

an introduction to
**concept
development**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Cinema is the art of storytelling.

It starts with a hero, a challenge they must face and the journey they must take.

Not all heroes or heroines wield swords or crash through plate glass windows. A hero is more often than not, a fallen person or a person who has lost their faith in life.

We become heroes when we choose to lift ourselves up and to take on challenges far greater than ourselves, far greater than anything we ever thought we could achieve.

It may mean saving the local community centre, it may mean saving the world, but in the process of the story, the most important thing the hero saves, is him or herself, when they discover within them, a strength they never knew they had and with it, overcome their fears, their doubts and the ghosts of their past.

This is the heart of great storytelling and the vital ingredient that has been missing in so many Australian films.

Great stories and truly great films take audiences on a hero's journey. They allow audiences to vicariously experience the hero's trials and final victory from the security of their cinema seat or lounge room couch.

Movie goers may be under the impression, that such great stories are generated by lone wordsmiths, who work part-time as waiters, then scurry home late at night to create their masterpieces.

Few realise that these masterpieces are the result of professional concept development. That in fact, many writers have been involved, over a number of drafts and have developed the works in creative collaboration with a director, a producer and a team of creative and management professionals. It is in fact, the power of creative collaboration, coupled with professional concept development that provides the refining fire necessary to distill a raw script into a truly enjoyable cinema experience.

This process is long and arduous but, like the hero's journey, inevitably leads to victory. Presence Films' belief in, and employment of, professional concept development is what sets us apart from other Australian film makers.

It is why our films will speak to audiences' needs and provide truly satisfying cinematic experiences. It is why our projects will generate a profit for our investors.

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II. THREE STEPS

There are three steps to film-making:

1. Concept Development
2. Production
3. Distribution.

Concept development involves the development and packaging of story concepts for financing or sale.

Production involves financing and production of those story concepts.

Distribution involves the promotion and exploitation of film rights throughout the globe.

Presence Films believes professional concept development is the foundation of a successful feature film.

III. OUR APPROACH TO CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Delivers films with:

- Rich characters
- High stakes
- Engaging stories and
- Satisfying endings.

Such stories can both move and entertain us.

Compare this, to much of the slate of Australian films delivered over the past decade, most of which have been developed by solo writers in isolation, devoid of market considerations.

Such films, almost without exception, yield poor outcomes for both investors and audiences.

IV. OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Is to develop outstanding films that both entertain audiences and generate strong global returns for investors.

We believe that our approach to professional concept development is the key.

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V. WHAT'S INVOLVED IN CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT?

There are three processes involved:

1. Creative development
2. Financial development
3. Marketing development

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT INVOLVES:

- **Premise development.** Brainstorming and testing the premise. This is the critical first step to ensure a story idea will engage, entice and entertain audiences for two hours of screen time.
- **Script development.** The development of the premise into a final draft, feature-film screenplay. A team of specialist writers are engaged to generate multiple drafts of the screenplay, each one more refined than the last, until the final draft is achieved.
- **Attachment of the creative team.** Recruitment of the writers, producer, director, DOP, production designer, concept artists, composer and so forth.
- **Collaborative development with the creative team.** The development of the story and the 'world of the film' by the writers, in collaboration with the other members of the creative team. This also generates the look, pace, rhythm and tone of the film.

No matter what kind of team - sport's, business or in this case, a creative team - the objective is the same, victory through teamwork, and teamwork in the creative sense, means collaboration.

- **Star attachments.** Casting is a function of production, however, tactful overtures made during development can help smooth the way forward for later approaches and attract potential production finance.

FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT INVOLVES:

- **Determining a preliminary film production budget.** This is the equivalent of determining the cost of a product before you manufacture it.
- **Determining a returns projection for global distributors.** Stating likely gross return for each movie, based on returns for up to five other movies of similar genre, storyline or casting. (This kind of information is available via sites like IMDB Pro, Variety, The Hollywood Reporter and The Numbers and is used to attract global distributors to a project).
- **Determining a financial projection.** This is a recoupment model for production investors. It demonstrates their return on investment and a schedule or timeline for that return.

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- **Recruitment of finance agents.** A team dedicated to raising funds for the film's production budget from potential production financiers. Potential finance agents include business angels, stockbrokers, lawyers, accountants and so forth. In short, well connected people with an interest in the film industry.
- **Approaching potential production financiers to fund production.** Such financiers may include for example; banks that use distribution guarantees as collateral, banks that use production investor assets as collateral, distributors, private investors, federal government funding bodies such as the FFC and the AFC, state government funding bodies, foreign or local co-production funding, foreign tax fund investments or major studios.
- **Determining and advising the best taxation structure for potential production investors.** The ATO offer a number of different tax schemes including 10BA, 10B, Co-pro and so forth. Each scheme has its advantages.

MARKETING DEVELOPMENT INVOLVES:

- **Establishing relationships with sales agents,** as well as potential production financiers and global distributors.
- **Market research with sales agents and distributors** to determine trends in the global markets.
- **Market research** with target audiences.
- **Generation of promotional material** for agents and distributors such as a synopsis, a tagline, a logline, a mock-up poster and most importantly, a **teaser trailer** (a demo film) to help secure distribution, by demonstrating that we can deliver an outstanding film, that will entice our target audiences

These processes demonstrate to investors, sales agents and distributors that:

1. Audiences will want to see this film.
2. It is financially viable.
3. We have a competent team, capable of delivering the film.
4. We can deliver a film that distributors can profit from and most importantly...
5. We can return strong profits to investors from the global market.

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VI. A MANAGED PROCESS

Professional concept development is a managed process.

Our head of development determines the team's objectives for each stage of the development timeline.

Outcomes are quantifiable and subject to budget and timeline scrutiny.

Standard business practices apply. Everyone is held accountable. Everyone is focused on results.

VII. THE STATUS QUO IN THE AUSTRALIAN FILM INDUSTRY

Regrettably, Australian production companies rarely have the resources to adequately pay writers or any other participants for development.

The key problems they face are:

- A lack of funds
- Flawed business models that are divorced from market realities
- Poor slates with projects that fail to entice audiences
- A reliance upon government grants for survival, which then inevitably dictate which kind of films are produced.

Presence Films seeks to be different.

- We shall raise funds for professional concept development from private investors
- Employ a business model that is based on market realities
- Develop films that entice and entertain audiences
- Endeavour, where possible, to fund our productions privately so that the choice of film project is determined with commercial considerations in mind.

VIII. LEADERS IN THE FIELD OF FILM MAKING

Certain leaders in the field, in Australia and NZ, employ the techniques of professional concept development and by doing so, have achieved considerable success.

Examples of these are:

- George Miller, *Babe*
- Alex Proyas, *I Robot*
- Peter Jackson, *Lord of the Rings*
- Baz Luhrmann, *Moulin Rouge*
- Scott Hicks, *Shine*

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We seek to emulate their success, not by attempting something new, but rather by employing that which has demonstrably worked: professional concept development.

IX. CONCLUSION OR, 'HOW VIAGRA GOT MY PROJECT UP'

The Presence Films' approach to film-making, employing the power of creative collaboration, coupled with professional concept development, is like Viagra for the Australian film industry. With it, we can get the project up, keep it up and ensure it entertains for at least two hours.