

THE COWBOY WAY
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Q: Any thoughts on *Triggerstreet.com*, Kevin Spacey's website, where screenwriters upload their work for peers to critique?

Remember that little file-sharing blip on the Internet map a few years back that went by the name of *Napster*? Remember how all the ambitious little undiscovered bands jumped at the opportunity to give anybody and everybody the chance to hear their music and share it with their neighbors? Remember how the bigger bands that had long established themselves as guaranteed moneymakers balked at the thought of untold millions being able to download their material for free? Well, keep all this in mind when you're thinking about the pros and cons of a website offering a writer the opportunity to upload their script for mass viewing.

If your writing career is currently the equivalent of that garage band down the street, then any chance at letting more eyes see your work (and offer you productive feedback) is a good thing. If you've already spent years perfecting your craft and refining the number of people you're comfortable lending your script to—a small handful of trusted confidants—then there is little reason for you to lease your material out for broader perusal. *Metallica* doesn't want anybody but their families and their managers hearing their newest song before its release. This is because the song they're writing just happens to be a *Metallica* song: a known commodity that is guaranteed to be worth a good deal of money just as soon as it's released. It's just smart business: why tinker with a commodity that's already sellable.

Now let's be honest and admit that the vast majority of aspiring writers out there should likely not consider themselves a *Metallica* of the brad-bound page. If you're a struggling writer just trying to get ahead, then a forum such as *Triggerstreet.com* might just be the perfect opportunity for you to get your material read and even considered by people that might or might not have more clout than you do within the industry.

That said, it would be best for any writer wanting to put their words out there to realize that once you place those pages on the block there is always a certain amount of risk involved. This holds for every time a writer submits a script to an agent, a manager, a producer, an actor, a friend or a stranger. Unless the person that picks up your script (hardcopy or electronic) has offered you a signed release protecting your original material, there's always going to be the risk that someone can take what they read and use it to their own ends.

Having your script pre-protected through copyright and WGA submission is always a good idea, but even then there are dangers involved. Just be aware and always keep in mind who is reading your script and what they might be able to offer you for that chance.

Only you can decide if the potential opportunities are going to be worth any of the small but unavoidable risks.

Q: What about when your Rep doesn't want to take something wide, but you feel strongly enough about the piece to want to send it to your own contacts whom you've known for some time—do you send it yourself?

Let's cut to the chase and admit that this dilemma can't really be about the submission pattern for one single script. In my experience, it's fairly difficult to reach this kind of an impasse with your agent without more than a little bit of buildup. When you hire a party (whether agent, manager or entertainment lawyer) to represent your material and your interests as a writer, there is a certain amount of trust and respect you're handing over with each finished script. That representative is being offered a portion of your own potential earnings based on the assumption that he can do a better job soliciting interest for your material than you would be able to by yourself. If you've reached a place in relation to your agent that you either no longer respect his professional opinion or trust his intention toward you, then something certainly needs to be done.

You have a number of options in this scenario, but none of them should include sending your script out behind your agent's back. Simply decide whether you're willing to trust your agent or not, and, if you decide you no longer can, sever ties with him in as amicable a fashion as possible. But please realize that dropping your agent is not the same thing as being capable of representing yourself. Find a new representative whose opinion you trust, have him do his job and send your script to the contacts you both agree should receive them.

One final thought: if you continue to find yourself in a difference of opinion with your new representation as to how widely your scripts should be submitted, then you might want to consider that other possibility ... you should shut up and let your agent do the job you're paying him to do.