

**CREATING
BLOCKBUSTERS!**

CREATING BLOCKBUSTERS!

**How to Generate and Market
Hit Entertainment for TV, Movies,
Video Games, and Books**

Gene Del Vecchio



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*This book is dedicated to storytellers.
Thank you for your wild imaginings.*

*In memory of Dr. Milburn Calhoun,
publisher of Pelican Publishing Company.
He generously gave wings to my words.*

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Introduction: Why This Book?

This book is more insightful than any other book you might have previously read on the subject of creating, developing, and marketing entertainment. The knowledge comes from my thirty years in the entertainment business, working alongside some of the largest entertainment companies in the world.

Authors of other books have provided an excellent foundation of the skills needed to write a decent screenplay or novel. This book builds upon that foundation and goes well beyond it. My emphasis is on creating that special class of entertainment known as blockbusters, which capture the attention of huge audiences and make fortunes. I will explain in detail how blockbusters succeed in hopes that yours can too.

My book goes even further, providing guidance on how to create Multi-Category Franchises that dominate all business categories ranging from film, television, toys, video games, publishing, music, and even apparel. The importance of this is profound; unless you build essential elements into your entertainment while it is in an embryonic state, it will never become a blockbuster let alone a full-fledged franchise. I will also show you how to effectively market blockbusters in ways that keep them *Ever-Cool!* No other book goes the distance as this one does.

Other books don't provide actual tools to help you generate ideas for new entertainment. This book does. It is chockfull of techniques to help you produce the next potential big idea, backed up by principles that will help you refine, develop, and market it.

To my knowledge, no other author demonstrates the principles he espouses by generating and articulating his own new story ideas. This book does. Within these pages, you will

find twenty story ideas that I generated myself. I then outline the pros and cons of each idea and invite you to do the same. It's incredibly instructive. Don't miss it!

Many of the previous books on the subject give advice on what is needed to sell an idea to industry executives who have the authority to green-light projects. If you are developing a screenplay, for example, previous books provide guidance on how to come up with the kind of characters, drama, and story structure that executives look for. Many of these books also describe the importance of creating a "hook" that can get your idea noticed by executives. The advice they provide is quite good. However, despite the great intentions of previous authors, a great many ideas for entertainment that are generated, selected, and produced eventually lose money. The entertainment is not sufficiently motivating to put enough butts in seats at the movie theater or enough noses in front of television sets for high ratings or enough traffic in stores to sell books. They fail!

While this book is also about creating and nurturing ideas for entertainment, my frame of reference is *not about how you can sell an idea to entertainment executives*. Instead, my book is about *how you can create entertainment that audiences will want to buy!* Great storytellers from Jeffrey Katzenberg to John Lasseter instinctively know that the audience is ultimately in charge, so it's highly advisable to give the audience what it wants.

By focusing on the end consumer of entertainment, this book provides invaluable tips, which will help creators and executives increase the odds of creating, producing, and marketing entertainment that audiences will flock to experience. After all, entertainment executives may give permission to proceed on projects, but they don't actually turn them into blockbusters. Audiences do that by either giving or withholding their interest. While previous authors do discuss some aspects of audiences' needs and interests, this book is far more audience-centric than any previous book you might have read on creating entertainment.

I am a weird hybrid, a cross between consumer researcher and storyteller. That, too, is rather unique among others who have written previous books on this topic. It allows me to bridge the gap that often exists between what audiences want (audience research) and how to create it for them (storytelling).

My career started in consumer research. Overtime, I have conducted more than one thousand consumer research studies, most of which have been for the largest entertainment companies in the world. I have tested films, TV shows, and story-based video games and toys. My research has included both large-scale quantitative studies conducted around the world and small-scale, local focus groups where I have sat face to face with audiences. Audiences have told me why they love some entertainment and hate others. They have told me about the elements of stories and characters that they cherish and the elements that they think suck. Audiences have not been shy. All told, I have heard the voices of approximately 100,000 audience members. When added to my three decades of general industry observations, this research provided more input into the creation of effective principles.

To demonstrate my appreciation for audience research, I conducted a new study among four hundred respondents across the nation specifically for this book. They tell us their preferences for storylines and character types and the elements of execution they dislike. I also asked the respondents to evaluate my story ideas as a way to demonstrate the value of research in deciding which ideas to pursue. No other author has done that! It shows the benefit of scientific research as a way to help inform the development of art.

I am also a professional writer and novelist. My first novel for young adults, *The Pearl of Anton*, received a starred review in *Booklist* in 2004, which is the bible for the American Library Association. The sequel, *The Sword of Anton*, received the Young Adults' Choices Award by the International Reading Association in 2008. In addition, I've written two books on youth marketing—*Creating Ever-Cool: A Marketer's Guide to a Kid's Heart* and *The*

Blockbuster Toy! How to Invent the Next BIG Thing. Both of these marketing books did well and helped executives understand what's in the heart of the child so that they can apply the concepts to television shows, films, toys, and packaged goods.

Given my background in consumer research and storytelling, I have developed knowledge-based tools and insider tips to help you create blockbusters. No other author has those credentials.

In summation, this book provides insights that build upon the knowledge of other books but goes far beyond them. Unlike other books written on the entertainment industry, this book provides insights and advice to help you create and market not just any entertainment, but *blockbuster* entertainment that might even jump into the realm of franchise . . . forever!

This book provides concrete tools to help you generate ideas, right now, for the next blockbuster. I even offer my own ideas as a way to demonstrate how the tools work.

This book is written from the point of view of what audiences want to buy, not from the point of view of what you can sell to Hollywood.

This book provides new research on what audiences want, thus offering a fresh perspective. I even threw my own ideas into the research in order to demonstrate how the process should work.

This book is from an author who is both a researcher and a writer/novelist; this allows me to bridge the gap between audience research and storytelling.

Whew!

It's a widely known fact that most of the people who traveled west seeking gold during the California Gold Rush did not strike it rich. The same is true for most writers and inventors of today. The great majority will not be able to support themselves on their efforts, and it can be frustrating to witness the prominence of those few that do. Success always feels so close, but in actuality, it can be miles away. The people who, as a class, were the most successful during

the California Gold Rush were those who sold merchandise such as shovels, pans, and food to the miners.

For the great part of my research career, I have sold shovels (tools) to those looking to make it rich in entertainment. But here's the critical difference between me and the merchants during the Gold Rush days; the merchants didn't tell miners where to dig for gold. I do. And there's lots of gold in them thar hills. They are called blockbusters. Let me help you find them; but not by explaining how to *sell* something to Hollywood executives, but rather, by explaining what your consumer audiences are extremely anxious to *buy*.

Let us begin.

