

# The Complete Film Production Handbook

Fourth Edition

Eve Light Honthaner



AMSTERDAM • BOSTON • HEIDELBERG • LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD  
PARIS • SAN DIEGO • SAN FRANCISCO • SINGAPORE • SYDNEY • TOKYO

Focal Press is an imprint of Elsevier



Focal Press is an imprint of Elsevier  
30 Corporate Drive, Suite 400, Burlington, MA 01803, USA  
The Boulevard, Langford Lane, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 1GB, UK

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#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Honthaner, Eve Light, 1950-

The complete film production handbook / Eve Light Honthaner. – 4th ed.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-240-81150-5 (alk. paper)

1. Motion pictures—Production and direction—Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Title.

PN1995.9.P7H66 2010

791.4302'32—dc22

2009052974

#### British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-0-240-81150-5

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*It's also lovingly dedicated to the memory  
of Peter - my smart, gentle, compassionate,  
story-telling, bowtie-wearing, Cubs-loving,  
big-hearted brother*

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*significantly more*

Welcome to the fourth edition of what's now *The Complete Film Production Handbook*. I know it's been a long time coming, but it hasn't been for lack of trying. This latest incarnation has taken three years to complete and the process has been full of starts and stops as work and other aspects of my life have consumed big chunks of time. It's also become a much more daunting task to revise this book than it ever has been before. What innocuously started as a production manual I created for a company I had been working for and kept expanding as the scope of my experience grew, has definitely taken on a life of its own. And the book that was first published in 1993 is no longer (in any way, shape or form) based on the scope of my experience alone. The industry has changed in countless ways during the past several years, and aspects of production and producing have become so much more complex and specialized than ever before. And although I've always had help from friends and colleagues with the expertise in areas I only had working knowledge of, this edition has literally taken an entire village of friends, colleagues and friends of friends and colleagues to help educate me and fill in the huge gaps where my sphere of experience and knowledge falls short. I couldn't have done it without their assistance, expertise, stories, patience and generosity; so I owe all who have helped me with his book a huge debt of gratitude. And in recognition of their contributions, you'll see their names noted not only at the end of my introduction, but also throughout the book.

Before I seriously started working on this latest edition, Focal Press, as is their practice, sent out the third edition to a select group of both industry professionals and educators for review. These individuals were asked what they thought should be added and/or revised in the fourth edition. And while I've tried to cover as many of their suggestions as possible, I've come to the conclusion that as uniquely complete as this book is, it can never be all things to all people. What is important, however, is that it cover the basics of feature film production and maintain its wide appeal to working professionals, new filmmakers *and* students alike – without being geared too much toward any one of those markets. The fact that it's used by both professionals and students is an aspect of the book I'm most proud of.

What's changed since the third edition? Well, to start with, 24 chapters have been expanded to 32. There are some new forms, but fewer of them overall, as most union and guild forms are now accessible online. And gone are

the blank forms and the (forms on the) CD at the back of the book, as they're now also available online.

Several chapters have been updated and expanded, and topics such as Travel and Housing and Shipping, which had previously been included as parts of other chapters, have now become chapters in their own right. You'll find other new chapters covering television production, new media, independent and low budget filmmaking, the proliferation of incentive programs throughout the U.S. and environmentally-responsible production practices. There's another chapter on working with animals and a new glossary of terms at the back of the book. I've also added a new feature called *Tales From The Trenches*, which highlights relevant experiences my friends and I have had that will hopefully make this material more real, relevant and interesting.

Because this book isn't revised every year or two, there are a number of areas where I don't get too specific – especially when it comes to rates and regulations – technology, too. Take incentive programs for example. It's become a huge part of our industry, but the U.S. states and the various countries offering incentives as well as the incentive programs themselves change constantly. So I've provided you with as much basic information on the different types of incentives as possible, what you need to consider before choosing a location because of its incentive program and where you can go to get the most updated information on who's offering what and where. The same can be said for post production, which for years and years and years, was a lot less complicated. But now with the profusion of new digital cameras and technologies, the workflow following any picture through post can vary in a multitude of ways – and it keeps advancing. So without getting too explicit, the chapter is presented as a basic overview and directs you to areas you need to learn more about as the technology continues to evolve.

It's been pointed out, and I have to agree that there are a few sections in the book that make for pretty dry reading, and I apologize. But these segments provide material you'll be glad you have when you need it, and it won't matter that it hasn't been written in a more conversational tone.

It's been nine years since the last edition of this book came out. Since then, I've worked on some more films (ranging from about \$20 to \$100 million); I line produced a reality show pilot (my one and only); my second book, *Hollywood Drive*, was published in 2005; I've consulted

on a few projects; I got to work at my favorite company, DreamWorks (for a year); and I have started making headway into above-the-line territory. My teaching has expanded from the USC summer course I started ten years ago to doing workshops and lecturing all over the country. I enjoy teaching more than ever and have been truly bowled-over by the passion, perseverance and talent of several of my incredible students. It's been a thrill to be able to share in the excitement of their successes and to become friends with many of them. I've been fortunate enough to be able to travel a bit for work, and that's included a five-month location on the lovely island of Kaua'i; a fabulous filmmaker's tour of Toronto and all it has to offer, compliments of the Ontario Film Commission; and a week-long dream trip to England sponsored by the UK Film Council. Most importantly – I've continued to make new friends and to learn – which is, without a doubt, the best aspects of being in this business.

In the same length of time, changes in the industry have been staggering as technology has altered the entire landscape and continues to advance at breakneck speeds. This may be old news by tomorrow, but as I write this, recent headlines have revealed that the sales record (for *any* media platform) has been broken by Activision's *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, a video game that's estimated to have made \$550 million in its first five days. And while the buzz and excitement is currently raging for James Cameron's remarkable blockbuster film *Avatar*, it was just announced that 3-D televisions will be hitting the market later this year. Who would have believed? When the last edition of this book came out, who could have conceived of the multitude of tax incentive programs now being offered throughout the U.S. that have changed the meaning of *runaway production*, created a buyers' market and made us wonder if Los Angeles really is still the film capital of the world. High-profile corporate scandals have effected the way we do business; *Webisode* and *mobisode* have become common terms; digital cinematography has become mainstream; the affordability of equipment has made it possible for more people to shoot and edit their own films and many independent filmmakers are marketing, selling and distributing their own projects on the Internet. Since 9/11 and the advent of the Department of Homeland Security, travel and shipping regulations have become more complicated and there's more reason to be vigilant about confidentiality.

When it comes to unions and guilds, there's a larger variety of low-budget and new media agreements, but basic union rates go up with each contract year. And as unions and guilds continue to fight for improved benefits for their members (especially in the area of new media), labor unrest gives rise to the unsettling possibility of further devastating labor strikes.

I've asked several friends and colleagues how they've experienced the most recent changes to our industry, and the following reflects a consensus of views – the signs of our times, which are that. . .

The major studios are now part of larger conglomerates, and it's clear that the corporate attitude toward costs and risk has taken a big bite out of creativity. As the majors stick to the type of films they know they have the audience for, the variety of product grows narrower.

The scandal and collapse of Enron in 2001 and the resulting changes in accounting practices has fundamentally altered the way we do business. There's more oversight, red tape, paperwork, auditing, legal involvement, tax regulations and micro-managing than ever before. Furthermore, the downturn in our economy has seen studios streamline their work force, reduce or freeze salaries (above and below the line), eliminate many of their independent film arms and do away with several on-lot amenity/support departments.

When it comes to feature releases, there are a lot of small independent films coming out, and similarly on the other end of the spectrum – gigantic blockbusters, but there aren't nearly as many mid-budget adult dramas being produced as there once was. There are more teen-oriented franchise films being made where action and gross-out rules, as well as over-the-top, raunchy (toilet) humor. There's a growing importance of opening weekend on total box office; and film festivals such as Sundance and Toronto have become lead-ins to the Oscars. Big-name talent is no longer as necessary to open a movie, while bigger, better and more spectacular visual effects are becoming more crucial. There's more niche marketing of films on the Internet, and the summer movie season now starts on May 1<sup>st</sup> instead of in June.

On the TV-front, television seasons have gone from 36 episodes to 22 and down to 13 and six in some instances. Shows are being shot in HD, and there's a new person on the crew called a DIT. Reality continues to be popular, plentiful and cheaper to produce, and the interactivity between TV shows and viewers has hit new heights. Drama series are getting better (*Mad Men* and *The Good Wife* both prime examples); sitcoms aren't as plentiful; and we can watch shows we've missed or continuations of our favorite episodic storylines on the Web.

The digital revolution has created an explosion of formats, systems and software; distribution and exhibition outlets; paperless, filmless, tapeless workflow; virtual production and casting offices as well as screening rooms; independent films that are being made at home and for relatively little money; instant, wireless communication; less-expensive high-end equipment; remote collaboration technology; digital cinema; more piracy; and the progressively more outrageous use of computer-generated effects in both features and television.

While DVD sales are down, movies-on-demand are more available and consumers are frequenting multi-platform medias and social networking sites. A treasure trove of films, television shows, games and original online and mobile content is abundantly accessible on and downloadable from sites such as YouTube, Hulu, Crackle, Jaman, Joost and Vudu. When you add in the interactivity of thousands of websites, games and virtual worlds – it’s a wonder that some people ever make it out of their homes each day and actually step into the real world.

It’s a lot to take in, and I hope I can keep up with it all. If not, I’m going to need even more help when it comes time to start the fifth edition.

Speaking of help, this seems to be a good place to start my list of acknowledgments by recognizing the loyal readers and users of this book, all of you who have recommended it to others and the educators who make it required reading in your classes. Without you there would be no subsequent editions.

I would also like to acknowledge my incredibly loving and supportive husband Ron, who totally gets how challenging it is to have a life, to work and to write a book all at the same time and does everything he possibly can to help me. Whether it’s taking on my chores, supplying

a back massage or just bringing me a cup of tea – he’s always there cheering me on, keeping me grounded and reminding me that I’m loved. How lucky am I?

To my family and friends who have lived through this latest edition with me and have listened to me talk about it incessantly – thanks for putting up with my absences, my lack of attention, for your overwhelming support, and most of all – for just being there for me.

To my team at Focal Press – Elinor Actipis, Chris Simpson, Jane Dashevsky, and Melinda Rankin – you guys are the best! For all my unintended delays this time around, for your understanding and for doing what you needed to do to get the book out in time, I can’t thank you enough.

To my Tuesday Team – Suzanne Lyons, Alison Lea Bingeman, Becky Smith and Mark Rosman – I can’t tell you how much your coaching, advice, encouragement and support has meant to me.

Many thanks to my interns, Carra O’Neal and Kerry Wagoner, to Stephen Fromkin and Nicole Pommerehncke for their valuable reviews and to my friend Mark Hansson for the many hours he spent going through the previous edition, chapter by chapter – making copious notes on how I could best improve the new one.



## Acknowledgments

It's hard to express how much I appreciate the many people who have helped me by sharing their knowledge, answering questions, checking my material for accuracy,

letting me interview them, proof-reading, giving me notes, making my work better and helping with specific chapters. Here are their names – in alphabetical order:

Nick Abdo  
Stuart Altman  
Scott E. Anderson  
Cindy Baer  
Robert Bahar  
Brian Bell  
Thea Bernstein  
Matt Birch  
Jone Bouman  
Jenifer Box  
Mary Jo Braun  
Krysten A. Brennan  
Ali Brown  
Chris Burket  
Ralph Burris  
Milan Chakraborty  
Harriet Cheng  
Joe Chianese  
Ron Cogan  
Matt Cooper  
Michael Coscia  
Danielle Daly  
Bill Dance  
Bob Del Valle  
Maureen Dooling  
Jim Economos

Terry Edinger  
Christine Evey  
Sheri Galloway  
Peggy Geary  
Dave Hamamura  
Julia Haneke  
Susan Hirshberg  
Tom Houghton  
MaryAnn Hughes  
Mark Indig  
Elizabeth Jones  
Hal “Corky” Kessler  
Stephen Koncelik  
Matt Kutcher  
Andrew Lewis  
Mark Litwak  
Yolanda Lopez  
Ron Lynch  
Guy Magar  
Stephen Marinaccio  
Al Marrewa  
Gary Massey  
Cory McCrum-Abdo  
Kathy McCurdy  
Mimi McGreal  
Eric McLeod

Eric Mofford  
Steve Molen  
Sahar Moridani  
Elizabeth Moseley  
Missy Moyer  
Carolyn Napp  
Boone Narr  
Mike Neale  
Deanna Chavez Nocero  
April Novak  
David Orr  
Michael Owens  
Mike Papadaki  
Daniel Pensiero, III  
Cindy Quan  
Lou Race  
Keith Raskin  
Celina Reising  
Carol Reush  
Milton Reyes  
Jay Roewe  
Vail Romeyn  
Ned Shapiro  
Gail Sheridan  
Ira Shuman  
Kris Smith

Phil Smoot  
Susan Spohr  
Ty Strickler  
Susan Sullivan  
Jerram Swartz  
Bryan Sweet  
Robbie Szelei  
Todd Taylor  
Tim Tennant  
Kiku Terasaki  
Randall Thropp  
Jim Turner  
Tom Udell  
Suzy Vaughan  
Deedra Walts  
Ty Warren  
Richard Wells  
Daniel Wheatcroft  
Byron Wong  
Alex Worman  
Alan Wu  
Phil Wylly

My special thanks to:

*Peter L. Kaufman, Kaufman Entertainment Law Group  
(www.ebizlegal.com),  
who so generously updated and improved all the  
agreements, deal memos and release forms in the book.*

And to:

*David Powell, President of The Music Bridge  
(www.themusicbridge.com)  
Ralph Ehrenpreis, The Law Offices of Ralph  
Ehrenpreis Immigration & Naturalization  
(www.ralphenrenpreis.com)  
Travis Mann, Entertainment  
(Attorney & Independent Producer)*

and:

*Marc J. Federman, Sr. Vice President of CMM  
Entertainment  
(www.cmmeiers.com)*

One last note – and that's the announcement that with the help of some friends, I'm *finally* entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By the time this book comes out, my new website should be up. Check it out at: [www.EveHonthaner.com](http://www.EveHonthaner.com).

*Best of luck with all your new projects... may they be filled with challenges you can conquer, experiences you can learn from and savor, new friends and some time to have some fun! ☺ Eve*

---

## The Forms in the Book

Those of you who have used previous editions will note that the forms are a bit different this time. Instead of the blank forms at the back of the book, they're now all downloadable online. Some of the forms will be the same as those that were on the CD, where you'll see the gray fields to fill-in-the-blanks. You'll find that other forms/releases/contracts will be original Word and Excel files that can be altered. Being able to personalize some of these documents to make them more specific to your particular show is going to make a big difference.

The forms you'll find throughout the book as examples are a mixed bag. Some are the same as those used in previous editions (why fix the ones that still work?). To illustrate how to fill them out, they're filled out by hand with an assortment of fictitious names and situations. The fictitious name of our production company is XYZ Productions, and the name of the show is *Herby's Summer Vacation*. Note, however, that from one situation to another, *Herby's Summer Vacation* is either a feature film, a cable movie, a movie for television or a television series, with the current episode being *Boys Night Out*.

Some of the sample forms are pretty easy to understand as they are and have been left blank. Others (mostly the releases and agreements) contain prompts throughout the document, such as [NAME OF PRODUCTION

ENTITY], [TITLE OF PICTURE], etc., that indicate what information is required where.

In the previous edition, all of the union and guild contracts and report forms were found in the chapter on unions and guilds. But as most are now available on their respective websites, and all that remain are the SAG forms, they've been moved to Chapter 12 (Principal Talent).

Some of the new documents include a Competitive Bid Form, a Loss & Damage Report Form, a Confidentiality Agreement, a Deferral Agreement, a five-page generic insurance application, a Parental Consent Form and a Nudity Release. Several of the forms have been updated, including the Call Sheet and Production Report.

As with all previous editions, you'll find a lot of standard forms and a few that I created (like the Cast Information Sheet) just to make my (and your) job(s) a little easier. Use them as they are or as templates to create your own. The thing about forms that most people don't get is that if you'll take the time to fill out the ones you don't have to, it'll save you time in the long run in terms of keeping more organized and being able to better manage the voluminous amount of details associated with each production.

I hope you find them helpful!