



ENTERPRISE

Making It

Paving Her Way

Movie producer carves out a low-budget niche to make big strides in Hollywood

By Bridget McCrea

Being able to produce quality movies on tight budgets is a source of pride for Effie T. Brown, 34, president and founder of Los Angeles-based Duly Noted Inc. In fact, she enjoys the responsibility and challenges that come her way as her full-service movie production firm handles everything from hiring writers and directors to delivering the film to the distributor -- all on shoestring budgets.

For example, take *Stranger Inside*, which Brown produced for HBO Films. "Their average film costs about \$15 million to \$18 million to make, and we were able to come in with one that cost between \$2 million and \$3 million," says Brown. "My motto is, 'Give us \$5 million and we'll give you a badass movie.'" When selecting projects to work on, Brown looks for character-driven stories that carry a message and that have commercial appeal. Her past projects have included *Real Women Have Curves* and *Everyday People*, and upcoming films include *Rocket Science* and *Exactly Like You (The Billy Tipton Story)*.

Brown financed her endeavor with \$50,000 from her own savings and with the money generated through freelance projects she was already working on with HBO Films.

"I've been fortunate to make a string of films, year after year, to keep my business going," says Brown, whose business generated \$5 million in revenues last year and projects revenues of \$6 million in 2006. We're making quality films that go to festivals, win awards, and hit people's 'best of' lists."

Just a few months shy of graduating from Loyola Marymount University with a major in film and a minor in theater, and lacking any real connections in the film business, Brown made a cold call to the Black Business Bureau in 1993. Using her BBB connection, she was able to hook up with producer Loretha Jones, now senior vice president at MTV Films and MTV Studios.

At the time, Jones was working on the Robert Townsend film *The Five Heartbeats* and needed someone like Brown to help produce the movie. "I was just a black girl from New Jersey, an army brat. I didn't come from a showbiz family," says Brown. "I decided to just take a shot by making that call."

That first film turned into a string of projects for Brown, who incorporated her full-service production firm in 2001. One year later, Brown introduced her four-employee company to the world at the Sundance Film Festival with *Stranger Inside*, a movie about a woman reconciling with her long-lost mother in prison.

Now, Brown is looking to take her firm to the next level by enlisting investors who, based on her two-year track record of successful films, will invest in a package of films (rather than just one at a time). She sees 2006 as a pivotal year, based on two new films that are currently underway: *Rocket Science*, slated to come out in the fall, and *Exactly Like You*, expected to be out next year. "By the end of this year," says Brown, "I'd like to lock down an angel investor who can serve as a one-stop shop for my projects."

Having worked with Brown for several years now, Maud Nadler, senior vice president at Los Angeles-based Independent Productions, a division of HBO Films, sees no limit to what this ambitious film producer can do. "Effie can write her own ticket," says Nadler, who is particularly impressed by Brown's determination to stick with low-budget movies despite her ability to manage a "big career" as a big-budget film producer.

Duly Noted Inc.; 5225 Wilshire Blvd. # 403, Los Angeles, CA 90036; 323-525-1855, www.dulynotedinc.com

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