

Selling Your Screenplay is a step-by-step guide to getting your screenplay sold and produced. Learn how to get your script into the hands of the producers and directors who can turn your story into a movie.

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Selling Your Screenplay

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Introduction

“They [my plays] are the result of perfectly straightforward drudgery.”
- George Bernard Shaw in a letter to Archibald Henderson

I have been pursuing screenwriting for more than a decade and have sold or optioned more than 20 scripts so I know a few things about how to sell a screenplay. But my way is not the only way; it is just one way. There is no secret formal or magic bullet that I—or anyone else—can teach you that will propel you to screenwriting success. For every successful screenwriter, there is a unique story about how they succeeded. Hopefully you can learn from my experiences and perhaps combined with your own special circumstances and talents will be able to find your own path to success. Please do not look at this book as a rigid template on how to sell a screenplay. Look at it as a map through a vast jungle. It will hopefully lead you to where you are going but also be ready to explore areas that are not mentioned in this book, and be open to the idea that some of my advice might not be right for you. Always be true to yourself and trust your instincts, they are probably right.

While every screenwriter’s success story is different, there is one common trait that I have personally seen in every successful screenwriter. They all have numerous projects going at the same time. They have written a dozen or more scripts and they are pushing them all in different directions. They are working on feature film scripts in all different genres. They are writing original sitcom scripts, spec sitcom scripts based on an existing television show, movies of the week, mini-series, and even plays. They are taking screenwriting classes and reading screenwriting books to improve their craft. They are sending out query letters to producers, directors, agents, managers, actors, friends, relatives, or anyone else they think might read their script. They are working with directors, producers, or actors to develop original content for them. They are trying to raise money to shoot their scripts. They are getting their friends to shoot their scripts. They are shooting their low budget scripts themselves. They are submitting their

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films to film festivals. They are posting their films on the internet so that people can see them. They are doing everything and anything to try and advance their careers. This is what you must do.

With every success there are dozens of failures, so you individually must have dozens of projects going. You will fail at screenwriting far more often than you succeed. Luckily, it does not matter how many times you fail because one success makes the failures worthwhile. Notice that all of these “things that successful screenwriters are doing” are things that you could be doing, too. None of them require a lot of money or the approval of anyone else. You just need a willingness to do the work and the time to do it. There is no substitute for hard work. You are not going to sell your screenplay by reading this book. You are going to sell your screenplay by applying the techniques (over and over again) that I teach you in this book.

Good luck.

Part II - Selling Your Screenplay

5. Introduction to Selling

"I take rejection as someone blowing a bugle in my ear to wake me up and get me going, rather than retreat." - Sylvester Stallone

Now that you have written a few scripts and have a few that you think are good enough to send out, we will get into the meat of this book—how to sell your screenplay. Once again, I want to reiterate the point I made at the beginning. There is no “right” way to sell a screenplay. If you ask fifty successful screenwriters how they sold their first script you will get fifty different answers. Some things work better than others. I have tried many things and I am going to show you what I have done and how to do it, but please always keep your eyes open and keep trying to figure out new ways to approach the problem.

Before I get into the specifics of what you need to do to sell your script, please remember that rejection is going to be a big part of this process. Do not get discouraged. Even if your script is the greatest screenplay ever written, it is going to get rejected dozens of times, maybe more.

There is a classic screenwriting story that is often told in Hollywood circles. A script reader at the BBC would get submissions from the mail every day and throw them straight into the trashcan without even opening them up. Finally an executive caught on to what he was doing and asked him why he was doing it. He answered, “I am right 99% of the time!”

While it may be true that 99% of the scripts floating around Hollywood are horrible, I would add that 99% of the people reading scripts are equally as unskilled at their chosen profession. So not only do you have to write a great script but you also have to get it to a great reader who is smart enough to recognize how good your script really is. Not an easy task. In addition, different people have different tastes. So just

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because one person does not think your comedy script is funny it does not mean that a lot of other people will not think it is hilarious. Writing is very subjective. So do not get discouraged by rejection. But also never stop improving.

I wrote a film noir screenplay called *Irrefutable Evidence* which some people really like, while others are left completely cold. At one point I had a very quick meeting with a fairly successful producer named Bo Zenga (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0954848>). He was a friend of someone who had worked on another script I had written, so when I sent him an unsolicited query letter he agreed to meet with me. The day before we met he read *Irrefutable Evidence* and absolutely hated it. I got to the meeting and he basically told me he hated the script and was sorry he had set the meeting up before reading it. He apparently thought it was so bad that he did not even seem to think I had any potential as a screenwriter whatsoever. I had brought several other scripts to pitch to him but he flat out refused to read any of them. In hindsight I think he meant to cancel our meeting and just forgot, and he was not one to mince words so he just got rid of me as quickly as possible. A few weeks later a very well established director named Arthur Hiller (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002137>) called me after reading *Irrefutable Evidence* and told me he liked the script and wanted to shop it around!

My point is that two established “successful” entertainment professionals can have very different opinions on the exact same material. And I would say as a rule, these two men are actually fairly unique in that most of the people in Hollywood who I have meet cannot form a strong opinion on their own. They are too afraid to commit to an opinion in fear of being wrong. While I may have an issue with Mr. Zenga’s opinion of me and my scripts, I can say that at least he knows what he thinks and is not afraid to stand behind it.

I want to make one other thing clear, I do not want to give you the impression that I sent out *Irrefutable Evidence* two times and got rejected just once. While Arthur Hiller did like the script, he was not

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able to get any traction on it so he never did anything with it. I have sent out well over 500 query letters pitching the script to various people and I have probably sent the actual script to over 100 producers over the years. It has been optioned by several other people, and has come close to getting made a few times, but it still has not been made and if I lost focus after a few hundred rejections it never would have gotten as far as it did. So the second point I want to make is that even if you have something that can be considered up to “industry standards” in terms of the quality of the script, it is going to get rejected probably 100 times more than it is going to get accepted. And even if it gets accepted, it is still probably not going to get made.

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