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The Secrets of HOLLYWOOD, PA Revealed

by Lisa Hummel

Beginning February 24, the filming of the independent feature Hollywood, PA will once again turn Central Pennsylvania into “Hollywood East”. Recently, MODE sat down with the men behind the scenes to get the scoop on what it takes to bring a film of this caliber to the big screen, what it’s like to start from scratch, and just what the heck they’re doing with the Internet.

MODE: *First things first, a brief synopsis of the movie.*

Greg Swartz, writer/director, Hollywood, PA: It’s about a native Pennsylvanian who returns home ... determined to make his dreams come true in his hometown — to bring the film industry to them rather than go there himself — so he sets about making ultimate documentary, which is every single minute of his life.

MODE: *Tell me about the filming itself. Where will you be shooting in the area and how often will it be webcast live?*

Sven Pape, web director, Hollywood, PA: [It will be webcast] every second day and depending upon locations. We’re going to be live in The Vault, and we’re going to be live in the State Forum building — we’re going to shoot a town’s hall meeting there ... and we’re going to be shooting Negley Park where the Hollywood sign is going to be erected.

MODE: *In all, how much of the film will be webcast?*

Pape: We’ll shoot seven days live, for four hours, which is live web feed; we are going to be live at all times with the web cam — the web cam is a still-frame, with no sound, it refreshes itself every sixty seconds.

MODE: *Is this the first feature-length webcast?*

Gerald Stetson, film producer/web producer, Hollywood, PA: The first independent.

Pape: There was a studio film called *Urban Legend 2* where two days they were live for two hours each day. That's why we can't call ourselves "the first film ever". But we're the first independent, and I think independent is part of what we are. I think it is important to point out that we're doing this not because AOL is helping us or somebody else, but because we had to do this to find an audience for a film that otherwise might not have a chance to find an audience. I don't know how many thousand filmmakers make a movie each year, and you don't read about them or hear about them.

MODE: *Why don't you think this has been done before, at least not to the extent that you're doing it?*

Stetson: There isn't the technology. This really is very new.

Pape: Yes. I think the reason being is that the technology that is out there right now is actually not suitable for what we want to do. The compromises that the Internet user would have to make in watching this — normally they would just watch it on, say, television, with television quality — live, with stereo sound — and you don't have that. And half a year ago what we do now wouldn't have been possible.

Stetson: Right. And again in a half a year from now, it will be done to death. It's that close, of someone [else] doing it. And as we said, someone else did it for a two-day live stream just a month ago, so we're just a month away from being totally unique. Now we're still unique in the independent market, and for a longer period of time — seven days, four hours streaming. They did two days, two hours streaming a month ago. In three months time, it will be 14 days, and on and on.

Pape: What is still unique about it is bringing an audience to a film. Inviting people to hang out on the set ... The great thing of it is that we are relatively capable of changing the site within 24 hours, we can add elements to it, so if there is a suggestion ... the same applies to a certain audience.

MODE: *Are you prepared for technical problems? Do you have a back-up system?*

Stetson: We have enormous technical support coming from as far west as Seattle and Silicon Valley and as far south as Florida with our own production team coming from Los Angeles, as well. We're trying to have back-ups to overcome complications. There will be complications, it isn't a completely smooth process.

MODE: *What are some of the complications that you're prepared to face?*

Pape: I think it's very likely that the signal will break down here and there, and we'll just have to deal with it.

MODE: *Do you think that's going to happen?*

Pape: I think it's possible, yes.

MODE: *Are you prepared for people logging on at the same time? Will a large number of simultaneous hits crash your site?*

Stetson: We are very much prepared for people logging on at the same time, up to 300,000 at a time.

Pape: We have a deal with Eye Beam which is a broadcaster, basically they have a space satellite and the signal that we send from our set is not going through the Internet to the user, which normally leads to a lot of congestion and a lot of problems but it actually goes to Eye Beam directly, from there to a space satellite and from there to all the major back bone points of the Internet and then you as the Internet user, you don't have to go through the Internet to get to us, you just go to your local server and get the information from there.

MODE: *Is there a crew for the web production, one that exists entirely separate from the film crew?*

Stetson: We have an enormous crew, a complete film crew and a complete web crew.

Pape: There's actually a company in Germany, an Internet design company, doing this they have about 15 people within that company, and I send them e-mails every day — what needs to be changed, what needs to be improved, and then they do that. And then there is a Pennsylvania company that we're working with called Startbutton.com ...

MODE: *What was the perfect fit between your script and the concept of the webcast? Why did you think it was a good idea?*

Swartz: The whole, original, very first draft of the script wasn't a web thing at all, it was this guy who had a cable access TV show and he was convinced that if he just showed his regular life every week he'd be successful ... the script wasn't even complete yet when I had switched to webcams, focusing more and more on the Internet. There are certain elements of the script that are obviously very autobiographical — I'm from here, I left here, I'm coming back here to make a movie — it sort of seemed to fit on another level if what he was doing we were doing. So other people have taken the shots of their feature film live, but we're not showing our shots, you're not going to be able to download our footage from the day — it's a behind the scenes thing.

Stetson: The real beauty of the Internet is that it's really an enormous marketing tool for a feature film ... we're trying to get public awareness.

Swartz: We can offer a distributor a pre-marketed film, it's not a totally unknown entity. Even if you take a movie — *Saving Private Ryan* — until Dreamworks began promoting it, it was an unpromoted film. No film gets promoted during its shooting ... *Entertainment Tonight* may have a behind the scenes thing about what Ben Affleck is doing on the set of his new movie, but they don't do a full marketing campaign, whereas ours are coinciding.

Stetson: We're promoting the film now and we haven't even shot a foot of film.

MODE: *What should we expect to see?*

Pape: We will have to turn off the camera if we run out of satellite time, that is why we have four hours for seven days, but we won't turn the camera off ... if something is being said that wasn't supposed to be said ... I think that's part of what ... we can offer, to show the truth about film making or to show behind the scenes, because filmmaking is very much a struggle, it's like crisis management, there's problems left and right and because you're so on the edge and its working so many hours each day, the relationships that you have among each other are very intense. And I think that's what's interesting about movie making to show those people on the set that just don't have the energy any more for being polite or for doing something that they would normally not do because they're just doing their jobs.

MODE: *So basically a lot of this is going to be uncensored?*

Stetson: Yes, firstly, we're saying we're making a film and we're going behind the scenes and that is pretty unusual. Now we're saying that we're actually going to have the camera rolling and that's even more unusual, whereby when the shit hits the fan, we're going to keep it rolling. Thirdly, one's going to be able to get the real, actual e-mails that we're passing around the crew ...

Pape: What we do want to do is show people what filmmaking is all about.

MODE: *Will this camera ever break the fourth wall, will it ever interview the stars, or will it strictly be used for behind the scenes purposes?*

Stetson: Yes, we can interview stars. It's the director's job to film the actual film, to get the real actors. When actors come off the set, and we've got another camera, we don't want to just stick it in front of their faces, they might have been in front of the director for six, eight, nine hours

Pape: We want to experiment a little bit with this, which means for a couple of days we're going to have Jenni.cam actually host the live web chat. She's the web girl that started webcasting from her apartment three years ago in Carlisle and so we're going to play with that a little bit and see what the response is. She's just going to pick and choose certain angles on the set. What we're also going to do is what we call the spy cam—which is another additional camera—a little camera placed on the shoulder an each day we'd like to ask another crew member to wear this for just 2-3 hours so we could have a different point of view of different crew members and see the set from a different perspective.

MODE: *Is any of the live webcast being recorded?*

Pape: Yes, we have an archive where you can see the days prior, where you can see a summary, the "best ofs," that kind of stuff, and we are going to have the web cam which will be live whenever we're going to be live.

MODE: *Are you worried that the aspect of the Internet is going to overshadow the film itself?*

Stetson: No, it's not going to happen. No way ... the film is what's going to make it, there's no question of that.

MODE: *What are your highest expectations — what do you realistically expect to happen?*

Pape: What I expect to happen is to find an audience for this film, and to find the interest of that audience, to have them interested in the making of the film and to have them interested in how that film turned out.

Stetson: I can see the Los Angeles contingent picking this up and running with it, I can see the same in New York, I can see it regionally here, if *Blair Witch* can do it, so can we.

MODE: *So, you're hoping that this is a vehicle to get the film into a larger market?*

Stetson: Hopefully. To find an audience. Totally.

Pape: You call it 'marketing ploy', I call it finding an audience.

Stetson: That's basically the same ... other films haven't got this vehicle to move forward and that time period — you know, it costs so much money to make these things — the momentum is going to roll and roll, by the time that we get out of the studio and the film is ready to go in the theater that momentum, that ball is rolling, gathering, and it's getting bigger and bigger, and who knows, in three or four months time when we're about to release this, there could be quite of a lot of awareness out there. And I really hope so.

MODE: *How are you getting exposure? Any national media outlets?*

Swartz: *Movieline* is a magazine, but it's also a website. It's interactive, kind of like *Premiere*. It's a film magazine, but not for filmmakers, it's more for consumers. They're doing a five part series on the interaction between Hollywood and the Internet and we're one of the five parts. It's not a magazine article, it's on their site, and it'll be on the site for a month. And then also we're supposed to have banner ads rotating on all New Line Cinema sites, and New Line is huge ... and these individual sites are going to rotate our ads at the top ... the deal we have is not with New Line, it's with the designers of the New Line webpages.

Pape: ... We'll find our niche wherever we can get it, and we'll try to build from there.

MODE: *Do you think that this film would be able to get the attention that it may receive without the Internet aspect — is the Internet that lucrative of a marketing tool?*

Pape: That's one thing about filmmaking, you never know. If somebody would have asked the *Blair Witch Project*, "do you think that this film would get that kind of attention, that kind of buzz — " they would've said, "Yes, this is going to be the greatest film ever, we're going to this,

this, and this, and it's going to work out" and we would've said they were crazy. And you cannot predict that, you never know what is going to happen. You just have to try. And that's what we're doing.

Stetson: You'd be amazed at how many people are sitting at a table just like this "we're going to make a film this year" and at the end of that year, they're sitting the same around that table saying, "well, you know, we've had a few problems, a few personal things, let's start it next year" well, that's different than what we're doing now. You can talk 'til you're blue in the face, you just need to get out there and try it.

MODE: *What is your response to people who will make the comparison between Hollywood, PA and films like *The Truman Show* and *EdTV*?*

Swartz: The easiest answer, the smuggest answer, would be: read the script. The script is nothing like it — sure it's like it in that it's a study of the privacy, public lives/private lives interaction, but other than that, the story is nothing at all like it.

MODE: *But do you think people will walk out of the theaters after seeing this movie and say, "oh, they stole that idea from *The Truman Show* or *EdTV*"?*

Swartz: No. They'll say it going in, and that's just what we have to deal with. They will say it going in, sure. If anything, the original concept would seem more like *EdTV*, in that he's aware of the fact that his life is being taped, but if it's similar to any of those scripts, it'd be more *The Truman Show*, because of all that stuff about advertising in *The Truman Show*, the whole place is up for grabs, the product placement, and that's sort of what happens in his town — his parents begin selling wall space in their house ...

MODE: *Tell us about the setbacks, wasn't the film originally scheduled to start filming in November?*

Stetson: Well, basically, the dates were so close to Thanksgiving and Christmas, we tried to fit in between those two periods, and we realized that the time slot was too tight.

Pape: I think many things played a part in it. For one thing, we weren't ready. One of our companies, they weren't ready technologically. Also, on the film side we felt we weren't ready yet, certain actors hadn't been cast or something, so we felt, we can't deliver the goods and that's why we had to push it, and that's what you need to do as a filmmaker, as well. If you feel like it's not worth it, you need to say, "ok we'll do it later". But if you keep pushing and pushing and pushing, you end up sitting in L.A. in a coffee shop just doing nothing.