

Never Judge a Producer by His Website



THE AD ON WWW.CRAIGSLIST.COM called for a savvy development director to provide script analysis and rewrites on major motion pictures. The producer, whom I'll call Billy, directed me to his eye-popping website, which featured an array of celebrity head shots and glowing testimonials. His "test" was to have me read two scripts he'd received and write up notes regarding their marketability. Within 48 hours, I had delivered my critiques, prompting an enthusiastic Billy to call and tell me I was "in."

"What exactly does 'in' mean?" I asked.

"Let me get back to you," he said. "I've got Nicole on Line 2. Poor thing. Still crying her eyes out about Tom."

Such was the pattern of his calls. He was always just wrapping up a chat with Sigourney, lunching with Brad and Angelina or typing an e-mail to Christian Slater. A part of me wondered if maybe he was just a lonely teen

with lots of imagination. I decided to reserve judgment until I saw results, or at least a contract specifying my title and salary. The entertainment value alone, I decided, was worth taking a chance.

"Oh, you're definitely my development gal," he promised. "I just don't have the money in place yet." What he did have, however, were scripts he insisted were "hot." A squirrel with a crayon could have generated better material. Nevertheless, I diligently made notes on them because the aspiring writers who flocked to his website deserved honest feedback. I reminded Billy I'd be keeping an accounting of my time so I could be reimbursed when capital became available, and asked again for a contract.

"Yeah, yeah," he said, "I haven't had time." Oddly, though, he had time to send 10 to 15 frantic e-mails a day demanding more critiques.

Not surprisingly, I discovered he'd been optioning the writers' work for free. Apparently even the traditional good-faith gesture of \$1 was beyond his limited sense of ethics. Nearly four months elapsed and Billy had yet to sell anything. "It's all about who you know," he explained. In truth, it's about who you know who'll actually call you back. In Billy's case: nobody.

"What I don't get," one writer said, "is that he's got such a cool website."

I was reminded that, once upon a more innocent time, the measure of an organization's legitimacy was proportional to the perceived expense of its letterhead and business cards. The reality, however, is that a modest investment in letterhead can yield a sizable return for scam artists who play on the ignorance of their victims. Today they use websites as a virtual calling card of alleged accomplishments.

I finally decided to invoice Billy for the projects I'd reviewed.

"How dare you send me a bill!" he shot back, adding that I could have had a great career with him if I hadn't been so pushy about getting reimbursed.

Huh?

His parting shot made me think he really was a teen with no friends. "I was going to invite you to my big birthday bash this weekend," he said, "but now I don't like you anymore."

And I was so looking forward to partying with Ashton and Demi.

Former actress and director Christina Hamlett is a professional script consultant.