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“I loved every minute of the job, from the first day.”

Cathy Schulman

In this issue:
Brunson Green and Michael Barnathan Help out
Cloudy days at Inside the Actors Studio
Produced By Conference 2011
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Features

CASE STUDY: CATHY SCHULMAN
Call it a Crash course in the realities of the job.

BRKEN WINDOWS
The common ground between producers and exhibitors.

PRODUCED BY CONFERENCE 2011
With a Little Help from Their Friends Brunson Green and Michael Barnathan go south.

MOVING OUR TV SHOW INTO THE CLOUD
Using new technologies to re-imagine the way we produce Inside the Actors Studio.
“Shooting in Detroit was like having my very own Hollywood back lot with art deco skyscrapers, industrial monoliths, turn-of-the-century mansions and limestone and marble ballrooms all to myself. The only thing better than the architecture were the talented and hard-working local cast and crew who made the experience deeply personal and everlasting”, according to Chris Fisher, Director of the 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment police drama, starring Ray Liotta and Shawn Hatosy.
Losing a colleague is always hard. But losing Laura Ziskin is harder.

That’s a difficult thing to say, especially in a season that has cost us so many distinguished producers. Roger Gimbel was a PGA Board member and as distinguished a producer of long-form television as there has ever been. Bob Banner was a brilliantly versatile television producer whose range of credits encompassed everything from Emmy-winning television movies to The Carol Burnett Show and Solid Gold. And Leonard Stern not only re-invented half-hour comedy with Get Smart!, but also served as President of this Guild for 11 years — longer than any other Officer in our history. Within the last several months, we’ve lost them all. But Laura’s impact within the PGA and within our industry as a whole deserves a special consideration.

Personally, I came to regard Laura as something of a superhero over a decade ago, even before Spider-Man. I stepped into my current position at the PGA in 2000. Since then, I’ve had virtually no regrets about that decision; one of the few exceptions was at that year’s annual PGA awards event, which was, I must confess, an embarrassing production. But it was Laura, along with Bruce Cohen, who picked up that sputtering torch and completely overhauled our annual event. When the curtain came down on the next year’s Golden Laurel Awards (as they were then known), our Guild had a new public face, and a new standing in the industry. And none of us was surprised when Laura, and subsequently Bruce, was tapped to produce the Oscar telecast in later years.

Ten years later, this January, I found myself thinking about that night. Laura was onstage at the Beverly Hilton, accepting the Guild’s Visionary Award for her leadership of Stand Up to Cancer. There was no more powerful moment that evening — ask anyone who was there — than Laura’s full-throated call to arms on behalf of both her profession and her cause. Standing onstage, taking in the scope of the event that she fundamentally helped to create, and the affection and passion she generated in that room, I would like to think she was able to sense the impact of the legacy she would leave us.

It’s sadly become something of a cliche to talk about one individual making a difference in the world. But in the plainest possible terms, Laura Ziskin made a difference. Because of Laura, we have an annual event that generates the revenue that allows the Guild to provide its mentoring program, job forums, seminars and producing workshop. Because of Laura’s work with Stand Up to Cancer — through which she literally forced otherwise competing research teams to join forces and pool their knowledge — countless women and men will one day avoid the pain and loss that ultimately fell to her, her family, her friends and her community.

Laura was one of a handful of people who could legitimately be called a standard-bearer for the producing profession. This standard-bearer may be gone, but her standard remains. All we have to do is live up to it.
Cathy Schulman

Over the past 10 years, one of the defining moments for the Producers Guild was the Best Picture victory of Crash at the 2006 Oscars. The moment was significant as much for who was onstage to accept that award — Cathy Schulman and her writer/director Paul Haggis — as for who wasn’t, notably, any of the film’s four other credited producers, including financier Bob Yari, who memorably sued the Guild and the Academy over his exclusion. The legal battle (ultimately resolved in favor of the Guild, and resoundingly so) had the effect of putting Schulman front and center as the public face of independent producers. It may not have been a role that she asked for, but as the following interview attests, the profession couldn’t have asked for a better woman for the job.

In person, Cathy Schulman lives up to every expectation you might have of independent producers: fiercely intelligent, unabashedly outspoken, hilariously busy. One of the industry’s admitted activists, she balances her production schedule with industry commitments not only to the PGA and its Board of Directors, but Women In Film (where she serves as President), Film Independent (Board member), and the producing programs at UCLA and USC’s Peter Stark Program. In that same spirit, the films she’s put her name on, including Crash, The Illusionist, Thumbsucker, the documentary Darfur Now and the recent Salvation Boulevard, are as formally diverse a collection of titles as one could hope for. Even so, they’re animated by the same set of characteristic passions — for social justice, for self-discovery, for human connection. Having been through not one but two courtroom crucibles — the first with Mike Ovitz over her departure from his short-lived company AFG, the second with Yari over disputes surrounding Crash — it’s not hard to surmise that Schulman has arrived at the conclusion that life (or a producing career) is too short to fight for stories that don’t speak to those elemental struggles.

This is the 51st in Produced by’s ongoing series of Case Studies of successful producers and their work. Editor Chris Green met with Cathy Schulman at her office at Mandalay Pictures for an hour-long discussion (okay, we may have run a little over...) that covered such areas as the nature of drama, the economic and emotional cost of credit proliferation, and how to keep a crew’s spirits up when there’s no film to put in the camera that day.

Photos courtesy of Cathy Schulman/Mandalay Pictures
It was good to see you at the Produced by Conference in June. What was your experience of the event?

I was only able to attend the Conference for about six hours this year, unfortunately. But I was so impressed, first of all, just by walking in and seeing that the number of attendees had increased exponentially. I also felt that people were really utilizing the panels to get hard advice and accurate information, that we had moved from being ephemeral to being grounded. I was very happy to see that; the more that we can be “brass tacks” about it, the better.

I hope we’ll get down to brass tacks about the realities of producing in a moment, but first I was hoping you could give us a sense of how you found your way into the industry?

I actually fell into it. I don’t have the story of being five years old and hoping to be a movie producer, but I was a childhood actor, dancer and writer. I went to Yale University, where I majored in playwriting. I was lucky enough to win some awards at Yale and have some of my plays produced. I moved to New York after school to work on my plays, which was exciting and I got a couple things produced off-off-Broadway. However, my father had recently been killed in a car accident and my family was under financial stress, so I had to figure out some way to make money. Being a playwright in New York was the definition of not making money, even with success, so a friend suggested the movie business. I didn’t know what that was, the “movie business,” but I started making some phone calls and I got a job working for two producers, whose names were Earl Mack and Michael Taylor, and they had a company called Mack-Taylor Productions. They were working on a movie called Hider in the House, which starred Mimi Rogers and Jake Busey, which was shooting in and around New York. I got the job and I was on set about eight days later. I didn’t even know what my job was supposed to be, but we did three things: backfills, and it was just an amazing beginning.

I got to work on Blue Steel, which was one of Kathryn Bigelow’s first films, and it was amazing to see what a woman was achieving in this medium. I was thrown right into the fire of what it means to make a movie and I was just drinking it in, I loved every minute of it from the first day. I was especially taken by the ability to fix mistakes; I didn’t consciously realize how easy that was in making movies. In the story, nothing can go wrong, and if something goes wrong, it’s the job of people involved in the play to make it appear that nothing went wrong. But there’s no going back, doing another take. My favorite part of making movies is editing. When you’re doing theatre, there’s only one way the play can carry itself out. I feel like in the movies, you have one intention going into development, then a slightly different intention going into production, then you get into post and see what you have and you come up with the actual final intention of what you’re going to do with the movie.

Can you think of a movie or an example of where the intention you had going into development started at something very different from where you wound up in your post-production process, and what journey that took?

One example that comes to mind is The Illusionist. In that movie, there are essentially no car crashes. There’s the story of the son of a furniture maker, Edward Norton, who falls in love with a princess, and then there is the impossible, in terms of class, of this relationship. We basically had enough money to pay for the “poor” settings, and so we ultimately wrote the entire court out of the movie and had the princess travel around in royal carriages to meet her lover! Similarly, with Crash, the script started out as a movie that had car crashes as interstitials between the intersecting stories of the five or six different characters. How do you make an independent film when the connective tissue between dramatic scenes is car crashes that you can’t afford to shoot? It’s kind of funny to see how Crash, in the end, doesn’t actually show any car crashes. There are lots of sirens in the distance.

To that movie’s credit, I never heard anyone say, “Wait, where were the crashes?” I think the metaphorical crashes are so evident that nobody ever stopped to wonder why this movie was called Crash. Exactly. And that’s what I was speaking to when I said that you re-form what you’re going to do in the process. In editorial, we had no need for crashes, because as you said, it was a metaphorical notion. It takes the process to learn that— the years, the collaboration between all the various people to figure out what you’re actually doing.

It’s not tremendously hard to get a job where you’re on set, but finding a way to climb the ladder to the places where you’re developing your own projects is where many people really struggle. How did you navigate that path?

I think I always did work I wasn’t asked to do. It seemed that if I were to do only what my job required me to do, which at the beginning was essentially secretarial and organizational services with lots of coordinating and list keeping, I don’t know how I ever would have ever broken through. I just looked at it as “that’s the stuff I should figure how to do well in five minutes,” because I’m capable and I’m a college graduate. Then I spent the rest of my time trying to be undeniably relevant to what those senior to me were doing. I would take the scripts and do my own notes. I would literally edit them and do all sorts of things that I thought made the scripts better. At the beginning I did it on my own, in the corner of my cubicle on my own time, and then when they started to realize I was good at it, they allowed me to start doing it with the filmmakers. It became clear to me in my first job, even before I knew what the definition of a creative producer was, that I needed to do more than just do nuts and bolts. Today, I feel like I’m only doing my job if I understand every department that’s involved and every distribution or marketing agenda and every problem the actors are having and every problem we have, from rewriting to scenic design. I can delegate, and I don’t need to be in the middle of everything, but I need to have an overall understanding. That was my experience of being a watch producer on set from my very first job. So I worked my way up by being undeniable. Now I give the same advice to my students at UCLA who are trying to break in. No one is handing you the opportunity to be exceptional; it’s really up to you.

It seems like you were fortunate to be in a position where the people you were working for recognized that you had something to offer. Some Hollywood denizens eat their young.

That’s exactly right, and I’ve been eaten alive too! I was very lucky that Michael Taylor, who’s remained a lifelong friend, was willing to help me at first. But they do eat their young in a movie has good ideas and is worth listening to. I got very strong messaging from the very beginning about the importance of putting yourself in the other person’s shoes and having a conversation. That positive reinforcement continued on my next job, which was with Barbara Boyle. She and Michael Taylor had produced some movies together and Barbara was running a new company called Sovereign Pictures. Barbara is an amazing woman and a huge advocate of women in the industry. She was a lawyer, as well as an executive and a producer. She founded Film Independent and was one of the founding partners of Women In Film. I mean, what an amazing summer 2011 produced by

produced by summer 2011
every day would be a miserable existence. I learned that I had to embrace the notion of a problem. Each time you figure something out, you improve yourself, your skills, your problem-solving abilities. Whatever the project is that you’re trying to move forward, you move it forward by solving the problems. A problem comes at you and you solve it, you don’t push it to the side. That’s been the secret to so much of my happiness and satisfaction and, hopefully, success as a producer. So that was one lesson. Another one from Barbara: She said, “Every morning, read your trades. What you do is go through them and find everyone that has done something that impresses you, particularly if they’re your colleagues, but even if they’re not, and you sit down and write a congratulatory note to those people about their achievements and how they inspire you.” She essentially took what I think is a normal reaction to the trades, which is jealousy — oh my God, that person got that project set up or they got that green light. I always wanted that book — and turned that negative energy into positive energy. Now I enjoy watching the successes of others, and this daily process has monumentally expanded my circle of colleagues and collaborators in the business.

Given your background working with Barbara and with Miramax, it’s no surprise that you’re primarily worked in the independent arena, as opposed to a studio path. Was that something you consciously chose, or did you more or less fall into it?

I fell into it, but I probably stayed for a good long time because I thought the work was progressive, especially as a young person full of every form of idealism possible. And actually, my interest in social activism became so intense that after a few years at Sovereign, I decided that I should leave the movie business and join the Peace Corps or something. So I managed to find a job working for a charitable organization for no money, but I only made it from Hollywood to Culver City! I got hired by Geoff Gilmore to be the co-director of programming for the Sundance Film Festival, which was just an amazing experience for me. And some of the things I learned from Barbara I still live by today.

My Left Foot was the first movie I was put on as an executive to supervise, which turned out to be the most extraordinary, career-inspiring experience for me. And some of the things I learned from Barbara I still live by today. I learned from Barbara that I had to embrace the notion of a problem. Each time you figure something out, you improve yourself, your skills, your problem-solving abilities. Whatever the project is that you’re trying to move forward, you move it forward by solving the problems. A problem comes at you and you solve it, you don’t push it to the side. That’s been the secret to so much of my happiness and satisfaction and, hopefully, success as a producer. So that was one lesson. Another one from Barbara: She said, “Every morning, read your trades. What you do is go through them and find everyone that has done something that impresses you, particularly if they’re your colleagues, but even if they’re not, and you sit down and write a congratulatory note to those people about their achievements and how they inspire you.” She essentially took what I think is a normal reaction to the trades, which is jealousy — oh my God, that person got that project set up or they got that green light. I always wanted that book — and turned that negative energy into positive energy. Now I enjoy watching the successes of others, and this daily process has monumentally expanded my circle of colleagues and collaborators in the business.

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Experience and took me away from the corporate part of the business for three years. I was traveling around the world looking for films. They didn’t come to us in those days, we went to find them. We worked in the basement of the Sony Thalberg building, and we would play movies for two months straight from 9 a.m. until 9 p.m. I and a couple of the co-programmers would wind up lying on the ground because sitting in theater seats for that long twisted our backs into knots. We’d lie on the floor watching movies, and in doing so, we learned so much, watching thousands of films from filmmakers all over the world. Though regarding domestic films, I remember thinking if one more person makes a movie about how hard it is to be 20-something living in Silverlake and looking for love, I was going to put a gun to my head. [laughs] So it was a great experience. But after doing that for three years, I needed to be making movies again, and Tom Rothman, who was on the Sundance board, offered me a job to go to Goldwyn.

So at what point did you find yourself starting to develop your own projects and coming up with your own material? What were the early movies where you felt you could claim some sense of pro ductorial ownership? Once I got to Goldwyn, I was picking and managing movies and taking them from start to finish. The Madness of King George and Much Ado About Nothing are probably two where I felt my fingerprints were most evident. Tom Rothman was an amazingly visionary guy, and we had an interesting business plan at Goldwyn. It’s funny, because it’s so different from what Tom does now. I think our budget limit for films at the time was $11 million. The theory was we could make our economics work as a company if we funded movies that were $11 million or under. The goal was to find a visionary filmmaker interested in a piece of material that we thought was exceptional, then build a model with that filmmaker to make the movie within the $11 million, but leave every creative decision to him or her. I laugh, because I wonder if we were to allow filmmakers to do movies with no interference, versus 13 development drafts and every other kind of studio input that happens in the process today, would the films come out well just as often? And I think, at the time, Tom had that philosophy. At Fox, he runs a very different ship. Goldwyn was where I really started to formulate my opinions about the kind of material I liked. It goes back to my basic training about the fundamentals of drama that I learned at Yale. I have to confess, when I’m working with students who are just starting one of my courses, or I’m working with the interns that come to Mandalay, one of my favorite questions to ask from the very beginning is, “What is drama?” And I can’t tell you how few times over the past five or six years young people have been able to answer that question. It’s fascinating, because the simple answer

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Above: Schulman with crewmember on the set of Godsend.

Left: Schulman (right) poses with a major piece of Salvation Boulevard scenery, alongside DP Tim Orr and director George Ratliff.
is that drama is conflict. The definition of drama is conflict. You can look it up; that's what it is. And the reason I bring it up is that there are so many people working in the business today who haven’t even stopped for one minute to think about dramatic form. Not even for one second. So when you ask how did I begin to form my opinions about the materials I liked, I was highly educated in the history of theater, particularly from the UK and the U.S. I used those skills to pick the kind of scripts that interested me, because I sought stories that were driven by conflict and resolution. It seems so silly to say it right now but people don’t even talk about those fundamentals in story meetings. Maybe the reason why the third act isn’t working isn’t because the star doesn’t have enough scenes; maybe it’s because there’s nothing being resolved. Maybe the reason the second act is so flat is because we’re being repetitive and we don’t have a pivot or a climax, or any other form of drama. There are classical reasons why drama works. I started with that.

I can see the affinity for something like Crash in that; I mean, it’s nothing but conflict. But at the same time, it has that unusual, rondel kind of structure. It’s very unique. I mean, it’s essentially a melodrama. That’s become a word that, if you say it, people in Hollywood want to throw you out of the room. But melodrama is incredibly engaging. Shakespeare used it for a reason, and it worked in every play.

So considering Crash, I’d like to hear more about the experience of making it, what you went through to get it there and also after you got it there. Your experience seems like a kind of worst-case scenario for the producer-financier relationship. Well, it’s interesting. Crash came about after my experience with Mike Ovitz and APG, which ended in this enormous fireball, a decade-long litigation. If anything has been life-wrecking for me, it was that lawsuit. But it’s never been character-wrecking. So having sort of hit rock bottom, my ultimate decision was that I should bet on myself, and that it was time to go off on my own and make my movies without any kind of debilitating management structure around me. And I formed a company called Bull’s Eye, which was a partnership between myself and Tom Nunan, a notorious and talented television executive. We were doing the typical “work out of a paper bag” method of producing, and our agency, CAA, suggested we meet some financiers who might finance our company if we were willing to sell a piece of it to them. There were a lot of people with money hovering around the business at the time, and they introduced us to a financier named Bob Yari, who was a successful real estate player and had been dabbling in film. Ultimately, we struck a deal and we sold half of our company to Bob. He would provide the money and we would provide the sweat equity. And under that partnership, we made four movies: Employee of the Month, Thumbsucker, Crash, and The Illusionist. All movies that I’m extraordinarily proud of and that I think very much have my mark on them. With Crash, what happened is that Bob agreed to finance the movie at $10 million, then over the course of prep, that number kept getting whittled down, 10 becoming 9, becoming 8, becoming 7, becoming 6.5. We were trying to work as partners to understand the financial hardships that he was facing on his side, and what he did that was really problematic move was sell most of his interest in the film to DEJ, a division of Blockbuster. I had put together a movie with

Laura,

Your ferocious talent and generous spirit will always inspire us.

You are sorely missed.

this extraordinary talent and we were ready to go, but now I had to tell all of the agents that the movie had a straight-to-video deal, which was enough to destroy everything, and almost did. It took months of work, but ultimately, we were able to negotiate with DEJ. And they were fabulous, by the way; I don’t cast any aspersions on them. We negotiated a buy-back provision, so in the event the movie came out better than a video movie, it could be bought by a theatrical distributor, which was enough to get the talent to stay intact. Everybody was very passionate about the material and we started making the movie. But the problem was that Bob still maintained a piece of the financing, and he had to cash flow that piece of money to get us through the first phase of production. We actually shut down three or four times. It was enormously difficult. The responsibility of what he was supposed to be doing on one side and we four times. It was enormously difficult. The responsibility of what he was supposed to be doing on one side and we had to muddle through, I still don’t know exactly how.

In a situation like that, where the money is day-to-day and the process threatens to stall out on a daily basis, how do you, as a producer, keep the ship afloat? Just from the point of view of filmmaking as a communal enterprise, simply holding the thing together seems like an enormous challenge. That in itself is what separates the men from the boys — there should really be a female version of that expression. Essentially, it’s diplomacy. It’s making everybody feel that even in hardships, they can be heard. I’m also a great believer in honesty. I tend to be frank about what the problems are. But I’m also frank about how I intend to solve them. I’m a little more careful with actors, because it can be very distracting for them if they think there are problems on the production. But as far as it regards everyone else working on a movie, I try to tell people what’s going on and how I plan to solve it, how I’m going to move things around to band-aid the situation or how I’m going to go over to Kodak and borrow a bunch of loose ends and put them in the camera, which I did. And then I beg favors, hoping that I’ll be successful enough on the film to actually get the money back to make good on these favors. It’s a terrible pressure to make movies with unsteady financing. Bond companies have been helpful to me. It’s funny, they’re there to protect the financier, but often, they end up protecting the film against the financier. I’ll remind them, well, you guys guaranteed the film and said the financier was going to deliver, and now I don’t have the money. And they beat up the financier and that helps me get the money. Some producers will say the last thing they need is a bond company. I’m like, “please, God, give me a bond company.” [laughs] They don’t try to interfere with our filmmaking process, but they help me so I can explain how we don’t have what we need.

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Your latest film, Salvation Boulevard, seems to have had an easier path. At the same time, I can’t help but notice that there are a whole lot of producer credits on that film. I think everyone acknowledges that the producer’s job is to get the movie made, and everything after that is secondary. But still...

[laughs] I knew this would come up at some point. We founded a company at Mandalay a year ago called Mandalay Vision, with the intention to get back into independent film financing. And in order to finance movies, we needed equity. And right now it’s almost impossible to raise equity without bartering producer credits. The whole situation pains me, because that just can’t be true. I don’t want it to be true. But the reality is that in independent film, with the absolute lack of support from funding entities and from studios, there isn’t enough money available to make an independent film unless you go to private individuals. And private individuals want to be involved in moviemaking, often because they want to have their names on the movie. However, the entire practice goes directly against the PGA Code of Credits, and makes me incredibly uncomfortable. We have a new president at Mandalay Vision, and we are going to try to find a way around credit bartering. Because I feel, as a Producers Guild member and as an absolute advocate of the Producers Code of Credits, that I can’t be a part of this damaging predicament. But I think it’s important to say that in an effort not to do that, it’s complicating the financing extremely. Now, that said, we have to complicate it in order to turn it around.

Your latest film, Salvation Boulevard, seems to have had an easier path. At the same time, I can’t help but notice that there are a whole lot of producer credits on that film. I think everyone acknowledges that the producer’s job is to get the movie made, and everything after that is secondary. But still...

[laughs] I knew this would come up at some point. We founded a company at Mandalay a year ago called Mandalay Vision, with the intention to get back into independent film financing. And in order to finance movies, we needed equity. And right now it’s almost impossible to raise equity without bartering producer credits. The whole situation pains me, because that just can’t be true. I don’t want it to be true. But the reality is that in independent film, with the absolute lack of support from funding entities and from studios, there isn’t enough money available to make an independent film unless you go to private individuals. And private individuals want to be involved in moviemaking, often because they want to have their names on the movie. However, the entire practice goes directly against the PGA Code of Credits, and makes me incredibly uncomfortable. We have a new president at Mandalay Vision, and we are going to try to find a way around credit bartering. Because I feel, as a Producers Guild member and as an absolute advocate of the Producers Code of Credits, that I can’t be a part of this damaging predicament. But I think it’s important to say that in an effort not to do that, it’s complicating the financing extremely. Now, that said, we have to complicate it in order to turn it around. My personal goal is to try to be a leader and figure out how we can communicate to people who are interested in financing movies that improper credits are not the answer. There are some cases where they do qualify for executive producer or associate producer credits. But they need to meet the rules of the Producers Guild and they need to get away from the “Produced by” credit, as financiers. It’s an absolute embarrassment that we have so many producers on Salvation Boulevard, because some of them, I haven’t even met. That said, I sincerely thank each and every one of them for the contribution that they made toward this movie. But we as a company need to figure out how to finance independent films without doing this. We also have a bigger task at hand as the Producers Guild, which is to figure out how to support independent film through the industry itself. Because if you have to turn outside of the business to make independent film, then the rules within the business become less applicable. As a Guild, I believe that what we need to address is the actual problem, the financial problem. Follow this example: Producers make an average, on a theatrical motion picture, of about $250,000 — which might sound like a high average, in some ways. But once financiers enable and allow five more hyphenate producers on a given movie, the $250,000 gets split six ways. So now, what’s one-sixth of 250? About 40! And if I’m the producer of this example film, now I’m asked to go out of the...
country, to Eastern Europe probably, which is where so many movies are shooting. I'm going for a $40,000 producer fee, having been paid nothing to develop the film. And the financier’s not going to provide me the ability to bring a child and a nanny. They’re not going to help me deal with my house. And by the way, I’m going to have to pay 5% of that fee to my agent and 5% or more to my lawyers. Okay, so now we’re at about $30,000, if even that much is left. And of course, I’m supposed to sign an exclusive producer’s agreement, which means I’m responsible from prep through production and a good piece of post to be exclusive to this movie, so I can’t make money in any other ways during this time period. And I’m responsible for delivering on budget, or the overages are on me. All of that for $40,000, after God knows how many years of development? So what’s so important, and what I think people have forgotten, is that this is why we’re part of the Producers Guild. We are at least putting the right label on the right person. Because if everybody else is saying they have the job that we have, how is anyone to know who the heck should be paid? And how are we supposed to do the job? So I want to remind people that that’s what the Truth in Credits Campaign is supposed to be doing. Beyond all the credit recognition disputes, we have to remember that a Guild needs to protect the economics of its members. And I think we’ve lost that thread, frankly.

That’s very provocative. It’s the truth. By the way, I wouldn’t be so terribly sad if I didn’t get a producer credit on the movie that I produced. I’d much rather get my fee. But really, it’s an extension of the same issue that’s always been there — how do you take creative people and put them into a business that’s designed to make money? How do you deal with the combination of show and business? This is the beauty of the media industry. We are channeling creative efforts for profits. That’s all okay, but it’s a constant struggle to get the best out of the people on the creative side without being squelched by the financing side.
The home market, however, has been an effective way of marketing movies in their various distribution channels, with the highest price to consumers charged in the theaters at a price point of $29.99. That reader of the trades surely is aware of one of the most contentious issues to arise between the Hollywood studios and the exhibition industry in recent years. I refer, of course, to the plans by four major studios (Fox, Warner Bros., Universal and Sony) to release movies to “premium” Video on Demand (VoD) roughly 60 days after their debut in theaters at a price point of $29.99. That reader of the trades is also surely aware that movie theater owners strenuously oppose those plans. But that reader may not fully understand why.

The Producers Guild has thoughtfully asked me to address that “why” and further, to explain why I think the closure of a threnodic theatrical release window should matter to movie producers, too. I am grateful for that opportunity.

Since the advent of the modern home entertainment industry, release windows have been an effective way of marketing movies in their various distribution channels, with the highest price to consumers charged in the earliest and most exclusive channels. Each exclusive release window protected the value of the movie from downward price pressure as it moved from limited to wider availability. The system developed to exploit the benefits of the laws of supply and demand. The home market, however, has some built-in tensions that the studios have tried to contend with in different ways. When VHS first came to prominence, studios charged an extremely high price, assuming that consumers would not be interested in owning the movies and would rent. The high purchase price was to ensure that studios received revenues commensurate with the benefits retailers received from multiple rentals. This model changed with the advent of revenue sharing — the studios received a percentage of each rental — and changed further as consumers showed interest in purchasing movies at a lower price point.

The introduction of DVDs turned this model on its head. A reasonably priced, higher quality, durable and compact product unleashed a wave of consumer purchasing that fueled studio profits for most of a decade. Until, that is, it didn’t. As rental prices decreased, subscription models like Netflix appeared, and consumers discovered that they seldom watched those shelfloads of DVDs they had purchased and the lower cost rentals and subscriptions made it cheaper and just as convenient as ownership. Kiosk rentals have only accelerated the problem. As a result, home entertainment revenues have declined for six straight years even as the number of transactions have grown. Home entertainment is more popular than ever — consumers simply are unwilling to pay for it at the levels which once sustained the industry.

In contrast, domestic theatrical grosses have grown by 20% over the last five years (international has grown 30%) and the average price per transaction has increased. Over those five years, the average major studio release window has moved up and down within an eight-day range (four months, 11 days to four months, 19 days). The length of the theatrical release window has not caused the studios’ problems in the home market; shrinking it will not fix the problem.

Throughout this public fight over an unprecedented collapse of the theatrical window for recent high-definition theatrical releases. By offering consumers and producers expressing their concerns over this radical proposed change to the business model and asking to be included in discussions of that model (The letter is available at www.natonline.org/windows.htm). The number of signatures has grown since then. Theater owners are not opposed to technological innovation; we are currently deep into the most massive technological change the industry has ever gone through — the digital cinema transition. As you read this, more than half of U.S. screens will be digital and more than half of those have been installed in the last year. Theater owners understand the need for a healthy and producable home entertainment segment; as the home market boomed, theatrical grew right along with it, understanding the large spikes in admissions and box office following the introduction of VHS and again with DVDs.

Those twin trajectories have split, however, and I believe a large factor in the continued health of the theatrical market is the strong release window. Home entertainment is currently at the mercy of market forces and consumer desires that put continuous downward pressure on pricing. Studios find the purchase price of that home product competing with rental and low-cost subscription pricing of the very same product. As long as studios are in the packaged-goods business, the First Sale Doctrine ensures that disks will be rented or offered on a subscription at prices that do not sustain the product.

Premium VoD, the studios say, is an attempt to claw back some of that lost value, by establishing a premium window for recent high-definition theatrical releases. By offering consumers
for the most gigantic of blockbusters? Will the Black Swans or The King's Speeches or The Kids Are Alright even make it onto screens, let alone find the time to grow and find their audienc39es? In my many conversations with filmmakers and producers over the last year, I have heard time and again how hard it is for independent films to get theatrical distribution and how vital that distribution is to secure financing.

Theatrical runs determine value in every subsequent distribution. A shrunked theatrical release window threatens the viability of the theatrical run and the revenues all the way down the distribution chain. That will affect what movies get made and distributed and how producers get movies financed and, ultimately, how producers get paid.

Finally, the studios involved in the premium VoD experiment suggest that early release to the home will fight movie theft. They say that the only ones who benefit from the gap between theatrical release and the home release are movie pirates — going so far as to call it a "piracy window." Paramount disagrees strongly with this approach and its COO Frederick Huntsberry makes a compelling case that making a pristine, high-definition copy available will become that much more brutal.

Gamble, and so on. An already brutal battle for screen real estate will become that much more brutal.

Movies will have to maximize their revenue opening weekend or had a decent theatrical lifespan will find themselves out of luck. Dow, the calculation changes, and movies that may once have is worth seeing in the theater or whether they don't mind waiting to see it more cheaply in the home.

By shrinking the win-

ket to the theatrical side of the business. Consumers already make the calculation when considering movies whether or not it is worth seeing in the theater or whether they don't mind waiting to see it more cheaply in the home. By shrinking the window, the calculation changes, and movies that may once have had a decent theatrical lifespan will find themselves out of luck.

Movies will have to maximize their revenue opening weekend or find themselves off screens to make way for next weekend's big gamble, and so on. An already brutal battle for screen real estate will become that much more brutal.

What movies will get made then? Will there only be room for the most gigantic of blockbusters? Will the Black Swans or The King's Speeches or The Kids Are Alright even make it onto screens, let alone find the time to grow and find their audienc39es? In my many conversations with filmmakers and producers over the last year, I have heard time and again how hard it is for independent films to get theatrical distribution and how vital that distribution is to secure financing.

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Movie theft comes in two waves. First, shortly after theatrical release, when a camcorded copy makes its way onto the Internet, we see a sharp spike in downloads, roughly mirroring the interest in the theatrical run. Downloads then trail off, as there is less publicity surrounding the movie as the theatrical run winds down. A second spike in downloading takes place roughly a week before the DVD release, as copies get waylaid on their way to distribution warehouses. This spike often exceeds the first.

Now, move that up two months or more. Despite the studios' claims that they have technological safeguards in place to prevent unauthorized copies, technological crowbars will always overcome technological locks. Intel, which makes the encryption codes that are supposed to keep the studios' content safe, has admitted that the master code that manufacturers need to create devices that use the HDCP (High Definition Content Protection) protocol has itself been cracked.

The digital transition of the theater business is opening up many exciting possibilities. The 60-pound film reel has given way to the six-pound hard drive. Satellite delivery is on the way to the six-pound hard drive. Satellite delivery is on the horizon. As the cost of striking and shipping prints goes away, a major expense in film distribution can be applied elsewhere, lowering the barriers to entry for independent producers. One-off events at targeted theaters offer the possibility of maximizing marketing spends to carefully-targeted theaters. Self-distribution becomes a more likely possibility.

Exhibition, too, is moving into the distribution space, as the major studio tentpole strategies leave an opening for the kind of midrange and lower budget productions the studios have abandoned to be picked up by exhibition-aligned distributors. This can only be a healthy development. The trend toward homogenization — and the hyper-homogenization that a compressed theatrical window threatens — is not good for the industry. We need a vibrant and diverse theatrical ecosystem for the entire industry to thrive.

The impending end of this first test of premium VoD will not be the end of the issue of the theatrical release window. NATO will remain vigilant for its members' interests. NATO will also remain engaged with the creative community on this issue, but also on the many other interests that we have in common. Whether it is maintaining a strong, profitable theatrical industry providing your best work under the best possible conditions to eager moviegoers, protecting your intellectual property from the scourge of movie theft, or ensuring that your work remains free of government censorship through the voluntary movie rating system, you have my pledge that exhibition will remain committed to dialog with the creative community to serve the interest of this industry we all love.

John Fithian is the President and CEO of the National Association of Theatre Owners.

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This June, the Producers Guild of America hosted its third annual Produced By Conference. Following the Conference’s first two sellout iterations, Produced By 2011 raised the stakes, partnering with the AFCI Locations Show to create the biggest event in the Guild’s history. More than 2,000 attendees packed the Walt Disney Studios lot for a weekend of learning, networking and deal-making. Sessions featuring such luminaries as Harvey Weinstein, Morgan Freeman, Robert Greenblatt and Larry Gordon drew standing-room-only crowds, while producers could canvas more than 200 local, state and international film commissions to find the best incentive package for their projects.
Following the Guild’s General Membership Meeting, the Friday-night Kickoff Party started the weekend with a bang, as guests celebrated and networked with each other over tasty hors d’oeuvres and an open bar. The next morning, sessions began in earnest. If you were there, you could have kicked off the day with a roundtable discussion on producing blockbuster franchises featuring Kevin Feige, Lauren Shuler Donner, Ralph Winter and Bonnie Arnold, then wandered over to hear what maverick filmmaker Kevin Smith had to say about carving new distribution channels. TV producers were able to settle in to listen to top showrunners Damon Lindelof, Marc Cherry, Darren Star and Andrew Marlowe, while non-fiction producers were treated to an incredible panel of award-winning “green” documentarians, including Lesley Chilcott, Fisher Stevens and Joe Berlinger. Sunday saw indie pioneers Jason Blum and Eli Roth discussing the ins and outs of micro-budget features, Jim Stern and Gary Lucchesi considering approaches to global financing, and Cathy Schulman, Albert Berger, Steve Golin, Todd Black and Donald De Line meditating on the new challenges facing creative producers. The Conference closed with a double-barreled blast: Morgan Freeman and Lori McCreary, who discussed the importance of producing relationships with talent, and Larry Gordon, whose one-man session “No Excuses” shared the raw, unvarnished truth about realities of life in the entertainment industry.
PGA President Emeritus Marshall Herskovitz (left) and fellow PGA Officers honor Charles FitzSimons Award winner Dorothea Petra.

Morgan Freeman (center) gets the crowd’s attention, alongside Lori McCreary and moderator David Picker.

PGA Vice President Gary Lucchesi (center) talks global finance with fellow panelists Macdara Kelleher (left) and Rena Ronson.

Panelists for “Unlimited Channels”: Justine Bateman and Paul Kantoros.

“ABC Showrunners” panel, featuring (from left) moderator Cynthia Littleton, Marc Cherry, Damon Lindelof, Andrew Marlowe and (obscured) Darren Star.

“Producing the Micro-Budget Feature” panel: (from left) John Sloss, Erik Feig, Jason Blum (moderator), Eli Roth, Keri Putnam.

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When they weren’t attending sessions, Conference attendees spent their time hunting for the best incentive packages among the hundreds of film commission booths. PGA programs such as Film USA’s “On the Ground With” sessions brought together producers and film commissioners for a joint presentation about the day-to-day realities of shooting on location. For the third straight year, the Conference offered its Mentoring Roundtables, allowing small groups of emerging producers to sit with and ask direct questions of such veterans as Ian Bryce, Richard Glazstein, John Hadity and even PGA Presidents Hawk Koch and Mark Gordon. Meanwhile, the International Committee’s ProShow set up meetings for its 10 contest winners to pitch their in-development projects to a raft of potential financiers and co-production partners. And when the event became just too exciting, attendees could relax, refresh and (literally) recharge at sponsor GM’s Chevy Volt Recharge Lounge, where producers could power up their phone, tablet and notebook batteries while sitting at a bar top or kicking back on classic, mid-century sofas.

The success of this year’s event is a testament to the incredible work of the entire Conference team, including event producers Barry Kaplan and Teresa Taylor, programming director Karen Schwartzman, Marketing Director Madelyn Hammond and Sponsorship Director Diane Salerno, as well as the Conference Chairs themselves, Gale Anne Hurd, Marshall Herskovitz and Rachel Klein. And of course, the entire affair would never have been possible without the incredible support of the Association of Film Commissioners International (AFCI), particularly interim executive director Martin Cuff and President Mary Nelson. Working together, the PGA and AFCI created an event that far exceeded what either organization could have pulled off alone. The success of this year’s Conference only proves (once again) what every great producer already knows: Great results come from great collaborators.
Initially, producer and PGA member Brunson Green was drawn to The Help film through his friendship and partnership with director Tate Taylor, with whom he had spearheaded the production of indie films Pretty Ugly People and the short Chicken Party. With the two films, Green and Taylor had defined an aesthetic that attracted industry attention but had yet to bring them mainstream success.

On a warm Sunday afternoon, Green sits on a brown sofa in the lobby of L’Ermitage Hotel in Beverly Hills to discuss The Help. While trading off sips of Pellegrino and hot coffee, Green grins and explains his thoughts on The Help as a film. He often pauses and rearticulates, as if each word were more precious than the last.

“It begins with friends, and friendship, because of Tate and Kathryn,” Green explains, hints of his Mississippi accent slipping out. “Kathryn, Tate and I are all from the same hometown, Jackson, Mississippi. Tate and Kathryn knew each other from fifth grade, so they have been childhood friends. We all grew up in the same neighborhood.”

Although Green did not meet Stockett and Taylor until later in life, the common roots proved beneficial when Stockett was looking to publish The Help. She gave an early transcript to Taylor, who quickly envisioned it as a motion picture. As a trusted friend and business companion, he offered a copy to Green.

The Help takes place in the South during the 1960s and centers around Skeeter (played in the film by Emma Stone), an aspiring journalist who returns to her hometown and attends the funeral of her beloved African-American housekeeper. The experience leads her to question the racial divide between the community’s African-American maids and their white bosses. Through her friendship with two housekeepers, Aibileen and Minny, she exposes the racial discrimination that permeates and regulates her community; ultimately, her story is as much about friendship as it is about empowerment. As Stockett’s first novel, she spent five years perfecting it and was initially rejected by multiple publishers.

“When I finished the manuscript, I was bawling on an airplane,” says Green. “It seems like everyone has read the book on an airplane,” he muses, “I think because it’s perfect for a five-hour flight… I had the thought, ‘I am stuck on a plane, so I’ll start reading.’ I started getting into it, and by the end, I am bawling and smiling because I am so excited for the story. It was so touching and inspiring, and it was a world that I knew.”

In the spring of 2009, The Help had yet to be published but by virtue of the ineffable bonds of friendship and with the blessing of Stockett, Taylor and Green optioned the film rights to The Help and began adapting it into a screenplay.

The publication of the book confirmed Green and Taylor’s faith in the power of Stockett’s story. The novel was critically praised; as it developed a passionate public following, The Help began to sell, and Green and Taylor knew they had something special.
During the final stages of the book tour, Taylor, Green and Stockett were driving together through Alabama when a vicious tornado hit. The spiny swirl began to obliterate everything in its pathway, forcing them to pull into a pilot station. As the three watched the tornado spin across the horizon, Kathryn received a call from her publisher informing her *The Help* had made *The New York Times* bestseller list. The three friends cheered their good fortune, while Taylor cracked open a Smirnoff Ice to celebrate.

“When Tate started adapting the book, we expected we’d probably have to make it as an indie because it’s not your typical big-budget studio film. It’s the South, it’s women, and there are no robots,” laughs Green. “Though we had the hope that the book would have a wide-enough appeal to be a major release.

To that end, we made efforts to help get the word out about the book because we wanted to help out our friend and make her work a success, and it betters the chance of being a larger-budgeted picture.

Although the story may have been an unlikely studio pick, as the book gained momentum, the prospects began to widen from budget indie to full-fledged studio backing. Four years earlier, Taylor had met with producers Michael Barnathan and Chris Columbus, who operate the production company 1492. Producer Michael Barnathan

Above (from left): Tate Taylor, novelist Kathryn Stockett and Brunson Green.

Columbus' daughter had shown him *Chicken Party*, which had been screened by a schoolmate, none other than Taylor’s niece. Columbus and Taylor struck up a friendship and began to look for projects to do together: Years passed but the connection remained strong, and when *The Help* came along, Taylor saw a new opportunity.

Taylor slipped the unpublished manuscript to Columbus, who was initially hesitant. “He said, ‘This is a chick flick, not really 1492’s kind of thing,’ and gave it to his wife to read,” recounts Green. “She loved it and made Chris read it. He loved the book and said, ‘let’s talk after you have a script.’

In February, 2009, the book came out in the United States. With the efforts of the independent bookstores like the one where my mother works in Jackson — they pre-sold 900 copies in the first week — the book just barely made it into the top 25 on the *Times* bestseller list. By August that year, Tate’s first version of the script was ready, and we asked Chris to read it. It was perfect timing, since the book had by then just cracked the *Times* top 10. It was the little book that wouldn’t die. Chris thought the adaptation was masterful and had the entire team at 1492 read it. Michael Barnathan loved it and Jenny Blum really went nuts over it. As Chris said, 1492 doesn’t usually get involved with that kind of material, and Jenny, who has worked at 1492 for 16 years, was excited to present a script around town that was different from anything else she’s every shown from the company.”

In September of 2009, Green's Harbinger Pictures and 1492 officially became partners in getting *The Help* made. “Tate really said, ‘I will do this with 1492 if you are willing to support me 100 percent as a director,’ and Chris really did it based on how well he had adapted the book, and the fact that he had grown up with Kathryn and in Mississippi,” explains Barnathan. “He knew the inspiration for these characters and this world in a first-hand way, probably as no other director could. We shook hands on it; we never had a piece of paper. We said, ‘We will help you get this movie financed,’ and we agreed to fight to the death to have him as the director.”

Columbus and Barnathan have an affinity for supporting undiscovered talent and producing films with an emotional edge. The two men met on the first day of freshman year at NYU Film School, having both signed up for a beer tour of Greenwich Village.
Brunson Green (center) likes what he sees.

Village. Their friendship expanded into partnership, as they eventually founded 1492 together.

“We work well together,” comments Barnathan. “We each know the other thinks, because we have been friends for 35 years. Half of that time, we were just friends but not working together, and it’s rare that he likes something I don’t.”

As friends and producing partners, Barnathan and Columbus have produced more than 20 films with 1492. Along with colleague Mark Radcliff, they have crossed the lines of genre, backing a wide variety of films, including Night at the Museum, Rent and Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief.

As a ternary of producing muscle, Barnathan notes, “We work well together.” comments Barnathan. “We each have a pretty pure creative eye.”

Green, Taylor, Columbus and Barnathan began working together to find backing for the film. Stacey Snider of DreamWorks was a big fan of the book and fought for the production company to back the film. Participant Media, with its emphasis on producing films with socially progressive messages, had been involved since the early stages, having read the book in manuscript form. With DreamWorks and Participant locked, casting became the next phase of development.

Green got his start in casting and hired his former boss, Kerry Barden, as casting director of The Help. Taylor had specifically written for Allison Janney as Skeeter’s Mother and Octavia Spencer as Minny Jackson. Spencer had gone on the book tour and read the African-American parts alongside Stockett. As a champion of sorts for Green and Taylor’s indie film, Spencer became close friends with the two men and shines considerably in her role as Minny.

“What is great is that DreamWorks let us cast the best person for the role, as opposed to requiring a star for the role,” explains Green. “There was a lot of interest from a lot of actresses because there are not a ton of roles with this much meat for actresses these days. We had some amazing people come in and read, but it’s funny how you see somebody in a room and you know instantly that is someone who should play the role.”

As it turns out, the best women for the roles included Jessica Chastain, Sissy Spacek, Viola Davis, Emma Stone, Bryce Dallas Howard and Anna Camp. As a film with a lot of strong personalities, the producers were committed to finding actresses that could authentically inhabit their parts and do the book justice.

When discussing Taylor’s eye for talent, Barnathan remarks, “He could hear when actresses would audition and their accents would be off. Brunson and he would look at each other and shake their heads and I would say — as a New Yorker — just let me know when this strikes a true note.”

A casting director recommended Stone as the main character. Skeeter, although she had done little work at the time. Green recalls, “Zombieland wasn’t out on video and I wanted Tate to see it, so I had to secure an advance copy and screen it for him. I wanted him to see her before he met her. He envisioned Skeeter as a younger Joan Cusack, really smart, really funny. When he met her, he instantly knew she was the one.”

Given the downtime on set and 110-degree heat, the tiny town of Greenwood, Mississippi became something of a camp environment for cast and crew. Everyone became locals at the three restaurants in town, attended football games and threw house parties, as a true camaraderie formed between those on set. “Almost every character is in search of family,” reflects Barnathan. “I hope The Help opens people and makes them think about their own lives, their own families, the people that they interact with, who work for them and who they work for.”

Inasmuch as the community that forms around a production becomes its own offbeat family, the producers of The Help have created a work whose plot of multi-faceted friendship reflects their own.
I have directed and co-produced a show called *Inside the Actors Studio*, based in New York City, for the last 17 years. I’m privileged to work with James Lipton and an absolute who’s who of the world’s most talented actors — people like Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, Barbra Streisand and Sean Penn. The show has grown in popularity over the years and is now seen in 120 countries worldwide.

During the first 16 seasons, we managed to find our flow and got pretty comfortable producing the show. In our 17th season though, we decided to mix things up a bit. The first thing we did was book an amazing roster of guests, including James Franco, Bradley Cooper and the entire cast of *Modern Family*.

Next, we moved our production office from HBO Studios downtown to the Tribeca Film Center. This is the amazing production facility where industry luminaries like Robert De Niro and Harvey Weinstein also have their offices. This move put us at the center of the production community in New York City, and gave us a place to re-invent the way we produce the show.

Using new technologies to re-imagine the way we produce *Inside the Actors Studio*

Re-inventing our production process

The first thing we did was book an amazing roster of guests, including James Franco, Bradley Cooper and the entire cast of *Modern Family*.

Next, we moved our production office from HBO Studios downtown to the Tribeca Film Center. This is the amazing production facility where industry luminaries like Robert De Niro and Harvey Weinstein also have their offices. This move put us at the center of the production community in New York City, and gave us a place to re-invent the way we produce the show.

We also switched the way we shoot each episode. We used to rent a mobile production truck and park it outside the theater, but parking in Manhattan was always a nightmare and took way too much of our time to sort out. So we stopped using a truck altogether, and switched instead to a “digital flypack” that is provided by a company called Remote Digital Media. Think of it as a live HD control room in a suitcase. We set up the flypack right next to the set, and are up and running within a couple hours, which saves us both money and time compared to the way we used to do it.

Going tapeless

The next thing we did was switch the format we use to produce the show. In years past, we shot each episode with six cameras recording live to tape, shooting in standard definition. We were keen to make the switch to HD and go tapeless, so we switched to Sony EX3 cameras and began shooting in digital format. We now record each camera into a digital file, using Sony’s “SxS” cards.

With this change, we had made the switch to tapeless HD … but that was only part of the equation. We then needed to...
Moving into the cloud

To tell this part of the story, I have to rewind back to 2009. That was the year when I was contacted by two technologist friends, Mark Davis and Jeff Schacher, who had the vision to create a new kind of technology that would streamline the process of film and television production. They described it as a new kind of “operating system for Hollywood,” which would be based entirely in the cloud.

If you aren’t familiar with the cloud, chances are that you’re actually using it today. The “cloud” refers to Web services that used to be handled by software programs installed on your computer, but now you access them over the Internet. There are dozens of these cloud-based apps out there ... things like Google Docs, Office Live, Dropbox, and even consumer apps like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Cloud computing is actually the fastest growing industry in the world right now, growing at an annual rate of 25% and expected to be worth more than $50B annually by 2014.

Mark and Jeff were convinced that these newly-available cloud technologies could be used to transform the way that TV shows and films are produced around the world. I was hooked by their vision and joined the company as an investor and “chief evangelist.” The idea was that we would build the technology in stealth mode, perfected it within Actors Studio and then, offering it up to the production community at large.

That journey came full circle on June 5, when I stood on stage at the Produced By Conference in Burbank and, for the first time, we publicly unveiled the company and its technology. The company is called Scenios, and the technology we built is a production management platform that’s based entirely in the cloud.

So what does this mean to you as a producer? Well, to answer that, let me describe how this new technology transformed the way I produce my show.

For the first 16 seasons, we used a confusing mix of software to manage the various aspects of the show. The production team was constantly emailing files like the script, budget and call sheets back and forth, and no one was ever sure who had the most recent version. There was no simple, single way for us to collaborate with each other. This was, suffice to say, a highly-inefficient way for us to work together.

Beginning in season 17, we were able to migrate the show onto the Scenios production management platform. We now use Scenios to manage each episode, from pre-production through production and on into post.

The first thing we do is invite the cast and crew to join each episode on Scenios. This is as easy as connecting to someone on Facebook. My co-producer, Sharon Tesser, sends an invitation to everyone on the cast and crew from within Scenios and, once they accept, they are connected to the project.

Then we can begin collaborating. Usually the first thing we figure out how to edit six iso-cam feeds totaling 24 hours of footage per episode into a one-hour show. For this, we built a new Final Cut Pro edit suite. We set up a 12-core Mac Pro in our production office, along with the requisite monitoring equipment, and we were all set.

I now have my assistant editor, Amy Lealand, ingest and tag the footage for each episode before we begin the edit. I still enjoy being the editor, which is how I started my career some 30 years ago. Our small team works very well together and is led by James Lipton, who is in the edit room with us while we cut each show, do the audio sweetening and then any final color grading. The entire editing process takes about 30 hours per episode.

We then output each episode to tape, which we then send to NBC Network Operations in New Jersey, who handle ingest and age per episode into a one-hour show. For this, we built a new

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do is share the production schedule to keep everyone in sync. We then load the script onto Scenios. We could upload the script in Final Draft or Word format, but for our show the "script" is actually James’ stack of iconic little blue cards with questions on them for the guests … so we upload those in PDF format.

Next, we load the budget into the project, though we’re careful to set permissions to allow only certain members of the crew to see it (like the executive producer and production accountant). We add locations using Scenios Locations app, which overlays our shooting locations onto Google Maps and allows us to add things like location photos and diagrams. There’s also a File Cabinet function where we can load things like releases, IATSE forms and other documents related to the project.

Shawn also uses Scenios to assign tasks to members of the crew and monitors who has done what to see if they’re staying on schedule. When we’re ready to shoot, we send out the call sheet using the Scenios Message Center, which allows us to send messages like call sheets to the entire team, specific departments or to individuals.

When we’ve shot the episode, one of my production assistants loads the footage onto Scenios, and then uses the shot log tool to log it all. Once that’s done, we work with James and the post-production team to select our shots, do the rough cut and then put together the final episode. All of these iterations can be loaded onto Scenios for review and approval by other members of the team.

This new workflow has given us an entirely new level of efficiency, transparency and — yes — accountability. When each episode is done, we can easily put together our wrap book for the network, which means we get paid more quickly.

Well worth it
It wasn’t an easy transition, but moving our show into the cloud has been one of the most satisfying — and valuable — things I’ve done throughout my three decades working in production.
How often do you watch film or TV and see a green theme or story?

There aren’t a lot of eco-focused programs out there, which is surprising given the social responsibility that we as producers and creators have to get the message out about the environmental issues that affect us. And there are plenty of projects trying to be as green as possible during production, and some people believe that green content will increase soon — people like executive producer (and the APA’s very own Vice President of Televisio), Hayma “Screech” Washington, and executive producer/director Art Spigel.

Art sees it like this: “The audience drives the degree in which we see green content, and the younger generation is much more in tune with being green. As that generation grows, I think green content will be much more prevalent because it’s a message that [this particular] audience wants to hear.”

Yay, younger generation!

Screech and Art’s new project for Disney fits that mold.

“We were asked to create what is normally a traditional television show,” says Screech. “But the entire impetus was all about teaching and educating people about how we can be more environmentally conservative, all behind a fun concept.”

The project is called Disney’s Friends for Change Games and it’s part of Disney’s larger eco-campaign called “Friends for Change Project.” The goal for that campaign, says Art, is for kids to join together and make a difference for the environment.

“Often when you have these environmental topics, it’s sort of doom and gloom and ‘We’re all gonna die,’” he says. “But from Disney’s perspective, they were like, ‘We can be optimistic about this, make this fun and engaging. Inspire kids.’ We’re raising awareness of global causes and raising money for environmental charities.”

The entire movement, including the “Games” venture which is presented via a series of interstitials, is aimed at a younger audience — those people who have grown up in a much more eco-aware society than we did.

Disney’s Friends for Change Games, which first aired June 24, works like this: four teams of domestic and international Disney stars compete in eco-inspired games and challenges, all the while working to win money for conservation agencies (Fauna & Flora, World Wildlife Fund, the Ocean Conservancy, and UNICEF). Each team automatically gets $125,000 for their charity; the winning team earns an additional $100,000.

The audience is encouraged to play along on the website; when they win the online games, they win points which they can donate to their favorite team. Then, according to Disney, the team with the most online points will be named the regional “Fan Favorite” team, and each of the three global regions: “Fan Favorite” will be awarded an additional $100,000 for their team’s charity.

“It’s a unique opportunity for kids,” explains Art. “They’re not only interacting with the content and learning about the environment, they’re also donating money to worthy causes.”

These challenges are both fun and educational for the participants and the audience. But they’re not the only ones who learned. Screech, Art, and their crew realized important ways to be more eco-conscious during the entire production process. The eco-friendly laundry list of practices utilized on set includes using biodiesel, 100% recycled paper; water stations with biodegradable cups instead of thousands of water bottles; donating leftover food and leftover wardrobe to local shelters; reusing set pieces and dressing from other shows, both to build their own set and to reuse within the games; and printing double-sided scripts.

“The first time I saw a double-sided script, I was like, ‘where’s the other page?’ But you get used to it,” explains Screech. “Now, I don’t want to imply that we were perfect with that. Sometimes with the speed needed to get scripts out, it’s more difficult to print double-sided, but we did it whenever we could.” Both Screech and Art emphasized how easy it was to find vendors who are willing to go green (e.g. caterers using biodegradable utensils and napkins), or who are already green and really want to get their products used (e.g. generators, biodiesel companies).

“You’ve just got to ask [the vendors] for what you want and make it a conscious decision every time,” Screech offers.

Through Disney, the production was assigned a Green Captain, someone fully dedicated to maintaining the eco-standards that the studio has put into place.

“We even found a location in Simi Valley where our entire production office was run on solar power,” he says. “There is still resistance in the entertainment industry, and often it’s a money issue. ‘There’s this assumption that it costs more money, but any way you look at it, there’s savings as well,’” Art points out. “It’s cheaper to save energy than not, cheaper for water stations and good cups than countless water bottles, and really, saving resources saves money, too.”

Screech continues, “We’ve learned so much from this project that we’re carrying it on to other projects. And I think it affected some of our production people, too. I don’t think that maybe everyone was quite as conscious, but because we made such a vocal effort [it easily becomes habitual].” According to Disney’s records, the production team was able to attain an 80% diversion rate on the trash that was hauled away. In total, they kept more than 28,000 pounds out of the landfills. Ultimately, says Screech, “I find that when you put it into practice, everything you thought would be difficult isn’t.”

And that’s great news for producers and the planet.

— ALLISON HALL
Your PGA Health Benefits

PGA members have a variety of healthcare options available to them. While none of them represents a “perfect plan,” many members will be able to improve their coverage or the cost of their coverage through their PGA membership. Members may take advantage of two options: Employer-paid coverage and self-pay coverage.

Qualifying for Employer-Paid Coverage Through the Motion Picture Industry Plan

Am I eligible?

To be eligible for the program, you must...

- Be credited as an executive producer, producer, associate producer or post-production supervisor;
- Work for a company that is an AMPTP signatory, or signatory to Motion Picture Industry Health Plan;
- Work on a theatrical motion picture or primetime network television program; some primetime cable and syndicated series also qualify, as do productions for which an AMPTP member agrees to make contributions; and
- Work on a production that utilizes a West Coast IA Crew.

How many hours do I have to work to qualify for coverage?

To qualify for the Industry Health Plan, a producer must be credited with 600 hours (automatically computed at 56.5 hours per week) within a six-month qualifying period. To maintain coverage, he or she must be credited with at least 400 hours for each subsequent six-month period. If a member becomes ineligible, his or her eligibility for benefits will be reviewed every month until he or she accumulates enough contribution hours within a six-month span to re-qualify for benefits.

I’ve determined that I qualify; how do I get my coverage to start?

Contributions are not automatic; they must be directly requested by the producer. Producers request contributions by signing and submitting a participation form within 60 days of starting eligible employment. If the producer does not submit a signed participation form, he or she will be deemed to have waived his or her right to contributions with respect to the job. Participation forms should be provided by the employer upon request. If you have difficulty obtaining a form, contact PGA Executive Director Vance Van Petten at (310) 358-9020 x104.

My company isn’t an AMPTP signatory. Am I out of luck?

Not necessarily. If you are employed by a company that is a signatory to both the IATSE Basic Agreement and the Motion Picture Industry Health & Welfare and Pension Plans, you can request that they make voluntary contributions, even if they are not members of the AMPTP. This request has been granted many times, but can be difficult to secure. A good way to know if your production has signed on to the IATSE Basic Agreement is to check if the camera, grips, or sound providers are union.

If I qualify, is my employer required to approve my coverage?

Unfortunately, no. However, the cost to the employer is reasonable enough that many employers will approve the coverage.

Additionally, standard practice has dictated (though again, not required) that once a production begins making contributions to the Health Plan for one producer, it will make those same contributions for any eligible producer on the show, provided coverage is requested in a timely fashion.

Self-Pay Plans: Atlantis and Producers Health

In a perfect world, every PGA member would qualify for employer-paid coverage. For those who do not qualify, the PGA offers two self-pay options which, because of our group status, are likely to offer better rates than what members can find on the open market.

The Atlantis Health Plan is available only to New York-based members of the PGA East. The Producers Health Plans are available nationally, including in New York. If you’re currently without health insurance, we encourage you to call immediately to see if you qualify for a plan that suits you. Even if you currently have coverage (particularly other self-pay coverage), it would be worth your while to investigate the options you may have through the PGA self-pay plans.
New Members

The Producers Guild is proud to welcome the following new members, who have joined the Guild since April, 2011.

CHRIS GIBBON

PETER FRIEDLANDER

KATHLEEN FLYNN

CRAIG FLORES

JEFF FISHER

VOLKER ENGEL

CHRISTINA DELFICO

CHRISTINA DEHAVEN

BARBARA KEITH COX

SHARALYNN JEFF CLANAGAN

CRAIG CHAPMAN

CHRISTOPHER CASSEL

SUSAN CARNEY

VOLGA CALDERON

BRENDA BRKUSIC

KIRK BODYFELT

ROBERT BLUMENSTEIN

JASON BERMAN

GAIL BERMAN

TOM BECKER

STEPHANIE ARNOLD

EVA ANISKO

MELINA ADDUCI

CHRISTOPHER COUNCIL

PRODUCERS
PGA Short Film Contest

We’re funding the Producers Guild’s Debra Hill Fellowship the best way we know how: through filmmaking.

On Friday, September 23, the PGA will sound the starting gun for the production phase of the Producers Guild Weekend Shorts Contest, marking the start of the busiest 51 hours that some readers of this magazine will see all year. The challenge: write, shoot and edit a short film in two days. Just to make it extra tough (and to make sure that no one does their work in advance), films will have to include specific elements that will only be revealed at the start of the contest.

After the finished films are submitted on Sunday evening, they’ll be evaluated by an all-star panel of judges, including Steve Buscemi, Jamie Lee Curtis, Paul Reubens, Lesley Ann Warren and PGA members Bruce Cohen and Stacey Sher. (Each of those judges worked closely with Debra Hill, and their willingness to donate their time and energy to this project speaks to how fully Debra impacted the lives of everyone she met.) The winning film will receive a prize package worth more than $100,000 (yes, you read that right) in production services, with some fine prizes for second- and third-place winners as well.

The contest is open to all U.S. residents; we hope we’ll see some PGA members throwing their films into the ring. Entry fees rise as the deadline draws closer, so better to enter sooner than later. And all entry fees go to fund the Debra Hill Fellowship, which the Guild awards to a promising emerging producer whose work reflects the values and professionalism of Debra Hill.

You’ll find the official rules and a link to the contest (which is being facilitated through withoutabox.com) on the PGA website (www.producersguild.org). So start getting your team together now; September 23 is going to be a busy weekend.

Member Benefits

- Access to PGA employment listings online resume search, employment tools and job forums
- Discounted registration for Produced By Conference
- Full access to PGA website including events, calendar, social networking tools
- Eligibility for individual, family and small business healthcare options through Producers Health Insurance Agency
- Participation in the Motion Picture Industry Health, Welfare & Pension Plan
- Listing of contact and credit information in searchable online roster
- Vote on Producers Guild Awards and receive discount tickets to the event, as well as DVD screeners for awards consideration
- Eligibility for PGA Mentoring Program
- Admission to special PGA pre-release screenings and Q&A events
- Free attendance at PGA seminars
- Arbitration of credit disputes
- Wide variety of discounts on events, merchandise, travel
- Complimentary subscription to Produced by

We’re funding the Producers Guild’s Debra Hill Fellowship the best way we know how: through filmmaking.
"I’d like to thank the Guild and my mentor.\" When I joined the PGA in 2008, I was most excited about the potential of experiencing a true mentor — something most awards acceptance speeches suggested was essential in Hollywood, but that I had yet to experience in my fledgling five-year career. After much anticipation, I received a letter from the PGA Mentoring Committee in February informing me I had been matched with Steven J. Wolfe. After some Internet research, I was excited about the producer who would be my mentor for the coming few months.

We exchanged a couple emails and met for breakfast. After answering some questions about his path in the biz, he invited me to visit his office. I asked about his first producing experiences, what goes into creative producing, and the key to developing, financing, and distributing films.

He invited me to visit him on the set of the latest project he was producing in downtown Los Angeles. When I arrived, the set was buzzing with excitement. They had shut down one of the largest plazas in downtown and were shooting one of the coolest parade sequences I had seen executed. He invited me to sit by the monitor and munch at the craft service truck. With my background as a low-budget line producer, I was impressed by the scale of this production — all union A-list crew and the craft service trailer was bigger than the truck that had housed grip, electric, and camera on the last movie I had worked. Later, I was to know this film as (500) Days of Summer.

Since our ‘official’ mentoring ended, I stayed in touch from time to time with Steven when I had a question that only a mentor could answer. And in 2010, that day every mentee dreams about came true — Steven took a chance on me and offered me a job line-producing some reshoots for a new movie he was completing. Since then, he has recommended me for several new jobs. It’s that rare opportunity that every PGA member seeks — someone to take a chance on you.

After such a fulfilling experience, the only thing I could hope to do was somehow find a way to give back to the program. After work, I found myself attending one of the Mentoring Committee meetings. I was amazed my mentor had somehow found time to commit again to helping organize this important Guild program. And I was excited and honored to sit with him and contribute in a small way to the timeless tale of Hollywood mentoring. Thank you, Steven J. Wolfe!