

New efforts to boost good storytelling in entertainment

Masterclass with Star Trek scriptwriter and programme to train film scriptwriters to apply their skills to games launched

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Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates declared that “content is king” in an essay written in 1996. Twenty years later, that assertion remains as spot-on as ever.

At the opening ceremony of the Asia TV Forum & Market (ATF) and ScreenSingapore at Marina Bay Sands Convention Centre yesterday, Minister of State for Communications and Information, and Health Chee Hong Tat reiterated

the importance of good storytelling.

He pointed out that while traditional TV and film business models have been challenged by new entrants and viewers are consuming content in new ways, one thing remains constant – “the need for good content”.

To that end, he announced the launch of WritersLab, a scriptwriting masterclass, and the introduction of a Professional Conversion Programme next year, which helps TV and film scriptwriters to apply their skills to the fast-growing gaming sector.

This is the 17th edition of ATF and the sixth edition of ScreenSingapore, which are billed as Asia’s premier media and entertainment content market and conference.

ATF started on Tuesday and ScreenSingapore started yesterday. Both end tomorrow.

They come under the umbrella of the Singapore Media Festival hosted by the Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA).

Organisers are expecting more than 5,000 attendees to the largest combined market to date, with 738 exhibiting companies.

The WritersLab programme will be launched by IMDA in collaboration with Lasalle College of the Arts to hone storytelling skills for television and online platforms. Up to three scripts will be produced to premiere on Mediacorp’s online Toggle platform.

Eight participants have been selected to take part in the 10-week course from Jan 9 to March 17 next year. They will be mentored by, among others, American Shari Goodhart, whose writing credits for TV include sci-fi series Star Trek: The Next Generation in 1990

and sci-fi animation Aeon Flux in 1995.

Home-grown film-maker Lim Jen Nee, 39, who had previously written the script for the mystery drama film, Truth Be Told (2007), is among those selected for the programme.

She called the initiative a timely one and told The Straits Times: “I’m looking for help with how to develop authentic characters as I think we’re too plot-driven most of the time. I hope to get a great script out of this.”

In May this year, content producer and distributor mm2 Entertainment had announced a partnership with IMDA to develop Chinese-language scriptwriting talent for the Singapore film industry in a three-year, \$8-million programme. It includes a six-month-long Scriptwriter’s Lab to develop feature film scripts.

In his address, Mr Chee also highlighted the gaming industry as he noted that Singapore companies such as The Gentlebros and XII Braves have developed games including Slashy Hero and Valiant Force, which have been well-received here and overseas.

To help build a “sustainable talent pipeline of game writers and developers in Singapore”, Mr Chee said, the Professional Conversion Programme will train TV and film scriptwriters to apply their skills to the medium of games.

He added: “We are confident that if we create the right conditions, nurture our talent and provide the environment for them to grow and innovate, they will create something of value that can benefit both consumers in Singapore and overseas.”

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