

So I'm going to take a little break from the normal deviant routine and hit you up with something a little different.

An interview.

That's right peeps. Busting my journalistic cherry and giving you an interview with Fade In Magazine's Founder and Editor in Chief, Audrey Kelly.

I've known Audrey for a while now, as I've been doing Fade in's pitchfests and it was nice to have a chat with her about the upcoming 15th Annual Hollywood Pitch Festival (July 29-31) as well as the history of the pitchfest, given the fact that she's the birth mom of the pitchfest... literally.

Enjoy!

So talk to me...tell me about you...how did you end up at Fade in and how did the pitchfest come to fruition. A history if you will.

I actually founded Fade In in 1993. In 1996, I came up with the idea of speed meeting for aspiring filmmakers and coined the word "pitchfest." It's both amazing and wild that it has since become such a phenomenon with over 100 pitchfests worldwide today.

Wow, so you're the person I have to blame for having to endure the pain! Your idea has obviously taken off and been hugely successful, so let me ask you this...did it become exactly what you had in mind or has it morphed into some other kind of demon?

Great question. Our event has developed quite a bit over the years and we always strive for quality, whether it's with the companies we invite or the ratio of attendees to VIPs [1:1], but I worry for aspirants who think every pitchfest is the same, as they are definitely not. It's important if you are thinking of attending a pitchfest to make sure the companies they have listed are valid companies; that the VIPs you are pitching are not being paid to sit there but rather are actually there to find material and talent, and; the event is not promising something they can't deliver [like 300-400 companies].

How has the Hollywood Pitch Festival been successful? I always get a lot of questions from people asking if a pitchfest is worth it. Obviously, you feel they're worth it...because you basically founded pitchfests, but have people gone on to fame and fortune starting at a pitchfest level?

Yes, we actually stopped counting the amount of attendees who found their agent and manager at the HPF and we've had a bevy of front-page Variety & Hollywood Reporter sales to boot. We're responsible for one marriage and have had producers run out of the room to call the studio, producers fight over the same project, even execs begging the pitcher not to pitch their story to anyone else as they were interested in optioning. Anything and everything happens each event.

A great story came by the way of a writing team who contacted me and said William Goldman had told them to contact me to get into the festival. They came they pitched and they sold their story to Warner Bros. Only I came to find out they lied about knowing Bill Goldman!

Just curious if ANY movie since 1996 was born out of a pitchfest deal.

Yes, "If Only" on ABC starring Jennifer Love Hewitt came out recently. Not sure where all the projects are, with respect to stages of development, but we have pitches set up at MGM, Fox, Warners, to name a few.

You've been doing this the longest, so what advice can YOU give to writer's trying to impress companies. You've heard all of the stories, you've seen all of the whackos...lay some science on me.

Ha! I'd say remember it's not just about telling a great story it's also about how you present yourself. A manager or agent will need to know they can put you in a room with executives and producers. Also, make sure your story has irony!

The doctor who becomes sick...

The dancer who becomes paralyzed...

The millionaire who goes bankrupt...

The homeless person who wins the lottery...

The nobody who saves the world...

Irony sells in Hollywood. Just look at some of these top-grossing movies and Oscar winners:

A Beautiful Mind – The story of a schizophrenic genius. His mind was both his asset and his greatest enemy. Irony!

The Lord of the Rings – The fate of the world rests in the hands of the smallest and meekest of creatures. Irony!

Training Day – A top narcotics cop turns out to be the biggest crook of all. Irony!

Monster's Ball – A woman falls in love with a man, not realizing he's responsible for executing her late husband. Irony! Plus, she's blkack...and he's a racist. Double irony!

Titanic – Not just the story of an unsinkable ship that sinks. Irony! The story of the world's largest ship [irony] that sinks on its maiden voyage [irony] as told through the eyes of two lovers who come from opposite ends of the social spectrum [irony]!

It's no secret that some events pay us to be there. Mostly because getting companies to commit is just hard as hell. Listening to pitch after pitch is one of the more brutal things we go through. Especially when so many scripts are bad and the people don't know how to pitch themselves, let along their scripts. So, with that said, how do you know you're getting the decisions makers? I've sat next to 18 year old interns hearing pitches, or assistants to assistants who were told to go at the last minute. How does Hollywood Pitchfest separate itself in the quality department?

We don't allow interns and assistants attend with a higher up unless at the last minute they are unable to attend. It's no secret HPF gets the top companies/studios/agencies [that other pitchfests can't get] and actual producers, agents, managers, executives. We get them because we are respected for putting on a quality event and have a track record for helping them find new talent.

I'm sure, in the years and years of pitchfest, that the writers were exactly the people you wanted to target. Writers around town that were struggling and if they only had five minutes. But now, anyone and everyone can pay they're entrance into the dance...do you think that's hurt the pitchfest scene or helped it? Keeping in mind that the more people that come doesn't always mean the more quality that comes.

We've always actually been open to screenplay & television writers, authors and aspiring filmmakers, not just writers. We've never targeted struggling ones or ones just in LA. The whole concept of the pitchfest came about 15 years ago because we wanted to connect people that would otherwise not have access. Now we are doing it online with our eHollywoodLive.com events. So if you're in Russia or Japan and New Zealand you can still speak to the powers that be in Hollywood face to face via Skype.

Finding a great story well told has always been like finding a needle in a haystack. It's exciting when you discover one but it's never been that easy to find. With pitchfests, at least you are spending a minimal amount of time, at least at ours, if you're a VIP, vs. reading a pile of scripts.

What's hurt the "pitchfest scene," as you call it, are the events that have popped up over the years that are more interested in making money than providing a quality event for both attendees and VIPs; that don't care whether a company is legit/qualified/WGA Signatory to hear pitches. At all costs, the attendees must be respected and protected. We hear from movers and shakers all the time who've had a bad experience and won't go to any pitch festival. We hear from aspirants that have gone to other pitchfests where they weren't sure if the assistant sitting across from them was there for a payout or actually interested in their story. These pitchfests [which aren't really pitchfests by the way, because they typically only have 4-6 hours of meetings and 2 days of classes] are giving what we do a bad name and it's unfortunate.

Which begs the question, one that I've seen on chat boards...a complaint of the naysayer's if you will. Do pitchfests make money? You have a lot of people paying a lot of dough to get their 5 minutes. Where does that money go? Can you just rebutte the people who claim that pitchfests are A) nothing but a waste of money and B) nothing more than a hook to get your money?

I can only speak for our event. So when you ask if pitchfests make money, we spend 90% of what we make on the event itself by having it at the best venues here in town and not out at the airport, providing food all day for attendees and VIPs, valet parking for VIPs, advertising/marketing, staff, etc. So people who sit there and do the math and assume our event is just about the money here's a wake-up call: It just ain't so. We've actually never changed our prices in 15 years while costs have kept rising. And when you strive for quality, as we do, you have to pay for it.

As far as whether or not pitchfests are a waste of money...I believe there are several that are. And one especially that just started that is out there making untrue claims about its achievements and how many/which companies they have attending and how many deals their first event had [supposedly more than ours over a 15 year period. LOL]. It's sad. It's unfair to those pitchfests that are legit. They are taking advantage of aspirants.

We were actually never going to do the Hollywood Pitch Festival again after its initial year because it was such an undertaking. But when we saw how ecstatic attendees were and how many deals we were able to generate it spurred us on...and here we are 15 years later still helping connect dealmakers and new talent, still bringing together execs, agents, managers, producers [who spend a year talking to each other on the

phone] for an in-person, networking opportunity, still leading the way, setting the example of how a real Hollywood pitchfest outta be...

I want to thank Audrey for her time. Her life is incredibly crazy right now with the Pitchfest looming in a week. She was also kind enough to allow me to share with you Fade In's do's and don'ts for a pitchfest, to which I share with you now...

1. DON'T "nut and bolt" the pitch (that's pitching everything in the movie). Keep it short. 3-5 minutes, tops. Leave time for feedback!
2. DO make great eye contact.
3. DON'T use notes or read them the pitch.
4. DO begin with your log-line, "This is a story about..."
5. DO "set the table" by also starting with the title, genre and theme.
6. DO take the time to describe your principle characters in terms of personality, behavior, goals, fears, weaknesses, etc.
7. DON'T cast your story, i.e., "This is a part for Tom Cruise..."
8. DO tell your story in the present tense...as if it's all happening right now.
9. DO break the narrative to focus on at least three set-pieces -- scenes your audience is going to remember.
10. DON'T stand up while pitching!!! Remain seated at eye-level with executive.
11. DO answer questions with a scene from a movie.
12. DON'T spend time describing minutia -- the kind of car the hero drives, a character walking down a hall before entering a room, etc.
13. DO let the exec interrupt and even make suggestions. Make him/her a part of the creative process.
14. DO include irony in your premise. Irony sells in Hollywood!
15. DO provide a specific ending to your story -- Remember, it's all about the ending -- and then wrap up with thematic closure. Reiterate what this movie has been about -- what the "moral of the story" is, which is really a statement of your theme. (e.g., Redemption, Love, Betrayal, Family)
16. DON'T ask the exec what he/she thinks. Don't ask for a verdict. If the exec has an opinion, he/she will let you know.
17. Finally, you may want to leave a synopsis but our advice is DON'T. Giving them a synopsis does not work to your advantage. Think about it: Why are they going to read your script (120 pgs) or manuscript when they can read your 1-3 page synopsis? Why are they going to call you back to their offices to let the other powers that be hear you pitch your story, when they can just give them the summary, which more than likely reads flat and could dissuade them? Maybe instead ask if they'll read the first 10 pages; bring staples copies!

You can see my lovely face at the 15th Annual Hollywood Pitch Festival July 30 from 4-6. If you'd like to attend, check it out here: <http://www.hollywoodpitchfestival.com> and guess what? I'm gonna save you a little coin. Wanna save \$25 dollars off the Hollywood Pitch Festival? Of course you do, you're a struggling writer. Just use promo code Manny888 when checking out and BAM! Instant savings! And when you get there, stop by the table and say hi. You can also call for tickets at 800-646-3896.

Next column will be back to regularly scheduled programming!

Till next week...