

Questionnaire for Agents & Managers – Great American Pitchfest, LA 2008

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What is your percentage? 10% in literary cases; 10-25% in producer's rep cases

How much promotion do you do for your clients? How much do you expect them to do?
The relationships that work best at my company are those in which the client is very actively involved in the marketing effort.

Do you have any events or parties for your clients where they can network amongst one another?
Infrequently. Clients are cheered when an MFM colleague makes a deal, but are also somewhat anxious about when their own time will come. They all realize that what helps any MFM client helps them all.

In terms of material, is there anything that you are specifically looking for right now?
Everyone in this business is always looking for great material. Subject matter, genre, style – none of that matters, as long as the story is there and the script fully executes the premise of the story.

Do you consider new writers? Always. I currently have 5 clients that I met through Great American Pitchfest and others. Of these, the very first pitch I ever received at my first Great American Pitchfest (2004) and one other are still clients of MFM.

What makes the perfect writer for your company? Please tell how a writer can help you to represent them the best. The magic is locked in the story. The craft is locked in executing the story in a cinematic way that will attract and hold an audience. The way for writers to help MFM represent them in the best possible way is to provide the world a great script. Especially in the case of unproduced writers, whose work needs to be truly remarkable to break through in the first place, the client needs to understand that the power over what words will finally be heard on screen goes to the owner of the rights. Thus a client of MFM needs to have a workable attitude, and be flexible enough to take well to notes, comments, revisions and criticisms – regardless of how great the script is that generated the industry interest.

What do you look for in the writers you choose to represent? What should they look for when trying to choose an agent? I don't recommend unproduced writers to look for agents. Having been an agent in the past, I know the differences. While they may appear slim at first blush, the differences are actually significant. I recommend that an unproduced writer seek a manager first. Once a script is sold and produced, then agents will seek out the writer. A manager will be more involved in the whole person and the career behind the writing, and involved in the movie business part of their lives. Meanwhile, the agent will function as a promoter on a project by project basis. This is not the only difference

between agents and managers roles, but it is a fundamental difference that too few writers are educated sufficiently about.

Are you looking for interns? What would they be doing? Is there any compensation, financial or otherwise? Interns are welcome at MFM to learn the management business for no compensation.

What are your goals for the pitchfest? Find great material.

How many writers do you represent? 10 very active; 15 periodically active

How many agents work at your agency? One manager.

What do you consider the biggest differences between a manager and an agent? The biggest difference is that agents are governed by state laws; and managers are not. The reason for this is that agents act and negotiate in a legal capacity for finding employment for their clients. In California and New York, anyone who acts as an employment agent needs to qualify for a license to practice and keep that license in good standing.

There are other differences, one addressed here and another above in a previous section of this document. Unproduced writers need more knowledge about the differences; and should consider the realities of how the two representatives operate before seeking to attach one. To be sure, there are overlaps in activities and functions, but the main differences described above are significant.

Does a writer have to be produced for you to consider them? No.

Do you represent film or television writers, or both? Both.

How long are the terms of signing on with you? Negotiated.

Is it worthwhile for new writers to have an agent? Why? No, it is crazy making for new writers to have agents. They will not get the attention they need to develop as functioning businesspeople within the industry. New writers can be aided by managers who serve as business advisors as well as script consultants to them – two functions most agents never have time for.

Is it worthwhile for new writers to be members of the WGA / WGC? It is a most desirable and worthy goal but not necessary at first. Yet the flip side of membership is the cost of maintaining it. Overall, a screenwriter should seek membership in the guild(s), but once s/he has obtained a certain amount of traction from being produced – assuming, that is, that s/he is eligible to join.

Do you read or do you have someone read for you? What is the process at your agency?
I do all of my own reading.

Do you only represent screenwriters, or do you also represent book authors, etc? MFM represents screenwriters; not book authors

Do you represent any other talent besides writers? (ie Directors) MFM represents screenwriters and filmmakers (directors and producers); and finished films for distribution; and producers looking for film financing

Is there any advice you would like to offer the writers who are pitching you? Or advice for any new writers trying to break in? The biggest problem at any pitchfest I've ever attended is that the writers are terrible at pitching. Whether it's from nervousness or inexperience, it doesn't matter. Most of that awkwardness stems from lack of a firm grasp on the story they have written. The greatest deficiency I've seen at pitchfests is that writers do not grasp their own stories in a way that allows them to clearly tell it in two minutes or less, and still leave time for the decision maker to talk it over intelligently.

Is there anything else you would like to add? About yourself? Your position? Your company, or the industry? In recent months, MFM has negotiated a major option for one of its clients. The project is budgeted for 8 figures, the script purchase price for mid six figures, and the option payment in mid five figures. A major producer is fully attached. Also, a drama from an MFM client writing team has been approved for airing by a major cable network; and its production is fully financed for its premiere in 2009. Another significant production company has offered, and we are now negotiating, a co-production agreement on a G-rated family feature for a writer-producer on our roster.

These are difficult times and seem to be getting tougher for everyone – big or small – throughout the industry. It makes it all the more important that a writer have patience, stamina, will-power to succeed, and a thick skin. Even more important is that screenwriters realize they are storytellers and that to succeed in making deals, they need to observe the most fundamental of all sales strategies – that is, to make it easy for some one to do business with them. It always – absolutely always – comes down to the script. Having a great script that tells a great story is and always has been the most important part of the business.

MF 2008-05-31