

Independence for Independents

WE ALL KNOW TIMES ARE CHANGING

iPods, Internet banking, mobile phones, digital cameras... I now wonder how we used to get on without it all. If you think about how we used to do stuff in say, 1994, just 15 years ago, it was all remarkably different. Digital technology has impacted on pretty much every aspect of our lives. My mum, who is in her seventies, now Skypes me with her webcam. Crikey!

By Chris Jones



Amazingly versatile digital tools combined with endless passion and energy means there have never been as many possibilities for emerging filmmakers as there are today... Teenagers, making Internet hits from laptops in their bedrooms, are the filmmakers of tomorrow, and the trend suggests they will stay in their bedrooms and not be tempted into the boardrooms of the dinosaur mega corps...

Artwork by Matt Allsopp (Leading Light Conceptual Design) www.leadinglightdesign.com

WE ARE IN A REVOLUTION, ONE THAT I believe is as significant as the Industrial Revolution, or the Bronze Age to the Iron Age, or perhaps silent movies to talkies... It's a big one, and the turmoil we are all feeling right now is a symptom of that change; growing pains if you like.

Haven't we heard this all before though? Sure. But... I believe this revolution is far more significant than merely "progress". It's much bigger than the clear benefits offered, such as carrying your entire record collection around on your iPod or posting your sister's wedding video online for family in Australia to watch on the same day. Calling it the Digital Revolution is quite right, but the phrase is so commonplace, we kind of ignore it as mere *noise*.

But listen carefully to that noise. Entire countries are going bankrupt, a black man is made US President, institutions thought of as being unshakeable are collapsing, and now filmmakers can shoot in high quality, edit and distribute to a global audience in a single day... Never mind 2009 being different from 15 years ago, it's a whole new world that is different to *last year!*

I believe that this is the age that will herald the death of the faceless mega corporations, and then in its place, the individual will rise, perhaps individuals in small communities. This is my time, and your time too.

To some morning readers, my blog (www.chrisjonesblog.com) is read *before* the daily newspapers. That is a *massive* shift in the way we are choosing to communicate

and receive communications. And that's just me, never mind the billions of people on the planet, all of whom are making their own individual choices and contributions.

If an entrepreneur has that one great angle, all they need to do is ramp this up, and you can become a world player almost overnight—Harry Knowles did it from his bed with *Ain't It Cool News*.

In the last few years I have seen huge changes in the film business. Shooting on cost-effective cameras such as RED ONE™, YouTube pioneering distribution, iTunes hijacking the music business and now having a go at film and TV too, piracy on an unprecedented scale (I heard from a distributor yesterday that Spain has no legal DVD business now, piracy represents 90 per cent of all sales and viewing), BBC

iPlayer, Tivo and SkyPlus mean that no-one watches live TV now...

The way we make and watch films has forever changed. Yet, it seems like the movie business still clings on to old ideals, business models and principles. It's all frighteningly similar to those banks that clung to their old models and buried their heads in the sand. There is a brave new frontier out there, and the new filmmakers who harness it, will be the powerful elite of tomorrow.

Best of all, this could be you, and it could all happen from a bedroom office.

This revolution began maybe ten years ago, and we are now feeling the real force of that evolution. It all changed the day that someone figured out that you could have a shop on the Internet and therefore cost effectively reach a global audience. The dot-com bubble was just the first, overenthusiastic attempt. I remember watching a doc on Virtual Reality in 1993 and thinking "Wow, so that's how it's going to be"—I guess we didn't see the "real" virtual reality when it arrived in the form of Facebook, MySpace and for the hardcore, Second Life. We have all read the press and sniggered in amusement at people's online antics, but it seems to me, we all went about our business as if the world was the same.

And then one day, the spell was broken and the banks collapsed. Suddenly, we knew something was different.

Think about it. With oil prices wildly seesawing and spiralling, jobs being cut, everyone tightening their belts, is the idea of "going" to watch a pirated copy of this year's blockbuster in an HD virtual cinema in a Second Life theatre, such a bizarre idea? Be that at home on the sofa with surround sound, or on a bus on an iPhone streaming over G3. More to the point, who is charging for entry to that screening? And remember,

It used to be that if you wanted to know what tomorrow would be like, you could take a look at yesterday and get a pretty good idea. Not so anymore.

this is global now. One venue has billions of potential customers.

Film has always done well in tough times such as war and recession. It delivers an immersive and cathartic experience of high quality, in small doses, at relatively cheap prices. So the in current climate, or as I prefer to think of it, in the current revolution, there has never been a better time to be an emerging filmmaker.

Let's just do an audit of the current situation:

1. Film and TV product will be *more* in demand than ever.
2. Filmmakers can now cost-effectively make product to a very high standard, even with very basic equipment and software.
3. Filmmakers can reach both wide and niche audiences globally, and distribute their product, to a very high standard, to those audiences very cheaply.
4. Viewing habits have changed forever—iPhone, BBC iPlayer, SkyPlus, etc. No one can really predict where we will end up.
5. Piracy has broken most of the old distribution models.
6. Access to content is now instant and global.
7. The big players move slowly, have been in denial (some continue to do so), do not evolve and are dropping like flies.
8. No one has a definitive answer for how to monetise this brave new world.

If these points do not read like a kind of twisted wish list for new entrepreneurs and artists, I don't know what would. Personally, it reads like a declaration of Independence for Independents to me. The few are losing their death grip on the many.

It used to be that if you wanted to know what tomorrow would be like, you could take a look at yesterday and get a pretty good idea. Not so anymore. And so I urge all new filmmakers to really think outside the box. Think beyond DVDs, Facebook, Second Life, PayPal, iTunes... These are in many ways tools developed out of the way things used to be. Not how things will be.

Stories will always be stories, with beginnings, middles and ends. They will always feature the human struggle, and we the audience will always connect with the better ones, and disconnect with the poorer. That will never change. But how we choose to tell those stories, fund them, get them seen and critically, make a sustainable business from it, these are the things that will define the new generation of filmmaker.

So buckle up, the next few years are going to be a wild ride. ■

One to Watch Acting



Phil Campbell

Phil Campbell most recently featured in *THE HIDE*, directed by Marek Losey. He has also appeared on British television in *Casualty* and *Merseybeat*.

What training have you received?

Life! I never went the conventional route of drama school. Most of my training was learnt working. From the age of fourteen I was a member of the Everyman Youth Theatre in Liverpool. We would take part in plays and musicals that would show on the Everyman main stage or would do small North West tours. Also, I was in the West End for nearly ten years in different shows and I suspect I learnt most of what you need to know to be a good performer there, whether it be acting or singing.

What kind of roles attract you?

Definitely dark and complex roles. Parts where the character has lots of unseen, inner turmoil. I think what is unsaid can say far more than what is scripted sometimes. I like to get into a character's psyche; what makes him tick, why he moves in a certain way. I think once you can inhabit a character's inner thoughts, everything else should come naturally. I would also love to play the conventional action hero.

What's the best advice that you've been given as an actor?

Hit your marks! When you're on set with a crew for eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, people are getting tired and there is nothing worse for the crew, as well as the other actors, if someone can't find their marks. This other piece of advice I picked up third hand in a magazine but it is good advice for film work: "Talk low and slow." This was something that John Wayne said many years ago and I have always liked that.

Most significant moment in your career so far?

Being cast in my first lead role in *THE HIDE* was a pretty incredible experience for me. I had not worked for four years prior to getting that role so to be suddenly on the lot of Pinewood in a two-hander was scarily exciting. I will always be very grateful to Marek Losey, the director of *THE HIDE*, for giving me the opportunity in this movie. Also to go to the Dinard British Film Festival with said film and have Philip French, *The Observer* film critic who is a hero of mine, come over with his wife and gush over a film I am in? Surreal!

You'll die happy when...

I will never die happy. I want to live forever... ■