



Photo courtesy of Page Ostrow

PAGE OSTROW

the numbers game

BY EDWARD T. KRUPKA

Suffice it to say, everybody writes. Whether it's a little old lady in Dubuque or an Alaskan fisherman in Anchorage, they all write. And they all have that one great screenplay in them that will make a great movie. Then there are those who have a great script and they're trying to get it around but can't get financing? Or, the film is in the can, but how does gone get completion funds and/or distribution? It's every independent filmmaker's dilemma: Where do I go to get financing? Who should I trust? Is there anybody out there looking out for me?

Enter Page Ostrow.

"I just want to show you what I deal with on an average day," explains Page Ostrow, the genial and effusively good-natured owner of Ostrow and Company, a leading Beverly Hills-based producer's representative, who has been involved in the financing and/or distribution of over 80 feature films. "I received calls this morning from one person who's selling the rights to a dramatic life story to a feature documentary by Mark Wahlberg and a comedy feature about a woman who hides her husband's body in the freezer for two weeks while trying to collect her green card. We picked up a beautiful feature film entitled *My Brother's War* about a woman who disguises herself as her brother to find him in the Civil War, gets shot, and is cared for by a woman who falls in love with her. [It's a historical fact] four hundred women actually disguised themselves as men to fight in that war."

Known as a finance and distribution consultant or producer's rep, Ostrow is the one to make it happen. Unlike the few lawyers and agents who control this emerging field, Ostrow gained her expertise on the ground while under contract to several distributors in the 1990s. After mining the field for over a decade in international distribution and traveling to major markets and festivals—Cannes, American Film Market (AFM), MIFED, NATPE, Toronto Film Festival,

MipTV, Mipcom, Sundance, etc.—Ostrow made her mark. “I landed here to help make a difference so the filmmaker could get his or her movie out there,” Ostrow says. “My experience put me on a first-name basis with over 350 distributors.”



Page B. Ostrow was born in 1963 in Toronto. The daughter of Canadian Holocaust survivors, Ostrow remembers that her family was like a UN of sorts. “My sister was born in Israel, my brother in Germany, my mother in France, and my father in Poland—it was the United Nations at the table, with six, seven languages spoken—it was pretty colorful,” she recalls.

Early on, Ostrow knew that she’d been bitten by the showbiz bug. “When I was a kid, I saw *Cabaret* with Liza Minnelli and Joel Grey, who won the Academy Award for that year (1972). My life was changed. I had my father buy me the record and I would listen to it over and over and perform my version of Liza Minnelli at 10.”

However, it wasn’t the happiest of times. “After 28 years of marriage, my parents divorced—an unheard of thing in the Jewish community. At my school, Faywood, this just didn’t happen,” Ostrow confides.

To break away from family tension, she would escape to the cinema. “There was magic there. No matter what you were feeling or going through or experiencing before going into that theater, once you were in there, it all vanished. You were in a new world. I thought, any medium that could do that—allow you pleasure or escape—is worth being a part of.”

Always fascinated by the performing world, Ostrow knew that she would one day be involved in the entertainment field in some way. “I would love to emulate the characters I

saw,” Ostrow reveals. “One day I was Liza Minnelli; the next day I was whatever actors I saw on TV or in the movies. And I would find costumes and become different people for the neighbors who would come over. Then, around the early 1980s, the big movies started coming to town, and [Toronto] became Hollywood North.”

With her father now out of the picture, Ostrow had no choice but to develop into a self-assured young lady. “My sister went back to Israel; my brother was already there, to help in the cause at the time. I was taking care of my mom, doing the taxes, handling all the financial stuff and then, by the time I was heading for puberty, my mom was heading for menopause. She was older and we just didn’t see eye to eye. I was self-reliant and self-confident. I felt I had to break out on my own,” Ostrow relates.

So, at the tender age of 15, “I left home and got myself a sales job.” Several years went by and then her father reentered her life.

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“When I was around 18, I got to know my dad again, and he brought me into his business. Leave it to a Holocaust survivor to come into the country with nothing and become the second-largest manufacturer of leather coats in Canada. So, after his brother died, he asked me to come to work for him. For me it was an opportunity to get to know him, and I learned a lot about business. I learned about going to shows, about buyers—how to deal with them, how to entertain them; the importance of keeping up with the news via the trades and newspapers—because you’re not just talking

business, you’re talking about world events. I learned old style, old school—all the things that were invaluable to me later when I got into distribution,” Ostrow explains.

Her father reveled in her growing expertise. “After he had a heart attack, he wanted me to take over the business. So I ran the ship until he recuperated, and did it successfully. But my heart wasn’t in it. When an opportunity opened in the movie business, I jumped at the chance. On the first day I was a production assistant; the next day I was a second assistant director. Then on my second picture, I got into the union with the DGC (Directors Guild of Canada).”

In 1986, after working on an assortment of movies, Ostrow found herself at one of the biggest festivals in town.

“I was at the Toronto Film Festival when I met an associate of Robert Lantos, one of Canada’s largest producers. I was offered a position in Los Angeles seeking projects, talking to writers, producers, and

directors. So I turned down my father’s offer to run the family business and got into entertainment.

“I went to my first AFM and it didn’t take me long to get a handle on what was going on because a) I spoke several languages; b) I knew production, and c) I knew business from my father, which was not dissimilar from working with the buyers my father dealt with. I ended up working in distribution for the next 10 years, functioning as a hired gun for over 25 distributors and negotiating worldwide rights to buyers on behalf of numerous film libraries.”

Ostrow's method of operation soon made a very strong impression on the people she worked with. "I was hard-working and assertive. I formed great friendships and business relationships with buyers worldwide. I would go to distributors, meet the president of a company, and tell them: 'This is who I am; this is what I do. You have your sales team; I don't want to work for your company. I would like to negotiate a contract with you to bring in territories your team isn't closing. You show me the territories you're still trying to close, what movies you have in your library that you're trying to raise money for through pre-sales, and let me bring in business on top of what your sales team brings in.' They seemed to like that idea.

"It was a great ride full of world travel for 10 years until I jumped fences four years ago to represent producers. Now I bring my filmmakers' films and projects to distributors and negotiate finance and distribution."



Utilizing her savvy intelligence and judicious negotiating skills, Ostrow started to make a name for herself. "I built myself a reputation because I was always with a buyer in tow. If you're with a buyer, every distributor wants you to come into their booth. Even the ones who had rejected me earlier, when they saw me in my Chanel and bantering in this language or that language with a buyer, they would always want to talk to me about contracting with them."

But Ostrow wanted to be master of her own domain. "I wanted to be on my own and do my thing. The early '90s was the best for presale. I did pre-sales for a lot of companies. At that time, I was able to raise money from the buyers who basically looked me in the eye and said, 'Is this company that you're consulting for really going to

make this movie?' And I'd say, yes. And they'd hand over a check."

After so many years mastering her craft, Ostrow is very secure in her line of work. "I welcome and encourage friendly competition; it's an area of unmined territory."

Today, Ostrow and Co. is comprised of a very tight group. "J.D. Gregory is our development person, who recently has been promoted to vice president of development and acquisitions. We have seven readers; two mar-



Photo courtesy of Page Ostrow

With Steven Spielberg.

keting staff members; two floating executive assistants; two liaisons for international production and finance; a team of festival and market acquisitions executives, and myself. And, of course, our copresident and best friend, Happy, my little Maltese pup, whose desk is next to mine."

Ostrow is also very involved in establishing forums for presenting new talent. "I stage and moderate an event called Green Light Night, where 350 people come to pitch their ideas to the top execs in the business. Some are good. Some aren't. But sometimes you get a nugget. So we vote on the best one at the end of the night and the winner gets a chance to see if his or her project is taken seriously by the execs."



Ostrow believes in what she does wholeheartedly. "I have this passion for

what I do. My job is to help you get there. I handle major motion pictures in a variety of genres from theatrical, domestic, and foreign releases to TV movies of the week. I accept submissions of projects seeking financing with a variety of budget ranges in all stages from concept or development to completed feature films and documentaries seeking distribution."

And her batting average is pretty high. "In terms of completed films, our success has been 100%. I have never taken on a film that I didn't secure a distribution deal for. I know when I watch a picture what its success will be. What I truly love about my representing the creative side is the heart and diversity of people I get to deal with on a wide variety of issues."

Ostrow relaxes in a variety of ways. "I love tennis—was ranked in Canada in the under-16 category. I read a lot and I paint, and have sold paintings throughout the world. I also play guitar. I love to race sailboats at the Cal Yacht Club and every morning I hike in the mountains. I'm an early-to-bed, early-to-rise sort of gal."

With work being her central focus, Ostrow has limited time for a social life. "This is my life. I try to mix in my friends and family and love to go to the movies and just be an audience member and eat popcorn."

Ostrow feels confident in her future. Though she has been approached by big business firms to join their operations, to date she's declined in favor of maintaining her independence. "It's flattering and all, but for now, I'm pretty content with where I am. But what really makes my day is when some filmmaker I've helped says, 'Because of you, I got my film made.' My place is in helping to make the filmmakers of tomorrow."

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