

SCREENWRITING IN THE DIGITAL AGE:

FOR THE FIRST TIME, NEW TECHNOLOGY AND DISTRIBUTION METHODS GIVE
FEATURE FILM WRITERS POWER TO MAKE A LIVING OUTSIDE HOLLYWOOD
STUDIOS

by

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the state of the screenwriting industry today and draws conclusions about the opportunities available for feature film writers. Within the major Hollywood studios, writers face long odds of success, as they always have. Big-budget spectacles and sequels reign, and economic conditions prevent studios from taking risks on projects that don't have worldwide appeal. However, for the first time, screenwriters have options outside the studios. New, inexpensive technology and methods of distribution allow forward-thinking writers to get their movies made and even be paid for their work without studio money. Writers still need studios if they crave traditional avenues of success in Hollywood, but if they simply want to make a living writing movies, the tools to do so are now available to them.

**Screenwriting in the Digital Age:
For the first time, new technology and distribution methods give feature film writers
power to make a living outside major Hollywood studios**

The way Americans make and consume movies is changing, and one particular group is in the middle of it all: the writers. The problems screenwriters face today, and the options writers have for overcoming them, reveal not only the future of screenwriting but the future of filmmaking as a business and an art form.

Looking at the history of screenwriting within the Hollywood studio system from the 1930s to today, the old model of the film industry emerges as one in which studios and major production companies hold most, if not all, control over what movies are made and why. The conglomeratization of the studios and the explosion of the global marketplace have created a culture that, at least within the mainstream, favors easily marketable adaptations and big-budget spectacles. As always, too many writers compete for too few jobs, and even those who make it still risk being left creatively unfulfilled.

The recent recession in 2008 left studios forced to slash their budgets, but even as conditions improve they show no signs of addressing the monumental changes in technology and distribution that have, for the first time, begun to give screenwriters other options.

Outside the confines of Hollywood, a new world of opportunity is emerging for screenwriters.¹ For the first time, writers do not need to depend on studio money to see their films come to life. All the tools they need – technology, distribution and storytelling – are at their fingertips. How writers choose to take advantage of such advances, not next year or in the next decade, but right now, is shaping the future of moviemaking.

¹ Although many film writers are also turning to a plethora of new opportunities in television, this thesis will focus exclusively on advances in feature film writing.

Tradition: Screenwriting in the Studios and its Evolution

Since the so-called Golden Age of Hollywood in the 1930s and 40s, the word “easy” hasn’t often been used to define the screenwriting profession. USC film professor Rick Jewell² makes that much clear.

“Writers in the studio era were not a happy lot,” Jewell says.

In those days, studios kept hundreds of writers under contract, churning out new feature films weekly as well as newsreels, shorts and cartoons. But while the work was steady, pay was low, and the writers had little control. Multiple writers were hired to work on the same script simultaneously, the studios made changes as they saw fit, and few writers, Jewell says, felt they got the credit they deserved.

“If you were a writer back then you rarely saw your own work unadulterated, unchanged, the way you conceived it up on the screen,” Jewell says.

By the 1950s, the studio system, in which major studios like RKO and Paramount produced all content in-house, had been replaced by a new model. Independent production companies, many run by actors or directors, made the movies while the studios focused on distribution and finance. Writers were no longer under studio contracts; instead, some joined production companies as employees or partners and others remained independent.

Though that model is still in place today, the 1970s saw another major change to the moviemaking business: the joining of studios and other major companies to form conglomerates – six, to be exact: Viacom, Time Warner, Sony, Disney, Comcast/General Electric and News Corporation. Under each giant umbrella are products like electronics,

² Rick Jewell, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, 17 October 2012.

magazines and newspapers, and for the corporation, financing movies is just another part of the business plan.

“Once you [the production company] finish that film they’re going to have a look at it, they’re going to suggest things to you, and sometimes fights erupt at that level, when they’re asking for certain changes and you don’t want to make them. But usually those things get worked out behind the scenes,” Jewell says. “And then from there it’s their job to market the film. That’s really what they’re in business to do these days, is market your movie, advertise it like crazy, present it in the marketplace at the ideal time.”

Screenwriter Nick Pustay³ graduated from USC’s Writing for Screen and Television master’s program in 1995. For the last 12 years he’s worked steadily, mostly on teen and young adult scripts. His biggest credit to date is the 2010 film adaptation of Beverly Cleary’s children’s books called *Ramona and Beezus*, which starred Selena Gomez and earned decent reviews and \$26 million at the box office.

Although he has produced credits to his name, Pustay says selling a script is more difficult than it’s ever been in his twenty years in the profession. He is not alone. According to the Writers Guild of America (WGA)’s 2012 annual report, the earnings by screen writers (feature films only) in 2011 totaled \$349.1 million – which is down 34 percent from 2007. The number of writers reporting earnings – 1,562 – fell 7.6 percent from 2007.⁴

Several factors may be to blame. The WGA strike in late 2007 saw 12,000 writers out of work for 14 weeks, and it had the unfortunate luck to take place just before the

³ Nick Pustay, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, 14 October 2012.

⁴ Writers Guild of America, West, Inc. Annual Financial Report, 29 June 2012, from WGA website, accessed 1 December 2012, http://www.wga.org/uploadedFiles/who_we_are/annual_reports/annualreport12.pdf.

economic recession began in 2008. The consequences have proven to be long-lasting. According to Pustay, production companies' "discretionary funds," which producers used to pay screenwriters to write drafts of potential projects, are gone. Scripts must be paid for by the studios, which don't have the means to take many risks.

"When I started it was a little easier to get a job, because people had money to throw at stuff like that and the understanding was you fund five scripts and if one of them hits you're doing great," Pustay says. "That outlook has changed."

A shift in the makeup of film audiences may have had an even stronger effect on the studios' aversion to risk and the movies they choose to make.

While traditionally a fraction of a film's profits have come from overseas markets and the majority from the United States and Canada, that breakdown has recently reversed, Jewell says, with films now making two thirds of their money overseas. For example, last year, *Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted* made \$216 million domestically and \$530 million overseas. Most of the top grossers of the year boast a similar breakdown. Even *Life of Pi*, which was well-received by critics and earned several Oscar nominations, made only \$112 million in North America but \$466 million around the world.⁵ The numbers don't lie – if a movie is going to be a blockbuster, it better have worldwide appeal. As a result, the kinds of films that get made today have had to adjust.

"[Studios] want stuff that they feel confident is not just going to make money in the United States, it's going to play all around the world," Jewell explains. "That's why you see so many films that are filled with spectacle and light on dialogue." The top-

⁵ "Top-Grossing Movies of 2012," The Numbers, accessed 15 February 2013, <http://www.the-numbers.com/market/2012/top-grossing-movies>

grossing movies of 2012, for example, are overwhelmingly dominated by action, fantasy and comic book flicks including *Marvel's The Avengers*, *Skyfall* and *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn, Part 2*. The only dialogue-heavy movies to break the top 20 were *Ted* and *Lincoln*.⁶

Compared to the studio era, Jewell says, it's a different world now, with a different attitude toward making movies.

“The people that run these organizations are very bottom line,” he says. “The old studio heads were seat-of-the-pants people and they went with their own instincts. They were very interested in making money but they were all gamblers and they felt like in the long run if their instincts were good enough they would emerge successfully at the end of the road. And most of them did.”

Sometimes a truly unique and original film will come along and surprise everyone, temporarily renewing interest in trying new ideas, Jewell says, citing *Ted*, the sleeper Seth MacFarlane hit. But ultimately, a smaller number of franchise movies and other big-budget spectacles take precedence over more experimental fare.

A couple studios have outright reduced the number of movies they release each year; for example, Disney released 38 films in 1995 and 18 in 2012, and Sony released 40 in 1996 and 26 in 2012. The other major studios have continued to release about the same amount, but original content has decreased – nearly half of their top-10 grossing films of 2012 were sequels while 1995's top grossers were almost all original.⁷

One measure of Hollywood's interest in new ideas is the market for original scripts, or “specs,” defined as screenplays not written under a contract with a studio or

⁶ “Top-Grossing Movies of 2012.”

⁷ “Movie Market Summary for Year 2012,” The Numbers, accessed 15 February 2013, <http://www.the-numbers.com/market/2012/summary>.”

production company. From a relative high in 1995 of 173, spec sales dropped to a low of 55 by 2010 – a decline of 68 percent. 2011 and 2012, however, showed an increase in spec sales, with around 100 each, exact numbers varying by source.⁸ (The numbers, of course, don't reflect how many of those specs actually become movies). Sources quoted by TheWrap.com speculate that the increase may be due to the improvement of the national economy and the completion of several major studio franchises last year, such as “Harry Potter” and “Twilight,” that have left executives scrambling to develop new material to take their places.⁹

Nevertheless, the surge in spec sales only seems to signify a return to normalcy in the studio system following the recession, not an exaggerated interest in original material. Even with the jump in sales, the spec market is still no better than it was in the '90s.

From inside the studios, the fundamentals of screenwriting have not changed. How-to books about the craft still teach the same basic skills today that they did 30 years ago, say producers Andy Licht (*The Cable Guy*, *Waterworld*) and Sheila Hanahan Taylor (the *Final Destination* franchise). In fact, Licht and Taylor assert that the number of good scripts in the studio marketplace each year stays the same regardless of any increase or decrease in volume – about four, they say, only half-joking.¹⁰

“The good scripts are good, everybody finds them, every year there's the same number of good ones that are out there,” Taylor says emphatically. “Honestly, we are a

⁸ Scott Meyers, “The Definitive Spec Script Sales List (1991-2012) | Go Into the Story,” 4 July 2012, The Black List, accessed 17 February 2013, <http://gointothestory.blcklst.com/2012/07/the-definitive-spec-script-sales-list-1991-2012-2012.html>.

⁹ Brent Lang, “Spec Market Sizzled in 2011: Twice as Many Sales as Year Before (Exclusive),” 11 January 2012, The Wrap, accessed 17 February 2013, <http://www.thewrap.com/movies/article/spec-market-sizzles-hollywood-rediscovers-its-taste-new-ideas-34326>.

¹⁰ Andy Licht and Sheila Hanahan Taylor, interview by author, Beverly Hills, California, 14 November 2012.

very small community, if you're any good at all, we always find you.”

“Who’s not going to bring you a script that they think is good?” Licht adds.

“It’s brilliant, right? And if some guy is sitting around in his apartment in the middle of nowhere saying ‘I am a genius, I’ve tried to get my script to people, no one will let me in the door,’ I would argue you are doing something wrong,” Taylor says. “For every one of those guys that’s complaining, there is a guy I know who’s from a small town, without a film degree, who got in.”

Adam Cozad, a working screenwriter for the last five years, agrees that studios are often unfairly accused of sacrificing quality for profit. He’s currently working on three films in various stages of development: *Jack Ryan*, based on the recurring Tom Clancy character and starring Chris Pine, Keira Knightley and Kevin Costner; an action film called *The Gray Man*; and Warner Bros.’ highly anticipated *Tarzan*.¹¹

Cozad points out that the type of movies he likes to write – “geopolitical thrillers, or taking factual events and turning them into fictional narratives” – are in high demand. Producers and studio executives, he says, value writers who can balance both artistry and commercial potential in each project.

“It’s a misperception from the public that the studios want to make dumb movies. Everyone I’ve worked with is trying to make something phenomenal. Always,” Cozad says firmly. “Whether that gets screwed up in the process or it comes together is a separate issue.”

But it’s true, Cozad admits, that “it’s either really big movies or really small movies. The middle has sort of dropped out.”

¹¹ Adam Cozad, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, 25 October 2012.

Licht sums up the studio mentality simply. The argument that studios shouldn't value profit as much as artistic value just doesn't make sense when it comes to sustaining an industry. "It's called show business, not show art," he says.

Taylor wouldn't count on the trend toward big-budget dominance to continue, however. She predicts that an increase and improvement in inexpensive global film will soon force Hollywood to reexamine its strategy for making movies it believes will sell overseas.

"That's going to make Hollywood take a new look, because we are convinced the only way for global dominance is super-expensive movies like *Transformers* and *GI Joe* and all that stuff. Other countries can't do that and they're like 'Nope, we're going to do it for \$5 million, because we're going to write human stories that are emotionally connecting to people and we're going to figure out how to do that.' I'm waiting for that shift to happen," Taylor says.

In the meantime, screenwriters may still find success in Hollywood bittersweet. Although they have succeeded in earning a living as screenwriters where countless others have failed, Pustay and Cozad both crave the opportunity to work on their own original scripts – something neither has been able to do as much as he'd like.

"It'd be nice to have one for me and one for them," Cozad says. "It's a hell of a lot more fun when it's your own ideas and you can start it from scratch and get through the whole process. It's time to get back into that world for sure."¹²

But writers don't have to wait around for Hollywood to take an interest in them anymore. For the first time, the three basic elements of moviemaking – story, technology

¹² Adam Cozad, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, 7 January 2013.

and distribution – are all within their reach. Those who get on board with the freedom that the Internet and inexpensive technology offer may find themselves rewarded.

Innovation: Screenwriting in the Digital Age

UCLA screenwriting professor Richard Walter¹³ says screenwriters now have more opportunities than ever before to sustain careers in the film business. He can see their potential before they even leave the classroom.

“There’s one guy in my class right now who’s writing a movie that would definitely be made. How do we know that? He’s planning it for a micro budget, it’s very self contained. It’s a great story, it takes place in limited locations. There are no car crashes or expensive things that are needed. It’s planned for a 12-day shoot, and he’s going to make that movie,” Walter says.

Gone are the days when camera equipment was bulky, expensive and could only be operated by trained professionals. Digital cameras now range from a few hundred dollars for a basic camcorder to a few thousand for cinema-style movie cameras.¹⁴ Whole movies can be shot on iPhones, and editing software is user-friendly and available at a range of prices – from the free iMovie that comes with every Apple computer to industry standards like Final Cut Pro and Adobe Premiere Pro.¹⁵

¹³ Richard Walter, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, November 6, 2012.

¹⁴ “Movie camera,” Amazon, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss_1?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=movie+camera

¹⁵ “Video editing software,” Amazon, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_0_5?url=search-alias%3Dsoftware&field-keywords=video+editing+software&prefix=video%2Csoftware%2C132&rh=n%3A229534%2Ck%3Avideo+editing+software.

“You could make that movie for one tenth what it would cost to provide coffee for the driver on *Avatar*, if you follow me,” Walter continues. “The point is anyone can make a movie now.”

Studios no longer have a monopoly on distribution, either.

Walter just got off the phone with a writer-producer-director friend of his who a few years ago sold a script for \$1 million, he says. It was put on the fast track at Columbia (“whenever you hear something’s on the fast track it’s never going to happen,” Walter dismisses), six weeks later was in turnaround – abandoned and sold off by the studio – and today has still not been made. It’s an example of how the business has been up until now: writers dependent on studio financing and resources to get their movies off the ground.

True, only studios have the means to distribute movies to the thousands of multiplexes in America and abroad. But the Internet has fundamentally changed how we consume and share media. Film studios face the same crisis that’s already walloped the newspaper industry: how to make people pay the same price for content that they can now get for free, or at least much cheaper, without even leaving their houses.

Amateur filmmakers can now upload their movies and television shows to YouTube, Vimeo and other video-sharing sites. They can spread the word about their projects through social media and amass a decent fan base if their work is good enough. Indie filmmakers can even secure pretty good compromises with the studios by making their films available in video-on-demand and streaming formats ahead of a limited theatrical release.

Examples of such enterprising are everywhere. In 2009, the New York Times

reported¹⁶ that Sacha Gervasi, who directed the documentary film *Anvil! The Story of Anvil*, paid a distribution company called Abramorama to play the film in select theaters, sold the DVD and television rights to VH1, and relied on Internet word-of-mouth to attract a relatively small but devoted following. It ultimately grossed about \$1 million in the worldwide box office.

For another case study, consider *Bass Ackwards*,¹⁷ a \$35,000 indie that premiered at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival, relying in part on a small Kickstarter campaign to raise funds necessary to send the film to the festival. While acceptance at Sundance can lead to a film's pickup by a studio, *Bass Ackwards*, directed by Linas Phillips and produced by Thomas Woodrow and Mark Duplass, wasn't so lucky. But the producers didn't let the film die.

Instead, their strategy was to release the film to as many people as possible as close to the Sundance premiere as possible. While publicity/marketing/distribution strategist Marian Koltai-Levine worked to secure limited theatrical release, the producers concentrated on the video-on-demand and DVD release. Through DVD and digital distributor New Video, *Bass Ackwards* did something "unheard of" at the time: it ensured that *Bass Ackwards* was available on DVD, iTunes, Amazon, and cable video-on-demand (VOD) on Comcast, Time Warner, Cablevision and Insight Communications – all immediately following the Sundance screening.

In other words, audiences could watch the film at home through nearly any

¹⁶ Michael Cieply, "As Studios Cut Budgets, Indie Filmmakers Go Do-It-Yourself," 12 August 2009, The New York Times, accessed 4 February 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/13/business/media/13independent.html?_r=2&.

¹⁷ Orly Ravid, "*Bass Ackwards* Moves Forward into Creative Distribution," 19 July 2011, Sundance Institute: Artist Services, accessed 4 February 2013, <http://www.sundance.org/artistservices/case-study/bass-ackwards/>.

method available, even though *Bass Ackwards* had no studio distribution. At its peak, 40 million homes viewed the film.

Koltai-Levine's connections at Zipline Entertainment, a fee-based distribution company, and the buzz generated by Sundance and *Bass Ackwards*'s unconventional distribution strategy eventually scored the film screenings in 11 cities and some publicity, but those profits were negligible.

By the following year, *Bass Ackwards* had made \$37,343 through DVD and digital platforms – almost exactly the film's budget. While the team's strategy wasn't foolproof and the slow economy at the time probably didn't help, their ability to simply earn their money back through digital methods signifies a new attitude toward making and releasing small-budget films.

“In approaching Sundance as a platform rather than a marketplace, we are trying to pave the way, insofar as we are able, for a new era of filmmaker empowerment,” Woodrow said in the film's Kickstarter campaign. “We are not waiting around for someone else to tell us they want to distribute our movie. We know the movie's good. We're being proactive.”

For screenwriters, more options for distribution, and options that require less money, means that if their movie is cheap enough to shoot, they actually stand a chance to show it to audiences and make a profit – without help from a major studio.

“It's very difficult to reach a lot of people but you don't *need* to reach a lot of people if your movie cost 20 or 30 thousand,” Walter points out. “You get your money back and enough to live on if you're diligent at your job. Vastly increasing numbers of writers and other film professionals will be able to make a living at this without needing a

day job. Isn't that great? I mean, wow! I think that's exciting."

But there are undoubtedly many writers who yearn for mainstream success, and the fame and fortune of A-list screenwriters like John Logan, Aaron Sorkin or Diablo Cody. For them, giving up dreams of the multiplex in exchange for the low-budget independent market may be painful and difficult to accept.

Walter borrows a line from the recent presidential debate for his response to such traditionalists. "I would say to them, 'Hey, listen, we don't use bayonets and horses anymore!'" he exclaims.

If writers want to create truly original, creative scripts, they know the long odds of selling a spec to a studio. But now, they can make what they want without major Hollywood financing to justify it.

"Most writers don't wake up in the morning going, 'Oh, I'd love to do a movie based around a Barbie doll' or something like that," Walter says. "What the studios would say they're trying to do is deliver to audiences what audiences expect. What's wrong with that? Well, I'll tell you what's wrong with that. I'm a member of the audience and I don't want my expectations met, I want them exceeded. I want to be surprised, I want to be stunned, I want to be shocked, I want to be disturbed."

But luckily, that's only a small piece of the business now, he says. "Much, much, much larger than that is this new stuff where artists who really care about what they create and their artistry can apply it, can exercise it."

One writer taking full advantage of the new model is Derek Rethwisch,¹⁸ who got his master's at USC's Writing for Screen and Television program in 2007. After

¹⁸ Derek Rethwisch, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, 23 October 2012.

graduation, Rethwisch wrote spec after spec and did script coverage at production companies like United Artists and Miramax for years, reading hundreds of other people's screenplays. He even worked as a test prep tutor so he could keep writing at night. But working in Hollywood showed him what he was up against. He doesn't know anyone who's had a spec sale, he says.

Rethwisch came up with a new plan. Instead of writing specs and hoping they got the attention of agents and producers, he decided to start making his own low-budget movies. He recently quit his test prep job and began working on his first feature, a Halloween horror movie called *Devil's Night* that he'll shoot in the spring. He's hoping to pay back the \$50,000 budget (raised mostly through friends and family) through alternative distribution methods and will submit it to film festivals.

He says he just got tired of writing screenplays that went nowhere and worried that his work wasn't good enough to be sold in Hollywood.

"I realized if your goal when you sit down to write a screenplay is to sell it for a million dollars you are constantly going to be let down. You are always going to fail. But if your goal is to make something that you're proud of or something you can do something with, you can achieve that," Rethwisch says.

Even writers willing to take a chance in Hollywood may find themselves falling back on the DIY method, simply because it allows them to do what they love.

NYU film graduate Michael Morris¹⁹ first made a career of "guerilla"-style filmmaking years ago, finding work directing, shooting, writing and editing indies such as *Fear House*, *Sleepover*, and *The Vampire Project*, all made on limited budgets with

¹⁹ Michael Morris, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, 16 October 2012.

small profits.

But Morris has bigger aspirations, so he recently set to work on a few spec scripts he hoped would get him an agent, traction with Hollywood producers, and the chance to see one of his films made on the biggest scale of his career. After attending an event by the company InkTip, a sort of speed-dating for screenwriters and producers, he received requests for his spec script, a thriller about a woman with face blindness.

Three months later, the news about Morris's spec script wasn't good.²⁰ Two producers out of the six to whom he sent the script already passed on it. Morris is still waiting to hear back from the others, and will send out the script to several more. He's also co-writing another screenplay and plans to send it out in the next few months.

About his chances in Hollywood today, Morris is unsure. His dream is to make smart movies that challenge people, like Christopher Nolan's, and on more than a shoestring budget. "I don't need it to be \$100 million, I mean 10 to 20 million would be great, and have it on location," he muses.

But Morris is acutely aware that, in the eyes of Hollywood producers, he's still "riffraff." He says he's not surprised by the difficulty he faced.

"What I want as a writer is for the script to just show up on their desk and them be like 'Wow!'" Morris admits. "Of course I want them to be clamoring for it, I want a bidding war, that's the goal. But the producer side of myself knows it's not that easy."

If neither of the two scripts go anywhere, he's prepared to step back from the spec market and go back to making indies with friends and colleagues.

"What else can you do?" he says.

²⁰ Michael Morris, interview by author, Los Angeles, California, 7 January 2013.

At UCLA's orientation a few months ago, Walter says he painted a picture of hope and opportunity for his students, telling them now is the most exciting time to get in the movie business. They just need to master its most basic element – storytelling. “It’s like 1903. Nobody knows where it’s going but it’s going,” Walter says. “If you’re a good story creator you’ll be all right. The length of the stories will change, the media on which they’re depicted will change but the nature of the story will not change.”

Conclusion: A New Era of Moviemaking

Is it too soon to predict how the new opportunities for feature film writers will affect the Hollywood studio system? Probably. While newspaper readers have transitioned relatively easily from print to online content (it didn't exactly require much convincing to get people to read the news online instead of paying for print subscriptions), a culture of non-Hollywood filmmaking may require a bigger adjustment on the audience's part. Without famous actors, lavish sets or cutting-edge special effects, the films may feel underwhelming, compared to the million-dollar showpieces we're used to, and for now film studios and large production companies remain the only entities capable of producing such high-quality content.

But for those simply trying to make a living writing movies, they have a choice, for perhaps the first time ever.

They can go the traditional route, and fight the same battles screenwriters have fought for years in the Hollywood studios. Writing jobs aren't going away but it's not exactly a seller's market, and for now the tradition of a select few summer tentpoles and

multi-million dollar blockbusters over a quantity of medium- and small-budget films still reigns. Success for writers is not impossible, but it's elusive.

If they take advantage of the inexpensive technology and new freedoms for distribution, however, writers will hit no ceiling, because such limits have not yet been set. With the tools to make and distribute films available to everyone, writers can shoot their movies, show them to audiences, and even see a profit, all without ever relying on a Hollywood studio or major production company.

Whether you have a film school degree or no degree at all, a network of Hollywood connections or a network of childhood friends – it doesn't matter. If you want to write movies today, you can.

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