

How has the screenwriting contest landscape changed over the last 20 years?

It has changed dramatically. When we started in 1998, there were a few competitions that mattered and about 50 that didn't. Now, they are still a few that matter and hundreds that don't. I feel it's difficult for new writers to navigate through these competitions and pick the right ones to submit to. Writers are constantly inundated with false and misleading ads, quotes and websites that give the illusion that these new competitions have connections to the industry. Well, most don't. And after doing this for 20 years, we can say that.

Do you ever read scripts that are submitted, but don't go on to win, but still move and appeal to you personally?

Absolutely. It happens every year, our top 100, are so well written and the stories are so engaging that, although they didn't win, we still promote them to the industry. We also have production companies coming to us looking for specific genres and we connect them to the specific writer(s) from the top 100. So, did they win? No, but they are still in a pretty good position to get noticed.

If you could give one piece of advice to screenwriters submitting to Scriptapalooza, what would it be?

Don't rush it. Make sure you submit the best script you can. Don't worry, we'll be here next year.

What criteria do you use when selecting your judges?

All of our judges have to have extensive credits and been in the industry for at least 5 years. We verify them and make sure they are legit.

Your fellowship program is still relatively young. What prompted you to start this, and have you already seen an impact from it?

We wanted to do something a little different. Our first 2 years, we sent the recipient to Costa Rica for a writing retreat. But, for third year we switched it and noticed a greater interest in the Fellowship. It might have been the whole going to another country was too intimidating for some writers. So, this year, as with the last, we send the recipient to a Robert McKee Seminar, which is great.

The Fellow gets to go to a STORY seminar, in NY or LA, flight and hotel accommodations included. It's a great trip for a writer to experience. It's also an opportunity to devote a large

block of days to writing. Everyone is busy, and sometimes writing gets the lowest priority when there are bills to pay, and daily obligations often get in the way of creativity. We thought a fellowship would allow the writer to take a break from their normal routine and focus solely on their writing. The writer is also mentored by a professional so they have some guided help that is beneficial to the writer and also creates future opportunities.

As Scriptapalooza has evolved over the years, what have some of the challenges been to your existence and growth, and how have you overcome them?

One of our biggest priorities is to always have the best producers reading all the screenplays because that's the most important thing. That's what a screenplay competition should be doing. We have over 125 producers involved with reading all the entries that are entered. The biggest challenge is having other less scrupulous competitions mimic your website, or copy your ideas in promoting writers. I just roll my eyes and keep focused on our goal, which is to open doors for writers, no matter where they live. Being a champion of writers is what ultimately sets us apart from the rest.

What is the biggest mistake most screenwriters make when submitting to your competitions?

I guess it would be rushing their first draft and sending it into Scriptapalooza or any other competition. You got to remember, this is your writing example, you have to put out the best material possible to get a shot out there.

As you reflect on the last 20 years, what would you say is your biggest achievement, or the thing you're most proud of regarding Scriptapalooza?

Getting writers an introduction, a meeting, their script optioned, movie made and hearing them say, "If it wasn't for Scriptapalooza..."

As years go by, do you find that the majority of scripts you receive tend to reflect the times and events that were happening around the screenwriter when they were writing?

Sure, we do get scripts that are reflecting the current times, however, I wouldn't suggest that it is typical. These storytellers come from all walks of life, anywhere in the world, and each has a story unique to them and the scripts reflect that.

Do the things that compelled you to start Scriptapalooza 20 years ago still drive you now?

Scriptapalooza was born when 2 writers and myself were sitting around a table discussing screenplay competitions and how bad they were. The overall complaint was you never knew

who was reading your script and if they were qualified or not. So, we looked at each other and said, let's change this, let's start naming names and so we did, we started naming the producers that would be reading the scripts. That kind of changed everything at that time (20 years ago)...no one was doing that. Now, they do. Our goal always has been to get the writer through that Hollywood door and after 20 years, that door is still open for us.

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