

Comment on Screen Australia draft program guidelines from Delores Fernandez

I'm a novice writer but I can't, for the most part, get producers to read my screenplay – not because they don't want to but because, as so many have said to me, they simply don't have the time or the resources to perform this unpaid work and their desks are already groaning under the weight of screenplays sent to them by 'experienced' screenwriters. As has already been pointed out in this forum experience does not necessarily equate with talent!

Tried to get the AFC to read my screenplay many times but it couldn't – not without a producer attached. Catch 22!

Let's say I find a director who loves my project - CHAMELEONS. My hypothetical director would love to develop the project further with me but he or she is not one of the few chosen by producers with Screen Australia money to develop a project; may not have the kind of track record which will attract the attention of a producer. A bit like Baz Luhrman when he was developing STRICTLY BALLROOM! What to do? For both the director and me? Limbo!

How about this for at least a partial solution:

Screen Australia sets up a website onto which all screenwriters can post their screenplays – along with brief tag lines, one paragraph and one page descriptions. This way producers can fish around the website looking for projects that interest them – without us poor (in the economic sense) writers having to spend a fortune running off copies and sending them to producers (probably equally poor) who don't have time to read them. Kind of like e-bay for screenplays!

The good screenplays or treatments will soon be known to any and all interested producers – who can then make contact with the writer and invite him or her to be a part of their Screen Australia funded script development package. With a bit of luck the writer of a screenplay in much demand will be then able to pick and choose between producers or production companies – the free market in practice – and get the best deal for themselves that they can. The setting up of a website such as this would, relative to its budget, cost Screen Australia next to nothing.

An added advantage of such a website is that certain projects would soon acquire something of a buzz (as evidenced by the number of 'hits' the projects acquires) and attract the attention of Project Managers at Screen Australia – even if, for whatever reason, a producer did not wish to get involved in it during its germinal stage of development. Hopefully Screen Australia (flexible, hopefully, in its modus operandi) would then be able to contact this writer and offer to assist the project in its development until such time as it was ready for a producer to come on board. This would be especially helpful for new screenwriters who may have a great idea but, at present, lack the craft skills to turn their great idea into a great screenplay.

I suspect that one of the byproducts of this website would be that informal mentoring scenarios would occur – experienced writers, directors and producers reading the rough and ready work of young writers and offering them suggestions as to how best to develop their project – if only in hopes that they can attach themselves to the project when it is further developed. And out of these informal mentorings would come interesting collaborations that were not easy to achieve in pre-internet days.

Given that Screen Australia has promised not to censor submissions and in order to put my idea expressed here into practice I invite any producer looking for an on-the road-comedy to contact me at delores_fernandez@hotmail.com. I'll send you a brief description of my screenplay and, if it appeals, send you a draft. No paper involved, no postage and no expectation that producers will get beyond page 10 if they think it is either not for them or just plain crap!

Delores Fernandez