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Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Micro Budget Rebound: Our \$20,000 Movie

Megan Freels · Thursday, April 2nd, 2015

Let's face it: the film industry is in transition. With so many movies going straight to VOD and big studios and financiers only wanting name actors attached to projects before putting forth any capital, it makes it really hard for the independent feature to get off the ground.

I'm not talking Noah Baumbach independent features starring Naomi Watts and Ben Stiller. I am talking real independent films with no-name actors and up-and-coming directors trying to take a stab at creating something great.

The film business is filled with Catch-22s. The main one being that you can't get money without a name actor and you can't get a name actor without financing. So what does that leave a producer or filmmaker to do? Not a lot, unfortunately. It's this system of agency protocols that makes it more than frustrating for those who just want to make content.

As a producer with modest success in film and television, this set of rules left me with a lot of know-how, but not a lot of options. I tried to find young directors to attach themselves to projects and I tried to get the budgets as low as I could. If I could get some C-level actors attached to projects and award-winning directors who have had films in festivals, surely someone would invest.

This was NOT the case. Unless you knew some very high-powered people in the financial world, trying to get financing for a film is like banging your head against a wall and continually hoping it will break. It doesn't.

I got into the film industry to make films. I loved being a producer. Unfortunately, I became a producer during the height of the recession and I watched a lot of my projects go nowhere. I was so sick of being in a constant state of development. I just wanted to make a film. So I decided to make a film for as little money as I could. I figured I could write it myself and factor the lack of money into the script.

I tried to find a director who would do a movie for \$100,000. Not many had faith in that kind of budget. Frankly I didn't even have that kind of budget.

I had what I could scrounge together, which ended up being around \$10,000. But I figured if a short film could be made for that little money, then surely you could make a feature. Robert Rodriguez did it. There was a film called *Primer* many years ago that did it. Why couldn't I? I knew that no director would be willing to try this, so I figured I would do it myself. At my core, I

was a filmmaker, a storyteller, so out of desperation I was willing to put on the director's hat to make the film myself.

Preproduction

When you have the crazy idea to try and make a feature film for under \$10,000 you need a few things. First of all you need a script. And not just any script; you need a script you can shoot in very few locations and one that is not too involving. Being that my preferred aesthetic involved atmosphere and tone this would be easy. *Rebound* was originally titled *PTSD*. I wanted to write an abduction film that went in a different direction. I wanted to write a story about a girl whose state of mind was almost scarier than the abduction itself. I loved the horror movies of the 60s and 70s and that is where I drew my inspiration.

I approached my friend Ashley James, who was an actress. Being an actress in this town is probably harder and more frustrating than being a filmmaker. Being an actor you are completely at the mercy of someone's preferences. I told Ashley about my idea, and that I wanted to make a feature for no money. I said if she helped me on the production side of things, she could also star in the film. There was not much hesitation from Ashley and she jumped right in with me.

It was then we went on the hunt for another producer. We needed someone very strong in the physical production world that could run the show while I was directing and Ashley was deep into her role as Claire, the emotionally tormented abductee. I put an ad out on a "Women in Film" board and found Debra Trevino. She loved the project and our enthusiasm. Her experience was exactly what we needed, and Deb wanted to have a full producer credit on a feature, so it was a mutually beneficial arrangement.

If you have little-to-no money, you have to find good people that will get something out of your project equally. Occasionally you will have people come on board that just like you and want to help, but for the most part people want to improve their resumes and you have to find your team with that model in mind.

Now that I had my producing team in place it was time to find a Cinematographer. I put an ad out on another film board I was a part of and found Stephen Tringali. Not only was he unbelievably talented but he also owned a Red MX camera. Stephen was an incredible find.

Little by little we put the rest of our crew together. I put ads on more boards and the film crew website Mandy.com and found Sound, Hair, a Production Coordinator, Script Supervisor, etc. Just the bare minimum for what we needed.

Things were moving at a pretty rapid pace, and then it was time to find the rest of our cast. We put ads on LA Casting and held our auditions at Hollywood Casting and Film. Some great people came out to read for various roles. Obviously we couldn't do SAG since our budget was low even for "micro budget" standards.

It was during the audition process we found Mark Scheibmeir our male lead, Kevin Bulla and Julia Beth Stern. Wes O'Lee, who played Gus, was a friend of mine. I wrote the role with him in mind so getting him on board just involved some minor begging.

Next we moved on to locations. Ashley knew the owner of the warehouse where we shot the second half of the film. They were beyond accommodating. We also shot outside of LA, which

meant we didn't have to deal with permits. I cannot express enough how important that is. The most difficult location to find was the bar. The first place fell through and we found the location we ended up using at the last minute.

Prior to shooting I put an ad on "Mandy" for an Editor. I had asked a couple of people I knew but no one seemed willing. I got a response from Eric Potter, who had done some very high profile movies. I never in a million years thought he would come on to help, but I gave him my pitch anyway. I said how frustrated I was with the business and I was trying to do a film for almost no money. Eric read the script and we met. He loved our enthusiasm and he came on board as our Editor, as well as Executive Producer. Eric is a good reminder that people don't have to know you to want to help you.

Production

So now we were ready to shoot. With a 12 day shooting schedule (of almost all night shoots) in a record cold January even for LA standards, it was going to be interesting.

We had everything we needed. We had our props and wardrobe which I had purchased on Amazon. We had our equipment lined up. We had our locations for the most part and we had our crew.

When shooting a film on this scale it means that a lot of people end up working for less money or for points. Or they are incredibly nice and have faith in you. All the reasons are admirable and hugely appreciated. One way we were able to show that appreciation is to not skimp on the food. Having great food on set is very important.

Stephen, the Cinematographer had a great team of guys who were willing to each help on a day or two of production. Our Grip and Electric crew was mostly a three man team which made the set ups a bit slow but we made it work.

I knew that everyone was there because they wanted to be there and not because they were making big bucks, so I made sure the days were as short as they could be. I never once let my ego get in the way or was super picky about getting perfect shots. The production was a team and I thought of it like that, every step of the way.

Things went surprisingly smooth and according to schedule. We wrapped production getting everything we needed except for one scene which we got two weeks later.

Post Production

We entered Post Production with no money left. Post was an area that was unfamiliar to me. I had been in development so long as a producer that I rarely got to this phase and with the higher profile projects I produced, I was not involved much in the Post Production part of things.

All I can say to young filmmakers is that Post Production is hugely important. It can make or break the quality of your film. Sound is not a thing that the average movie-goer even thinks about, but you sure know when sound quality is bad.

We were done shooting and had our Editor working on the edit. But we needed Sound, Color Correction, Score, and Special Effects. Our only option with no money left was to start an

indiegogo page. The difference between indiegogo and Kickstarter is that indiegogo lets you keep the money you have raised even if you don't reach your goal. With Kickstarter you have to reach your goal.

So we started an [indiegogo page](#) which was a wonderful and terrible experience all at the same time. It's wonderful because it allows you the opportunity to raise money but it's difficult and awkward to ask people to contribute to your film. We ended up raising a little bit of money. It was nowhere near our goal, but between that and some money I was able to raise on the side, we had enough to try and finish the film.



She looks scared, but imagine trying to make a movie for \$20,000. (Scene from 'Rebound')

The edit was finished and the film looked great. We managed to get all the shots we needed and the film looked far beyond our micro budget scale.

I put more ads out on the "Mandy" website and found a music team. I then went looking for help with sound. Stephen Tibbo came on board and transformed *Rebound* from this little indie film to a beautiful sounding feature. With his team on board, the film got the full treatment: sound design, ADR, the works.

When we were able to lock the film, I couldn't have been more proud of what we accomplished.

The Movie's Done...Now What?

Once the film was finished, I started submitting to festivals. I found this process to be extremely expensive and not very effective. What were once small festivals were now higher profile and getting thousands of submissions a year. Our little micro budget psychological thriller didn't fit into a lot of boxes. It was pretty dark and atmospheric but it didn't quite fall into the "full horror" category. So I submitted to as many festivals as I could but kept on moving forward. I brought on the company [Circus Road](#) as a consultant and they were beyond helpful. They helped submit *Rebound* to distributors and really helped point me in the right direction. They had faith in the film and knew there was an audience for it.

Eventually I got a VOD distributor. Indie Rights came on board and started to get the film up on the various platforms. The film is currently on Amazon as well as Vimeo On Demand. It will be on Google Play and the rest to follow.

The response by the film websites, particularly horror websites has exceeded all my expectations. The horror community has been so kind and supportive of the film. It's a good reminder that the viewer is ultimately who you want in your corner. They are the ones you want to love your film.

VOD is now the norm. Studios don't find every movie viably worth it to put in a theater. Everything I once knew was no longer relevant. These larger scale movies with name actors were now going straight to VOD too. My little \$20,000 film was in direct competition with \$2,000,000 films on Amazon.

It's been a triumphant feeling to realize that the power just went back into the hands of the filmmaker.

The Result

When I had the idea of making a film for a shoestring budget, I had no idea how hard it would be. In particular I faced a lot of obstacles with regard to finishing the film.

I kept hearing cautionary tales from others about films they had worked on that never went anywhere. It made me all the more determined to finish *Rebound*.

Rebound is doing extremely well on Amazon. It has developed quite a following and people have strong feelings about the film, one way or another, especially the ending.

Whether *Rebound* becomes a big success or disappears into obscurity, what I learned in this process is far greater than any monetary rewards.

I met so many passionate, amazing people and I'm grateful to everyone who worked on *Rebound*, many of whom I can't wait to work with again.

To every young filmmaker out there, I say- make a movie yourself! When you are forced to make a film at this scale, you learn how to do every job and wear every hat. High profile projects can be fun, but the process of making *Rebound* made me a far better producer and filmmaker. The lessons I learned will last me a lifetime. It's an experience I will never forget.

Watch Rebound on Amazon:

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