



**Jonathan Rand, CEO
Playscripts, Inc.**

www.playscripts.com

EDUCATION: BA, Theatre Arts,
University of Pennsylvania

HOMETOWN: Jacksonville, FL

CURRENT HOME: New York City

ANNUAL SALES: Passed \$1
million annual revenue some years
ago and still continuing to grow
rapidly.

**ADVICE FOR ASPIRING ARTS
ENTREPRENEURS:**

- Immerse yourself in the field you're interested in.
- Apply for jobs and internships in the industry.
- Attend relevant events and fundraisers.
- Interact as much as possible with like-minded people.
- The more you soak up, the more prepared you'll be to venture out on your own.
- Apply to be a Playscripts intern!

Playwright Taps Power of Web to Create New Way of Marketing Plays

by Chris Hardin

On his way to becoming a published playwright, young Jonathan Rand discovered that traditional marketing methods might not be suitable for untested playwrights like himself. His innovative solution gave birth to Playscripts, Inc., and now Rand is not only a playwright, but also the chief executive officer of a thriving corporation.

When Jonathan and his older brother, Doug, were in high school in Florida, they each wrote a play. Both plays were produced and won a national competition. When Doug won in 1994, his play was signed by a traditional play publisher. However, when Jonathan won in 1997, the publication deal was no longer a part of the competition, so he had to submit his play to various publishers and await word.

Jonathan enrolled as a student at the University of Pennsylvania and, during his freshman year, he came up with an idea to promote his award-winning play. He used his allotment of free student Web space to post the first few scenes of the play.

"If a visitor wanted to read the rest of the play, I'd grant them access to the full version," Jonathan recalls. "If they wanted to produce the play, I'd have them mail me a nominal royalty check."

Fast-forward one year and Jonathan's play had been produced more than 100 times in 12 countries, while his brother's play had seen only about five productions in North America.

"Doug and I were flabbergasted by this gap," Jonathan says. "Doug's play was supposed to be made in the shade, having been published, while my play – without a scrap of marketing muscle behind it – was thriving to a shocking degree."

The brothers began to examine the differences between their two plays. What they soon came to realize was that a play like Doug's, marketed in the traditional way, had to rely on a short synopsis buried in the middle of a massive catalog in order to be selected by potential producers. On the other hand, prospective customers for Jonathan's play were immediately given the opportunity to read the playwright's actual words before making a decision.

"It was at that point," says Jonathan, "that Doug and I looked around at how play publishers were promoting their titles, and recognized that none of them were using the Web effectively. Their websites were mere carbon copies of their hard-copy catalogs, with no easy way to determine what to purchase."

Armed with this information and a vision of how to change things, Jonathan and his brother founded Playscripts, Inc., in 1998, with their first offering of nine plays released in 2000. The principle behind the company is to offer the same services of a traditional play publisher, using unique and innovative promotional tools to effectively unite plays with theatres. One of their first innovations was to provide producers with the ability to read up to 90 percent of each play online for free, while encrypting these samples against printing and copying.

Since their humble first release, Playscripts, Inc., has expanded in nine years to include 1,333 plays by 643 authors. The company also has an advisory board made up of a veritable "who's who" of the American theatre – major playwrights and theatre artists including Harold Prince, Tony Kushner, Alfred Uhry, Neil Simon and

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Playscripts

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Theresa Rebeck.

The staff at Playscripts fields a large number of incoming play submissions and accepts a small subset for publication. The author grants the company the right to license performances of the play to theatres and to publish and distribute books. Once the play is published, Playscripts takes all the orders for performance rights and books, and continuously markets the play through targeted catalog mailings, advertisements, theatre festivals and a wide range of online services.

Jonathan believes that the fact that he and his brother are playwrights is a major factor in their entrepreneurial success as publishers.

“We have direct experience in what playwrights and theatre consumers are looking for and how they want to be treated, because we’ve been there ourselves,” Jonathan notes.

In addition to running Playscripts, Jonathan is an active playwright whose newest work is *How to Succeed in High School without Really Trying*. He wrote five of the 10 most produced short plays in high schools last year, according to a national survey by *Dramatics* magazine. His play *Check Please* was ranked No. 1.

Jonathan says his training at the Univer-

sity of Pennsylvania also has been a great asset for his company.

“My degree built a solid foundation...,” Jonathan says. “I regularly use lessons learned from my playwriting professor, Michael Hollinger – whose plays we’ve since published!”

Knowing theatre history also was crucial to the company’s success, he says.

“It’s invaluable to comprehend and appreciate the origins of anything before paving your own way,” he says.

In the early days, Jonathan found it difficult to delegate responsibility at Playscripts.

“Whenever I create something, I want it to be my own,” he says.

However, he gradually overcame his struggle as the company was able to hire a hard-working staff in whom he has full confidence. Since then, he seems to enjoy the freedom of running his own company.

“I like that we never have to rest on our laurels and can always be improving and innovating,” he says. “It’s gratifying to know that all the hard work directly results in so many positives for so many people.” ■

Chris Hardin is an assistant professor of voice and movement at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN, and a member of SETC’s Publications Committee.