



### **Interview with Rocky Lang BooksToFilm.TV**

**ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to a Podcast of Beyond the Book – a presentation of the not-for-profit Copyright Clearance Center.

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**KENNEALLY:** Welcome to Beyond the Book. My name is Chris Kenneally, your host. And today, we’re looking at an unusual and interesting new Website whose very name tells you almost everything about it. It’s BooksToFilm.tv and therefore covers the gambit of media that’s available online today. Joining us the creator of BooksToFilm.tv – Rocky Lang. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Rocky.

**LANG:** Thank you Chris. Good morning, how are you?

**KENNEALLY:** I’m just fine. You come to us from Los Angeles, appropriately enough, because you’re a producer, a screenwriter and a director. You’ve produced movies such as Ridley Scott’s White Squall, a Hollywood feature, as well as the Emmy Award-winning Titanic for television. You’ve published four books and it says here on the Website you know the entertainment and publishing side of the business, which is always good, because you know what the – fox is – how it gets served and what went into making it, so to speak.

**LANG:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, there’s a synergy in today’s sort of multimedia, fast-paced world that brings sort of all the book publishing business and the movies and television business and the new media business all together.

**KENNEALLY:** It’s all collapsing together. We’ve been hearing about synergy for a long time. A lot of people, including the folks at AOL-Time Warner have lost a lot of money banking on synergy.

But there’s also been another buzz phrase out there – buzz term – called convergence, which regards the collapsing – as you say – of media all into one spot, and that is at the desktop.



But what you're doing with BooksToFilm.tv is attempting to bring those various pieces together because for a lot of the creators of these kinds of work, they work in separate sort of silos and then don't really come together with the other producers until much later, does that seem fair?

LANG: I think that's a fair assessment. I think that in today's world, if I understand you correctly, there's still a lot of isolationism. The film business is still trying to look right now for big, huge blockbuster movies, and the sort of the independent, creative idea – the small movie – is harder to sell. In the book business, the fiction market is pretty much an almost dead market for the unestablished writer. And there are all these other markets that are opening up.

So as things are collapsing, they are also expanding and I think that a lot of people are sort of running around with their heads cut off trying to figure out what the next step is. But BooksToFilm.tv tries to sort of bridge some of this together.

KENNEALLY: So how does it achieve that? Perhaps for those who haven't yet been to the site – and we'll be linking to it from our page – give us an idea of what they are likely to find, and why particularly our audience of book authors – people who might be editing a book, or working with a book, or writing a book ought to be thinking about going beyond the book, if you'll pardon me to plug our show?

LANG: No, that's great. A plug's always good, and thank you for plugging my Website.

But let me back up a little bit and talk to you about the genesis of this. As a filmmaker – and I've worked at every studio and have done a lot of movies and a lot of TV. And what I'd realized over the years – and really importantly now, is that – the buyers are really looking for a visual depiction of the content. And so what I do when I'm selling my TV shows, or my reality shows, or my movies, I create what we call in Hollywood a sizzle reel.

And what the sizzle reel is – essentially it's a one-to-three minute, sometimes a little bit longer depending on what the project is, but no more than five – it's sort of a glimpse into the idea of the project.

So what I've been able to do is to go in – instead of just telling them about it, I'm able to show them what it can look like. And that excites them. And in today's world, sort of post MTV generation, people are looking for an immediate gratification for the experience of what they're seeing that stimulates their fantasies of the characters and the development of the project.



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So where that went to is that, I also transitioned to being a writer for books, is that I realized that there was a service that was sort of missing for the author and the publisher which became what we call as book sizzle. And to differentiate the book sizzle from the book trailer, which as been around for a little bit, is the book trailer is generally for published books and they're looking for readers to come to their Website and see something about the book. They're almost like trailers. The sizzle reel is a little bit different. It's a cousin to the trailer, but what the idea is, is to help the author and help the publisher find either financing or an agent or a producer.

So where it works – it's universal. For the unpublished writer who's looking for an agent, and they take their manuscript and they give it to us, we can give them a minute to two-minute sizzle reel on their manuscript. They can then send that to agents across the country, and agents will see it in their e-mail, and they'll just pop it. They don't have to read the book yet. They go, wow, that's really interesting, I want to read this manuscript.

So then you take it the next level, and you take it to the agent who now has this. Now, the agent wants to excite a publisher. They can use it for that angle and send it to a publisher. Let's say you want to take it to Hollywood. The lit agent sends it to the film agent in Los Angeles. Bam – they love it. That film agent can take it and send it into a producer. The producer can turn it into the studio.

Now, ultimately, it's going to all depend on the quality of the written material. No one can juke and jag and hide in the shadows with a lot of sizzle without substance. But what the sizzle will do is it will get you in the door and it will differentiate it.

Now, let's take a look at radio and TV. So everybody wants to go out and get on Opera. Everybody wants to get on the talk shows and the radio shows. So how do you do it?

Well, let's say you have a sizzle reel and you can then send it – boom – to every top person that you can find. You send it up – boom – it's up on the satellite, it's down on the desktop of somebody's computer. Now, you have leapfrogged through all those publicists that are out there and all those agents who are out there who are sending manuscripts and pictures in, they're stacked up on the floor of radio and television producers. And boom, this radio and television producer sees your sizzle reel and your project and goes, wow – that's really interesting.

And when it comes to talking about your project – because Dan Poynter, who's published 300 books, and he basically feels like very person has a book inside of them and every speaker needs a book. And every speaker and author needs a sizzle reel because you can then show these talk show hosts and you can show these radio



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that you're articulate, that you can actually explain your idea. You telegenic. You sound good on the radio.

So the use of the sizzle reel, or the book sizzles as we call it through BooksToFilm.tv, is pretty much universal across the board. That's a long answer, man, I'm sorry.

KENNEALLY: Well, no. But we'll break it down a bit. And it really makes a point that we talk about a fair amount at Beyond the Book for authors, and that is that the responsibility for the book or for the published work – whatever it might be – is not just to write it, but that's why we call up the other book. It's about what do you do when you put the pencil down, when you put the laptop off – you've got some responsibilities. And one of those responsibilities. And what of those responsibilities is marketing the book and trying to get as much out of your effort as possible.

So what you're suggesting, I think, is that people ought to be able to communicate the value of the material in as many different ways as possible.

LANG: Absolutely. And I don't remember if it was actually the Poynter book – there was one of the books that I was reading when I was writing my first book. And I'm very happy that I've actually published – my first novel is coming out, and I'm doing a sizzle reel on that as well, for different reasons. But in any event, the important point is what you're saying is that writers write, OK. That's their safety zone.

As hard as it is, as arduous, as crazy making it can be, to sit in front of the computer, and create characters, or create ideas or work on a research project, that's a comfort zone. OK, so now you have it, what do you do with it – unless you're a big shot. So you have to put as much energy into the marketing of yourself and your project as you did into the writing of the book.

And I said this to my daughter, who is a wonderful musician. She has performed at the Monterrey Jazz Festival. She's 17 years old. She has a CD out, but she spends all her time writing music and performing music, and she doesn't want to go out and put herself out to sell herself and market herself.

Now, she's only 17, but we've had this conversation that whatever the art form is – if you're an artist, if you're a poet, if you're a writer, if you're a musician. The key is, unless you want to be just someone who writes in your room, and you put your finished product up on the shelf, and you show it your friends and family, you're



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never going to get your idea to the mass market unless you're willing to put yourself on the line and do what's uncomfortable, and that is sell.

I mean, there's a reason why writers write and salesmen sell. And it's hard to go and sell your own material. It's difficult to be able to go and say to somebody, read this, it's really great. Because you wrote it, it sounds like you're an egomaniac or something. It's difficult.

**KENNEALLY:** Or the other side is you just expect the world to come beating a path to your door and that rarely happens.

Well, what's changing online, Rocky, today, is the phenomenon like YouTube that makes it possible to post vides very easily, and in fact, gear like the Flip Camera or even the new iPhones, that really make it possible to make a video, post it, do it all – anyone can do it.

And so I guess what I wonder about BooksToFilm.tv and its value is, is something I want you tell me about the professional piece of this, because it's not simply shooting a quickie video on your cell phone and putting it up on YouTube.

**LANG:** Well, yes. And we are professionals. I've spent 30 years in the movie business. My head of production, Scott Barker is the a director himself and is actually out directing his first feature right now, but he is available because we have a staff.

And sort of the YouTube thing is great. And you can take, or your authors can take our sizzle reel and put it on YouTube.

But more than that is that we are professionals and we take a look at the material closely. We look at the marketplace. We talk to the writer or the publisher and we ask them where do you ultimately want to go. A speaker says, I want to take my – I want to get on radio and talk shows to promote my book. Someone says I want to get it to an agent. Someone says I want to get it made into a movie. So we take a look at what the ultimate goal is of the client and we tailor the sizzle to meet that goal.

Now, we have various different levels of sizzle reels. We start at \$600 which is really, really simple, and we go up to a \$10,000 sizzle which is basically we go and recreate scenes from the book. If somebody wants it to actually go take scenes and shoot it like a movie, we know we have to go and do that.

Now, no one has hired us for the \$10,000 one, because it would only – it would take a major publisher or a major writer to do it. But we have a lot of mid-range



pieces, which really combines music and text and images and we use a lot of effects and colorization. And we cut it with music, and we license the stuff for you.

So at the end of the day, it's really a professional piece of material. And it's – there are a lot of samples up on the Website.

KENNEALLY: Well, yeah. And we can have a look at those at BooksToFilm.tv. This is Chris Kenneally. We're chatting right now with Rocky Lang, who is one of the co-creators of this new Website that's providing a service to authors and others in the publishing industry, helping them reach out to the film and TV world, to go from New York to Hollywood with the click of a mouse as it were.

There's been a relationship between the book world and the publishing world – sorry, the film world – going back to – gee wiz, almost the very beginning of cinema. What do you think the future is going to be like? How much does Hollywood rely upon the books that are published every year for material?

LANG: Well, I'll tell you this. What's happening with Hollywood today – and many of the filmmakers like myself are hoping it will change, but what's happening today is that the studios are looking for existing pieces of material, and that means that they are looking for – they are doing cartoons. They are doing comic books. They are doing sequels. They are doing prequels. They are doing remakes. And they are doing books.

And if you'll look at the Academy Awards list, four of the five nominees were books. And the fifth one was from existing material already, which was the Harvey Milk story that Sean Penn was in.

So five movies were coming from existing material, not –

KENNEALLY: And that's that whole notion of the platform, right?

LANG: Right. It's a platform to build from. But what that does is that in a certain way, it makes it harder for the writer who is in the shower or driving down the road that gets an idea that's a small idea and they want to turn it into something, and they want to get a movie made, which was the '70s and the '80s – mainly in the '70s, there was a lot of movies that got made – a lot of interesting filmmakers. A lot of people pushing the envelope as far as the style and substance.

If you just even look at TV today versus the way it was 15 years ago in style, it's completely different.



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So we're looking right now to hopefully – but, I mean, for me as a filmmaker, I'm looking that it opens it up to more of the individual idea. And as far as with the book world, it's pretty hard to get a book made into a Hollywood movie unless it's created – what you're saying – a platform. It has an audience.

Unfortunately, the Taking Woodstock project, which was, I thought, an incredible book, has not done well as a feature film. And I was really hoping to see that thing break out, because I thought it would have allowed the smaller writer, the smaller publisher to be recognized more, but it didn't work. So we just keep plugging away and see how it goes.

KENNEALLY: Right. And it's interesting – I think about some of the great movies of all time, and you're right, they are all books. *Gone with the Wind* would be on that list, I would have to think. And there are few movies that probably don't have some source material in a book and movie in one form or another – either a piece of nonfiction that's been fictionalized or anything like that. So that relationship is probably going to continue in the future.

Now, you've mentioned the various products you do – the sizzle reels and the various levels and even speaker sizzles, which allow somebody to market their service as a speaker. Are there some success stories that you could share with us – people you've worked with?

LANG: Well, I'd like to talk about Cable Publishing, which we did a sizzle for them. They are a midsize publisher in the Midwest and they have a book called the *Glen's Daughter* by Sharon Hendry. And Sharon came to us and asked us to do a sizzle for her, which we did. And I got a nice letter from Nan Wisherd, who is the owner of Cable Publishing, and she said their sales increased 20% just by the fact that they ran the sizzle on the Website of the publishing company. So I was very excited about that.

As far as other sizzle reels, I have a lot of success stories about my own stuff that I've done over the years. But we're a new company starting just in January of this year. So people are just gearing up – they are getting their material now and they're ready to go out and see what happens.

There is actually a producer in Hollywood who had us do a sizzle on a book that she had optioned. It was a completed book. It was a book that had not done well in the United States, but it had done reasonably well in England. And she owned the rights to us. And she asked us to do a sizzle real on that. And she now has a screenplay on it. And so she's out to market with the screenplay.



So the sizzle helped her motivate her to find the people who would get the screenplay written.

KENNEALLY: That's great.

LANG: Yeah, so it's – everybody's been very excited. There's a writer who actually self published, and she's got a book coming out, and she's gotten a lot of heat and interest off the sizzle reel. And she may actually wind up getting a publisher as opposed to self-publishing, because people are excited now and they want to read the book, and before they didn't want read the book. It was laying in the slush piles and things like that. So we're hoping that our writers and our publishers will see a lot of success with it.

KENNEALLY: Well, that raises a question for me. Is there a particular time in the process of writing a book that an author should be thinking about this? Do they have to wait until the book is done? Should they be thinking about this even as they're creating an outline? Is it too early or is it too late at any stage?

LANG: I immediately will answer you from the creative side as a writer. I think that a writer needs to focus on writing the material the best that they can write it. And at the end of the day, when they have their book finished and they are happy with it, you start to really put the game plan together about where to go, because as I was talking earlier is that you have to realize what your goal is – where you are trying to sell it and where you are in your career. Are you going to look for an agent or are you giving it to your agent to try to find a publisher or are you trying to get to Hollywood.

So I would say get your – you can always be thinking about how you're going to sell your book. It's part of the process of what am I going to do when it's over. But I think the focus needs to be on the writing, because remember, it is just a sizzle. It's not what's written on the page. It's basically a way of saying, this is what my book is about. It's very exciting. Please read it.

KENNEALLY: Well, that's a great reminder that it is about the writing. And I think it's a good way to end.

We've been talking with Rocky Lang, who is a producer, screenwriter and director about a new Website and a service that he's helped to create called BooksToFilm.tv.

And we'll look forward to seeing you sometime in Hollywood, in Los Angeles, Rocky. Maybe we'll do lunch.



LANG: I'd love to do lunch. Thank you, Chris – appreciate it.

KENNEALLY: I would love to do lunch as well. This is Chris Kenneally for Beyond the Book. Thanks for listening.

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Beyond the Book is the premier source for knowledge on the latest business issues facing today's dynamic publishing industry from initial research to final publication and beyond.

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