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## To Write or To Film -- Redefining How To "Break In"

Digital cameras, YouTube, the writers' strike, a reduction in studio output, corporate encroachment into independent film support structures like kickstarter.com. The last ten years has seen massive changes in the way content is created and consumed, and those changes have led to a real shift in how new writers break into the industry.

Film has always had "the hyphenate", the writer - director, who was seen as the great auteur of the industry: someone with a personal creative vision who had the tools to translate it to film with great success. The concept goes back to French New Wave Cinema in the fifties, but the digital age has changed exactly what being a hyphenate really means.

The advent of low cost digital cameras has made the dream of producing content a reality for many who aspire to a career in film. Add in readily available editing suites, and the egalitarian screening sites of the Internet, and we've entered the age of the filmmaker and content creator, not just the hyphenate.

With workshops, seminars, pitch events, software, and online access to WGA registration, the writing world is now at the fingertips of all writers, regardless of location. Written content is generated at a much higher quantity than ever before. The haystack grows

exponentially bigger every day. Are the odds of finding that big break decreasing with the increase in content? Does this mean that the writer must become the content creator/filmmaker if they want to improve the odds? Is there any reason they shouldn't, considering the current ease of production?

"People are having to retool their



Bill True

thinking, not just because the industry on the outside has changed, but there has been a fundamental shift." Bill True sees the trends, and knows he has to stay one step ahead.

His career took off with the independent feature, *Runaway*. Produced in 2005, *Runaway's* cast included Aaron Stanford, Robin Tunney, Melissa Leo and Terry Kinney. It was a big hit on the film festival circuit,

screening at two of the largest festivals in North America, Toronto and Austin. The film won the prestigious Best Narrative Feature Award at the 2005 Austin Film Festival.

Thanks to the success of *Runaway*, and the long climb to distribution, True has a unique perspective on how the film industry is evolving, and as a writer and instructor, he sees first hand how access to the industry has changed.

The genesis of *Runaway* can be traced back to 2000, when True, successful family man and corporate employee, walked into the two-day Dov S-S Simens film class. A reformed "theater guy", True wanted back into the creative industries. The one thing he learned was that he needed a great script, and so he spent two years working on, and honing in on *Runaway*. The result was a semi-final placing in The

Academy's Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting and a production deal with Producer Al Klingenstein. What makes this story such a worthy lesson is what happened next. True applied for, and interviewed for a producing position with the film. He got the job, which might be the best part of the *Runaway* experience. The industry lessons gained from working at every aspect from film development to distribution places True

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AARON  
**STANFORD**

ROBIN  
**TUNNEY**

# RUNAWAY

A FILM BY TIM MCCANN

courtesy of E1 Entertainment

YOUR SINS WILL ALWAYS FIND YOU

# "There are tectonic shifts in the underpinning of the industry." --Bill True, Writer-Producer

in a rarified position.

"By understanding how movies get made, from development to distribution, I was going to have information other writers refused to get... I have a viewpoint a lot of my other screenwriter friends wouldn't have." This is a viewpoint that's still opening doors for True.

It's that viewpoint that writer - producer Richard Moon is also cultivating. He too sees the value of diversifying his access points to the Hollywood system by not only writing, but producing his own material under his Moonhill Productions banner. "As long as you're sticking with one part of the process, you're relying on someone else."

Moonhill is the company Moon runs with his wife, Isabel Junie Hildebrandt, and fellow producer Colleen Kelly. They've produced two features and three short films.

"One of the things about becoming a producer or director is you get to cheat a little bit, and you know, rather than getting past the gatekeeper, you become one." While people do break in through things like pitch events, they can also be soul crushing experiences. "Sitting across from you taking pitches is usually a junior, junior executive who drew the short end of the straw", Moon says. It can be exciting, and still feel futile at times. Moon feels that creating your own

content is a great way to get the writer's words in the hand of actors and show that the words on the page work on the screen.

In regards to why he chose to produce, Moon believes, "It's a much harder job in a lot of ways, but it's a



**Michael Gibrall**

much easier sales pitch. You can get a lot more people involved, simply because more people are willing to get involved with someone who says, I'm willing to do it, I'm going to get the hard stuff done."

While producing was supposed to be a transitional position to promote his work, Moon may have found a second calling. He enjoys the process to the point that he's now interested in producing work that isn't his own. "I love

writing, but I really like completing films."

Like True, Moon has seen a change in the way people in the industry relate to him. "People respond when you say, I got this done." But it's more than that. Producing has changed the way he writes. "It's made it tighter and stronger." The added strength to his writing, and the increased respect for creating content has resulted in the kind of forward momentum that wasn't possible when he was just "writer Moon".

Following in the trail blazed by both previously mentioned men, is Michael Gibrall. Gibrall has a storied career as a technical director with ESPN, and has a Sports Emmy Award to show for it. The success at ESPN led to directing for WRIC, the ABC Richmond affiliate, and a second statuette at the National Capital/Chesapeake Bay Emmy Awards.

Gibrall isn't someone who just wakes up and decides to make a film; he's someone who does his groundwork first. After an encouraging, but ultimately disappointing attempt to launch a children's television series ("Learning Curves"), Gibrall turned to writing. Like every good writer, he's had frustrations and let-downs in the career, but decided that he was being challenged to perfect his craft. For Gibrall, the discovery of *The Screenwriter's Bible* by

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The poster features a close-up of a woman (Tammin Sursok) and a man (Ryan Eggold) looking at each other. The woman is on the left, looking down, and the man is on the right, looking at her. The background is a soft, hazy light. Below the main image, there is a smaller scene of a woman and a child in a field under a sunset sky.

EVERY LIFE TAKES A TURN

TAMMIN  
SURSOK

RYAN  
EGGOLD

STEVEN  
BAUER

FINOLA  
HUGHES

# DRIVING BY BRAILLE



Dave Trottier made a huge difference. "In my opinion, this book was a game changer for me. I took to heart the book's message, retooled my script using the techniques and advice noted in the book. Same story. Same dialogue. Same everything. Only now, the script was more professional and a much smoother read." That script is called "Positive Variance", and it's gone on to multiple film festival nominations and awards. It also firmly set Gibrall on his current path.

The Action On Film (AOF) International Film Festival incorporated a bold and new kind of competition in 2012. Called "The \$100,000 Challenge", the festival awarded one lucky writer production of a screenplay. Excited by the possibility, Gibrall set to work on a new script called, "Available". "Available" was a semi-finalist, encouraging him to move forward with the script.

Following the AOF experience, "Available" was placed on the newly minted "Black List" website. What happened next sealed its production fate. "Available" has been accessed and downloaded several times, and someone gave the script a 10/10. A perfect score. "When that happened, I started the process of making the film myself." said Gibrall.

Gibrall is using a combination of crowd-funding and private investment to finance the film. "I've been using my crowd funding campaign to do two things: [First] Get funding from the general public while advertising the project and developing interest. [Second] I can now go to investors and show them that there is both interest and funding from the general public, as a catalyst to invest in the project."

Gibrall is a part of the new breed of writers. He's becoming a filmmaker not because he sees himself as an auteur, but because, "In most cases, it looks like that would be the most realistic route. There are exceptions, but it appears to

be incredible luck or who you know that gets your script made into a film by someone else." He is taking his career into his own hands and in the process, is showing the film industry that not only can he write a great script, but he can also make things happen.

Bill True has learned a lot about the system since 2005. He's also learned that as much as things are constantly changing, some things stay the same. As an adjunct professor in the Scottsdale Community College Film Program, he still sees students entering his class with



Richard Moon

the misconception that they're going to write their screenplay, get an agent and have a Hollywood producer outright buy the script. "The business isn't at all like the myth that people propagate about it," he says.

The myth will continue to propagate if institutions fail to keep pace with the massive shift the industry is experiencing. As True notes, "Teachers are still teaching from business paradigms of ten to fifteen years ago. It doesn't exist anymore... The system itself is changing and the system doesn't understand itself. It's in the process of

changing literally as we speak."

He acknowledges that if the system changes, so does the definition of "Breaking In".

"People have to be more creative, and they have to look at different ways to break in because breaking in... the definition of that is shifting."

True believes that there are advantages to wearing multiple hats in today's business model, but feels that once you prove your worth through producing your own scripts, then Hollywood would prefer that you stick to one hat. He believes that once you've broken in, producers and agents would prefer that writers write, because the business demands that writers be able to produce three to four quality properties per year. "Making it" doesn't make life easier, it makes it more demanding. Says True, "Everything you do should be the best you can do."

Moon and Gibrall are both taking their careers in their own hands, proving something that the writer who only writes cannot prove; people want to work with them. It's an important message that separates them from an ever-growing crowded market of writers.

Moon prescribes to the belief that, "Anything you do to expand your horizons beyond the one career path probably increases your odds."

Moon and True are living proof of that. Gibrall is following close on their heels. "Market yourself and your script.

Create your own webpage, create a Facebook page and market you and your script, list your script on [Moviebytes.com](http://Moviebytes.com), and never stop marketing," concludes Gibrall.

Never stop... indeed

Bill True:  
[billtrue.net/BillTrue/Welcome.html](http://billtrue.net/BillTrue/Welcome.html) Richard Moon,  
 Moonhill Productions:  
[www.moonhillproductions.com/](http://www.moonhillproductions.com/)