

Comment on Screen Australia draft program guidelines from Igor Grabovsky

The current draft is preparing solid grounds for Screen Australia to continue in the 'glorious' traditions of former 'professional' agencies the FFC and the AFC to squander public money without any responsibilities. 'Responsibility' means to be punished for failure administratively, financially or criminally.

Look what is happening now with the 'new' agency:

1. The authors of the guidelines are unanimous (as usual). I believe it is time that this country learns the names of the 'national heroes' who prepared those documents.
 2. Outgoing CEO will not be responsible for the 'faulty' guidelines because she just supervised the merger and only drafts were prepared under her management. Perfect timing: comments closed on 15th November - new CEO took office on 17th November.
 3. Incoming CEO will not be responsible for the 'faulty' guidelines because they were prepared before she took office and after "consultation with the industry" Again, perfect timing. (I apologise beforehand for this assumption if the new CEO would have the guts to scrap all this Hippocratic nonsense and ask why so much time and public moneies were wasted).
 4. Why guidelines, why not rules? A Bureaucratic answer is meant to impress: "we want to be flexible to achieve the best possible result(s)". Nonsense. The only time the FFC were "flexible" is when they needed to cover for their own incompetence and there is no indication so far that Screen Australia will be any better. The answer is much more prosaic: with rules - everyone must follow them and there is no room for manipulation. This scenario obviously does not suit the new agency.
 5. "Statement of Intent" means: "we are prepared to try, but we are not prepared to be responsible". It must be replaced with a "Statement of Promise", where goals must be set concretely, not vaguely, then everyone will be surprised how quickly a set of guidelines with lots of holes and 'grey areas' will become a set of watertight rules.
 6. Screen Australia want to make executive decisions based on artistic evaluations which are totally subjective. At the same time they do not want to be responsible for their decisions. There is no mechanism in place to appeal subjective decisions and the only way to make those who made those decisions be responsible for them is to take them to Court.
- So, when it comes to subjects like P&A loans, we have complete anarchy.
7. Another point: what is the exact meaning of the word "industry"? Producers (including writers, directors, etc.), distributors, agents, broadcasters, exhibitors?

I am already hearing polished answers: "They are all parts of the same chain".

Yes, but not for the purpose of funding. It must be taken into consideration that the above parties often have conflicting interests and in the case of independent productions almost always. They are SELLERS and BUYERS. The world is changing and the agency's behavior must change accordingly. Screen Australia must prioritise the producer, because it is the producer who physically creates the PRODUCT.

Also, please do not forget that Screen Australia first and foremost is a financial institution, not educational or artistic (for those purposes we have universities, schools, agencies, courses).

It would be understandable if all those guidelines ever delivered any positive results, but as history shows over many years: IT IS NOT WORKING! Why is Screen Australia stubbornly trying to fit old nasty habits under the new guise?

There have been some good comments and suggestions submitted and I could go on commenting for another ten pages. Guidelines can be improved, but it will not save the situation because the fundamental structure, philosophy and attitude remain that of the SA's predecessors.

Executives in all the previous agencies were paid for effort or to be more rudely unceremonious: for NOTHING. If they were paid for results, they would not have received a red cent for the last fifteen years (at least in FFC and AFC).

The only decent thing that the incoming CEO could do is to stop any activity (especially financial) using anything that resembles the current structure and start building a new one.

All of the above is relevant to the section of guidelines which deals with feature films. I do not have the knowledge or experience to make any comments regarding documentaries, TV or new media (i.e. Internet).

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