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SIGGRAPH - It (Still) All Comes Down to the "Bible"

by [Robyn Weisman](#), 6:30 PM EDT, August 11th, 2004

LOS ANGELES, CA -- Wandering around the Siggraph floor these last couple of days has generated a great deal of envy for this former USC film student. For just a few thousand dollars, you can have at minimum:

- a prosumer DV camcorder;
- a baseline Power Mac G5;
- Apple's Production Suite of editing tools; and
- an extra FireWire 800 drive or two.

You could spend a little more for various accessories like a tripod, a dolly (or used wheelchair), some sound equipment, special effects software. Meanwhile, the school loans out backdrops and boom mics, you have a ready crew of film students to assist you, and put a tiny free student ad in *Dramalogue* -- and be prepared to be inundated with headshots.

The equivalent setup 10 years ago (while I was a student) cost several hundred thousand dollars, and the few Avid workstations available at the school were booked way in advance. The average student was relegated to splicing film by hand or using three-quarter editing machines for ugly analog video. I suppose that if I really had been passionate about making films, these issues wouldn't have stopped me. Nevertheless, I do wonder how I would have proceeded if I were 10 years younger and were starting my master's program next month.

However, while technology has transformed film and video production, it has yet to transform what is for many the [holy grail](#): finding an agent to represent you and a production and distribution house to at the very least distribute and market your product.

That's where the [Hollywood Creative Directory](#) and its sister publications, the *Hollywood Representation Directory*, the *Hollywood Music Directory*, among others come in. Unless you are a genius and extremely lucky, you need to know the right people to target -- indeed, the whole Hollywood landscape, if you want to avoid some agent's assistant or Hollywood "D-girl" tossing your DVD-R into the trash.



**HCD's Valencia McKinley (holding the Directory)
and her husband Frank Conlin of Final Draft scriptwriting
software**

(Click on the thumbnail for a larger image)

How do I know this? Because *11* years ago, I worked as an agent's assistant at CAA, back when Michael Ovitz ran Hollywood with the imperiousness of a Chinese Mandarin.

(Think I'm exaggerating? Then explain to me through what other means Ovitz's one-time aikido instructor Steven Seagal morphed into a big action star and earned his footprints at Grauman's Chinese -- several years before Al Pacino was presented with the same honor...)

A Book of Many Colors

Perhaps the most memorable thing about the Directory itself was the multicolored pages. For the most part, the Directory was printed on maroon or forest green stock paper, preventing poor aspiring screenwriters like me from photocopying the book in its entirety. Back then, a single issue of the Directory cost over \$40, and given Hollywood's less-than-stable work environment, it rapidly became outdated.

As an assistant, the Directory was my lifesaver. First off, it worked as a thick flexible shield with which to deflect manifestations of my boss's rage. The mammoth cell phones of the early 1990s easily bounced off it, while its cover absorbed spittle quite readily.

When I wasn't using the Directory as a protection device, I relied on it to learn the names of key executives at the different production houses, find these people's phone numbers when they declined to leave them themselves, and as an address book for everything from client scripts to Christmas presents. If an unsolicited script came in from a [production company](#) I hadn't heard of, I could check the name against the Directory's listings to determine whether I should pass it along to my boss or stick it in a return envelope.

The Need for It

Because CAA did not accept unsolicited scripts, any aspiring writer or director wishing to be considered as a client had four options. He or she had to:

- be recommended by an established client;
- be Michael Eisner's son;
- perform sex acts on one of the agents (and even that was no guarantee); or
- associate his or her script with a production or distribution house.

As a result, everyone (Michael Eisner's son and bimbos and himbos excepted) wanted to get his or her hands on the Directory. Many times people asked me to take it home with me just for a night to hand copy the listings, but I refused them. At the agency, each one was registered and, for all I know, had a barcode that set off an alarm the moment you entered the agency's Romanesque atrium.

That 'More Things Change' Refrain

When I left the agency for film school, e-mail was pretty much limited to intra-office correspondence and sporadic messages from the two other people you know who used AOL, most of which read, "Look! An e-mail from me! I am sending you an e-mail!"

A decade later, things are, of course, much different. And given the nature of the Web, I figured the Directory's vertex had passed, much like Ovitz's. After all, several competitors now exist, from the free [Who Represents?](#) whose URL I've mistaken for "Whore Presents," to [Studio System](#), which requires forking out a lot of money and whose use is limited to agencies and studios.

As a result, I did a [double take](#) when I saw the Directory's booth nestled between clustered production systems maker GraphStream and virtual-reality purveyor Virtools. Valencia McKinley, senior director at Hollywood Creative Directory, told me that her book is still considered the "bible" in the industry for distributors, production companies, and agencies. The primary difference is that now, when you pay \$64.95 for a year's subscription (three issues), you receive the book and access to the Directory's online version, which she said is updated daily.

When I asked whether her booth has received much traffic, she smiled and said yes. However, she expected the traffic to resemble an L.A. freeway at rush hour come Thursday.

Said McKinley: "The book is so popular -- and so heavy, they usually wait until the last minute to get it."

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