

ROBERT MCKEE'S CREATIVE WRITING MAGAZINE

# STORY

ISSUE.04

## RUSSELL BRAND

THE STRANGE  
AND WONDERFUL  
COMEDIC MIND



**RYAN HOLIDAY**  
CREATING AND USING  
A COMMONPLACE BOOK  
FOR DIDACTIC PURSUITS



**ROBERT MCKEE**  
THE CHARACTER'S  
CORE OF DESIRE

**& MORE!**

**RICHARD BOTTO** EXCLUSIVE  
WITH THE FOUNDER OF **STAGE 32**





*Photo By: Scott Cronan Photography*

# EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD BOTTO

## Founder of Stage 32

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**Tell us about your journey from RAZOR editor and owner to social network founder?**

Prior to starting RAZOR, I had run and been a consultant for a variety of internet companies includ-

ing many of the top 50 most visited sites on the web during that period. So I had some familiarity in startups and what it takes to get a tech business off the ground. Complimentary to that, at least as it relates to Stage 32, RAZOR had

a sizeable entertainment element. By virtue of that, plus my acting and producing background at the time (screenwriting would come later), I had a ton of contacts in the industry. When it came time to make the decision to launch Stage 32, I

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knew that I had enough experience to get the platform built and launched and enough experience in the industry to know what users of the site might need. The rest, as it always is, was trial, error and soliciting feedback.

## **What was the need that you saw for Stage 32 to fulfill?**

I took a look at the landscape and didn't see any sites or networks where the potential for success was equal to the time and expense. The all-inclusive social networks are, as it relates to people working in film, television and theater, a time suck. The business social networks cater more to white-collar workers. For a creative looking to find work, land representation, launch or raise funds for a project, further their education or simply operate inside a network where he or she could make a life or career altering connection, there was nothing. Thus, Stage 32.

## **How can film and TV creatives benefit through a Stage 32 membership?**

Without sounding glib, the end game is different for every individual. What's your goal? What's your dream? How much time and effort are you willing to put in? Because when it comes to anything networking related, you get out what you put in. Those who smartly, and that's a key word, invest their time

will reap the rewards.

The broader answer is anything you're looking to accomplish in your creative career, it's available to you through Stage 32. We have four pillars that form the foundation of everything we do: Networking, Education, Access, Opportunity. From making meaningful connections to filling our cast and crew positions for a project to classes designed to help you hone your craft to pitching to industry executives, we offer it all.

## **What can well-executed networking do for film and TV creatives? And how does Stage 32 facilitate this?**

This is a business of connections. Talent is one thing, exposure of said talent to people who can move the needle on your career is another. Stage 32 has 350,000 members worldwide ranging from students to Tony, Emmy and Academy Award winners. Again, however, no one is going to come knock on your door, you've got to go out, put in the work, and get yourself seen and heard.

## **Tell us about the Stage 32 Happy Writers.**

The Happy Writers was founded by Joey Tuccio in 2011. Joey had worked as an exec in the industry for a few years and would often hear from his colleagues how difficult it was to find quality material. Conversely, he would hear

from his writer friends about how difficult it was to get beyond the gatekeepers – to get quality reads. Joey decided to start a company where writers from anywhere in the world would be able to pitch to industry executives – managers, agents, producers, directors of development – through Skype.

Before I go on, let me stress that there are many reputable consultants, coaches and teachers out there that I have enormous respect for and whom I would trust with my own work. Having said that, as a screenwriter myself, I am ultra sensitive to all the snake oil salesmen who have entered the space over the last few years. The advent of free screenwriting software, a plethora of screenwriting books entering the mainstream conscious, and numerous consulting firms, coverage companies and the like has given irrational hope to many who unwittingly are being bilked out of their hard earned dollars by false promises or people completely unqualified to be passing judgment on their work. This pisses me off to no end.

So when Joey entered my orbit, I decided to spend some time with him observing his operation. I was floored. Not only did Joey work directly with every writer, but he made it quite clear to those who were not ready for prime time not to spend their money pitching. Instead, he held their hand for free,

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offering counsel and support until they had their scripts ready and it made sense for them to expose their work to the masses. I spent time speaking to the writers who utilized Joey's offerings. The feedback was universally positive, almost reverential.

In April of 2014, I acquired The Happy Writers – now The Stage 32 Happy Writers – and named Joey President of the division. It's been one of the most rewarding and satisfying parts of this incredible journey.

## **Besides pitching, what other services does the Stage 32 Happy Writers offer?**

Every initiative we introduce at The Stage 32 Happy Writers must satisfy two objectives: Access and opportunity. Like many, we offer screenwriting coverage services. However, we are the only company that offers coverage from a working industry executive. Further, you get to choose the executive from our ever-revolving roster. You also get to choose the executive by genre. So if you have a comedy script for example, you can choose to get coverage from a film industry executive working in the comedy realm. We offer phone consultations with executives as well.

We also offer education in the form of 90-minute webinars, 2-6 week lecture hall style classes, and 8 week all intensive, hands on labs. These

exclusive classes are again taught by the over 300 industry executives we work with.

Even our contests are designed to provide access and opportunity. They are judged by industry executives and our winners are flown to Hollywood for an exclusive cocktail party with the judges and to have a minimum of 10 meetings with managers and producers. Our last two contest winners have had their lives changed. Michael Madden who won the big contest last year signed with BenderSpink, which lead to him being signed by ICM, and placed as a staff writer on ABC's Black Box. Glenn Forbes who won our Search for New Blood contest just a couple of months back has signed with Seth Nagel of Infinity Management and they are working on getting Glenn's script produced.

## **Wow. How many success stories has the Stage 32 Happy Writers had?**

Going back to when Joey started, over 175 writers have either been signed, optioned, sold, secured staff or other writing jobs and assignments. About half of those have come during the last 10 months alone since we acquired the company. I couldn't be more proud of that fact.

## **What are the biggest mistakes that film and TV creatives make while networking?**

On the micro level, there are a few deadly sins. I'll highlight a couple.

The primary one is not filling out your bio and other pertinent sections of your profile – experience, reels, loglines, nominations, awards, etc. It's a fatal mistake. You know the saying that you only have one chance to make a first impression? Well, if someone of influence views your profile and sees a blank page, you've lost him or her for good. It's lazy, inexcusable and deadly.

A second killer mistake is being selfish or narcissistic. Social media is about interacting. It's not about broadcasting. You can't be a one-way street. You can't send the message that your time is more valuable than anyone else's. Ask questions, offer advice, show that you can play well with others. Present yourself as selfless, caring and possessing a collaborative spirit.

On a macro level, the biggest mistake is not putting in the time. So many people tell me they're too busy creating to spend time on social media. These are the same people who complain that they can't get a job or land a manager or agent. Why? They don't have the connections.

Filmmaking and television is being created all over the world. There are opportunities everywhere. Stage 32 makes the world smaller. You can make connections you

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can't make walking out your front door. I can't tell you how many international success stories we've had – people on one continent getting hired by people on another continent. Just this past week, we had a screenwriter in the UK sell a script to a producer in India. That wouldn't have happened just a few years back. And yet there are people who don't see the value in making the time to work a site like Stage 32, not to mention utilize all the free tools that are available. For me, creating is half my job, networking is the other half. That mindset and discipline has served me extremely well.

## **What is the biggest secret to crowdfunding a film?**

Pre-planning. Period. I have quite a few industry friends who have successfully run 5 and 6 digit crowdfunding campaigns. They all have one thing in common. They started prepping 3-6 months before the campaign by distributing information, videos and the like on social media, to close contacts, and by other innovative means. They had donors in line – be it family, friends, or people interested in the project – before they launched.

It's been well documented that campaigns that reach 15% of their goal in the first 7 days have an 82% chance of success. Raise that number to 30% in the first 7 days and the success rate soars to 98%.

Unfortunately, well, fortunately for those doing it right, most who launch a campaign adhere to a "If You Build It, They Will Come" strategy. It rarely if ever works.

## **What plans does Stage 32 have for serving film and TV creatives in the coming months and years?**

When we started, our goal was to service creatives working in any part of the concept to completion spectrum of a project. Now we're thinking much bigger. About a year ago, I threw out a joke that we're going to be the Home Depot for those working in film and television. Only now when that line is thrown out instead of laughing, we all just nod. We have a ton of plans. I'm constantly viewing the ever evolving world of distribution, streaming, and new media outlets. Equity crowdfunding is a subject that excites me. It's an exhilarating time to be involved in film and to be at the helm of a platform such as Stage 32 makes it that much more so.

## **What does the future hold for film and TV industry creatives?**

When I speak to my friends and colleagues in the industry, the consensus is that it's a remarkably exciting time to be a creative. You have a renaissance of sorts with independent film, streaming platforms ordering and producing original content, people shooting and editing films with their phones and online

distribution situation that's in its infancy. Opportunity is everywhere. Now cynics will say that all of this just creates more noise, that it's harder than ever to be heard. That's bullshit. It just means it's easier than ever for the cream to rise to the top.

## **If our readers have never heard of Stage 32, how should they utilize it right now?**

Head right over to [www.stage32.com](http://www.stage32.com) and create a free profile. We have a ton of features and resources, but make it extremely easy to learn how to utilize them all. You'll be making meaningful connections in no time.

## **Tell us about your new book. What need does it fill and who does it help?**

I'm writing a book on film crowdsourcing for Focal Press. There have been a few books written on crowdsourcing as it relates to industry and business practices, but there have been none dedicated to crowdsourcing as it relates to film, specifically identifying, engaging, motivating and moving a targeted crowd to carry the message of your project. In today's DIY world, it's not enough to be simply an artist, you need to have business savvy as well. Whether it's raising capital through crowdfunding, working within a small budget, marketing, distribution needs or just about anything else that goes into

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a film production, an understanding and grasp of the principles of crowdsourcing will inevitably and invariably give you a competitive advantage.

I'm just finishing up the last chapters and have really enjoyed the journey. The book is scheduled to be released in the fall of 2015.

## **Tell us about your screenwriting career. Are you represented?**

I've been writing my whole life, but only ventured into screenwriting about 3 years ago. I'm represented by David Greenblatt of Greenlit Creative.

## **What's been the most rewarding part of the manager/writer relationship for you?**

The give and take, for sure. David is an extremely opinionated guy, but those opinions are informed by decades of experience. And I certainly, like most writers, can be bullheaded when it comes to fighting for my ideas. The great thing about David is that he listens to my objections, digests them and then offers feedback, which, by the way, is almost always 100 percent correct. He always has my best interests at heart. He puts you in a position to succeed. You can't ask for more.

## **Can you tell us about any projects the two of you are working on?**

Yes. We have one script which now has an extremely talented director attached. And just this week we began going out to A-list actors. Getting any film made is a journey. But we're on the path.

## **What have been your biggest challenges becoming a screenwriter?**

The psychology as it relates to the business side of things. Whether it was getting read, interest from a manager, a great contest placement or even when I almost had one of my scripts go on an independent level, it's natural to get really fired up. You ride a sort of irrational high. I had to learn not to get too high on the good news and not too low with the bad news. Not only isn't it healthy for your psyche, but it has an impact on your writing. So I've learned to temper my expectations, accept the negative – and, in fact, try to learn from it – and simply be. But when the time comes to get really excited, then all bets are off.

## **Did you use Stage 32 to find your manager? If so, how?**

I didn't meet David directly through Stage 32. Although, how my script landed on his desk is a pretty remarkable story which all started with a connection I made on Stage 32 two years prior. Too convoluted to get into here, but the general gist and the high-

lighted point of the story is that networking is vitally important and no connection is a bad connection. You never know when someone who might not be in a position to help you today will be in a position to help you tomorrow. I wouldn't be in the position I'm in today without making that connection through Stage 32 and dedicating myself to networking as a facet of my job of being a screenwriter.

## **What's next for Richard Botto? Anything in the works that you'd like to let our readers know about?**

I have a ton of plans for 2015. I'm working toward finishing the crowdsourcing book for Focal in the next couple of weeks. I'm also working on two different screenwriting ideas and two ideas for television, one of which I'm hopeful to pitch in the 2nd quarter of the year.

On the Stage 32 side, too many initiatives to even list, but my entire team is focused and fired up for what we believe will be a landmark year.

Finally, I have numerous speaking, teaching and mentoring engagements lined up throughout the year which I'm extremely excited about. For me, there's nothing better than assisting and giving back wherever and whenever possible. ■