



Duo brings cash and talent to indie movie scene

Reel N.M. DAN MAYFIELD Of the Journal

The film "Saint John of Las Vegas," which started shooting last week in Albuquerque, may seem like an ordinary independent film, but the company that's making it isn't.

The production company IndieVest is a first-of-its-kind company that brings the principals of venture capital and mutual funds to the movie industry — the kind of company that shows up in the business pages, not Daily Variety.

IndieVest is the brainchild of Wade Bradley and Mark Burton. Bradley is the money guy, and Burton is the movie guy. The idea is parallel to that of a mutual fund, which can own a company by pooling the resources of hundreds of investors. So can investors own a film.

The IndieVest idea is new in the film world, and "Saint John" is the first film for the fledgling company.

"Essentially, I came out of the venture capital industry and I wanted to invest in independent film," Bradley said. "I literally could not get comfortable with the risk."

Films are risky. Films that should be monster hits sometimes aren't. Take "Pluto Nash," a film that should have made millions because it starred Eddie Murphy at his peak and was put together with a \$90 million budget, yet made only \$4 million at the box office. Or, films like the Jennifer Lopez-Ben Affleck bomb "Gigli."

Nothing is ever a sure thing in the movie business.

Then, of course, you have the odd "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," which was made for only \$5 million but grossed nearly \$250 million.

Though it would be nice to score big, IndieVest is hedging its bets through what the business world calls vertical integration. The company owns the project from start to finish, from the script to the theatrical and DVD distribution. By covering its bases from start to finish — much the way the oldtime studio model worked — Bradley and Burton feel confident that the company can turn a healthy profit.

And, of course, having bankable stars helps. "Saint John of Las Vegas" stars Steve Buscemi.

But getting from a script to a movie isn't easy.

"I always loved film," Bradley said. "I wanted to invest personally and get involved. As I was going through the research, and realizing the problem, and how we could achieve solutions, I realized that this problem was not mine. It was a multibillion-dollar problem.

Millions were being lost. Ninety-five percent of the films made in the U.S. fail to achieve any theatrical release and don't get any distribution."

The company has founded its own distribution company that guarantees widespread distribution of a film.

But then, you have to get people to see it.

"The normal (independent) film wants to get to Sundance to find a buyer. Then, it takes a while for the buyer to figure how to market it," Bradley said. "With us, the distributors and the marketers are going in lockstep. It shorts the duration between the film being completed and U.S. audiences and foreign audiences."

By almost micromanaging the whole process, the IndieVest films are expected to make money, be entertaining and provide people with a smaller net worth a chance to be involved in film.

But picking the right project isn't easy.

"Mark and his team have gone through 1,200 projects," Bradley said. "('Saint John') came to him about 10 months ago."

From the outset, it was clear the film would be shot here.

"One aspect is the director liked the area," Bradley said. "You've got great incentives to come there, great crews, everything is accessible. It's easy to put together a project in New Mexico."

LOCAL SUPERHEROES:

With the success of all the recent superhero films, from "Batman" to "Spider-Man" to "Iron Man," it only makes sense that local filmmakers would pick up on the fad as well.

Local filmmaker Ryan Mowry has concocted the film "Defective Man" about a not-so-super man. And, like every good hero, he has a lame duck sidekick. In this case, it's Horn Dog — whose only superpower is a gift for innuendo.

"Defective Man" has been filming recently in Albuquerque and will wrap in a few weeks.

"Basically, Defective Man and Horn Dog were in a chemical accident at work and as a result of the accident, they wake up thinking they're superheroes. But they're not," Mowry said.

Because, you know, radiation and chemical spills give you superpowers. Everybody knows that.

But the pair's newfound nonpowers simply bother everyone at work.

"(Defective Man) always speaks in the third person. 'Defective Man wants to know what Defective Man wants to do,' " Mowry said.

But worse, "People are tired of them showing up in costume at work," Mowry said.

That means tight spandex costumes that show all their, umm, superness. Or lack thereof.

So, they're laid off from their jobs at the chemical plant for being super annoying.

The original script was written by Steve Eckles, who saw a short film Mowry directed at the 2006 TromaDance Film Festival in Albuquerque for independent films and asked him to direct "Defective Man" as a feature-length project.

The plan is to have it ready for the Troma film festival in 2009.

"It's similar to the Troma style, but different," Mowry said. "It's not as violent. Intellectual is not the right word, but it's the closest thing I can think of."

SEND US YOUR TIPS: If you know of a movie filming in the state, or are curious about one, e-mail film@abqjournal.com.



BURTON: The creative force behind IndieVest



BRADLEY: Financial genius behind new movie-making endeavor



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