

Filmclips to service fest needs

TORONTO - A Toronto entrepreneur has developed a computer program to simplify the filmmaker's search for the international film festival best suited to his needs.

John Karmazyn has designed a computer software program that provides his customers with information on 500 film and video festivals. His service, Filmclips, is offered on a subscription and cost per service basis. It represents an alternative to filmmakers and production companies who work with a limited number of prints and who may wish to enter their films in as many festivals as possible.

Jean Lefebvre, Telefilm Canada's manager of festivals and international marketing, says he thinks the idea of a computerbased service could be helpful. He recently endorsed Karmazyn's service in a newsletter to all Canadian filmmakers and production companies. Although Telefilm Canada runs an office that currently helps filmmakers apply to festivals,

Lefebvre says he sees the Filmclips idea as complementary to the existing Telefilm service that already is overburdened.

After consultation with the customer, Karmazyn provides a computer search for the most appropriate festival or festivals, and develops a distribution schedule. Labels, instructions, and courier waybills are printed, the film packaged and sent to the selected festival.

"The more specific a filmmaker is with his target audience, the more specific we can be with the search," says Karmazyn. The search can be done on various criteria. Once a festival is selected, information is recalled on important details such as prize money, judging, and fees.

Karmazyn says he started collecting information on the myriad film festivals around the world as a Ryerson student. The result is that now he has a list more extensive than Telefilm's. (Telefilm only deals with festivals which meet TF's criteria concerning importance, competitiveness, and responsibility.) He also has developed software programs for scripts, film budgets and production planning.

Advanced film school

About 20 years ago, Richard Gailey had an idea - a concept for an advanced film school. Years later, in 1981, an industry group including Dr. Gailey approached the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) (where Dr. Gailey teaches in the communications department) in Calgary about establishing such a program. This year SAIT finally introduced its Professional Motion Picture Production (PMPP) program.

The establishment of the program, according to Dr. Gailey, was largely possible because of structural and political change at SAIT. "SAIT used to be a provincially administered institution, but three years ago we got a board of governors. This way new for us. It opened up all kinds of new ways of doing things."

PMPP is proof that the new system works. After years of inaction, the PMPP program is now a reality - in only three short years.

Eighty-nine people applied to the program this year, and of those, 16 were accepted. Shona Rossel, who designed and administers the program, says "These people have all been involved in film or communications. They were picked because they all possess the true grit it takes in this business."

One student has since left, but 15 remain in a program that will likely change their careers. In their first term they have talked to dozens of people in the business to learn about budgets, business management, marketing, distribution, and law. Then they heard from established and successful producers, writers, cinematographers, editors, sound technicians... and familiarized themselves with all the different types of equipment these people use.

So far it sounds much like any other film school, but it's not. The 15 participants have also set up their own company, called Venturainment. Through Venturainment they get hands-on experience in the very real world of motion picture production. Early this month, the class will descend on Toronto to sell their ideas, then head west to produce what they sell.

Although Rossel won't predict how much Venturainment will make, ("It's a bit premature"), the students will have to split the profits with SAIT.

Rossel says she designed the program to be business-oriented. "It's very market-driven. We're professional players in the business of filmmaking. You have to combine the artist with the business person, so PMPP teaches all the necessary skills.

"She insists that filmmakers must be able to sell their work before it's produced.

Rossel herself has been in the business since she was 17. "I started on a feature film for NBC, then I moved to Toronto." In Ontario she worked on dozens of projects, working her way up through the industry. Now she produces her own work and her colleagues describe her as 'young and brilliant.'

Setting up a program like SAIT's Professional Motion Picture Production program is a new experience for her. "I think it's wonderful. I came here because I was very excited about the idea. It means I'm grounded in one city for a while and I can give back what I know." She likes the program so much she's staying around after the term ends to help her students with their productions.

PMPP's year runs differently from the typical school-year so the students can film during Alberta's long summer days. Then, after a summer of production, the first group will either apprentice in the industry or produce their own work with support from SAIT's facilities.

Applications for next year are already pouring in. "We've been swamped," says Rossel. "Some of them don't have a technical background, but they have the tenacity, and the skills can be learned."

Rossel is very pleased with the progress of this year's participants. "They have life-force, enthusiasm and drive; they're very talented." And of the program itself she says: "It's very exclusive and it's very special."

Dr. Gailey says Rossel has set up what he envisioned decades ago and recommended in his 1981 report with other members of Alberta's film industry, including Ron Brown, past-president and board member of the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association. Brown says SAIT had a basic two-year film crafts program (the Cinema Television Stage Radio Broadcasting Applied Arts program still exists), but needed another program to stress "what we thought were the weaknesses at the time. We approached all of the educational institutions in Alberta, including SAIT. None of the others was particularly interested, especially the University of Alberta, which already had a film department.

"We had just pressured the government to set up the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation (AMPDC). We could see all that sponsored film decreasing; growth would have to be in the dramatic and entertainment area," said Brown. The PMPP program at SAIT now fuels that growth.

In spite of the Alberta government's support for various areas of the province's film and video industry, it has failed to recognize the value of education. In fact, SAIT was only able to implement its new advanced film school program after the government gave SAIT greater autonomy, and the power to spend its budget on the educational programs of its choice.

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