

Participant Productions Inc. - Media Giraffe Profile

Participant Productions Inc.

Jeff Skoll - Founder

"My thesis is that people want to see films that will not only entertain them, but also give them hope and inspire them."

Jeff Skoll, in a December, 2003, interview on the PROFIT Magazine website

"In the 1990's I helped to create a company called eBay that made it possible for people to trade, discover common interests, and foster community. eBay's success was founded on our belief that people are basically good and can be trusted to do the right thing not only for themselves, but also for the world around them."
Skoll, in a an introduction to New Heroes "

Address: 335 N. Maple Drive, Suite 245

Location: Beverly Hills, CA, 90210

Email: info@participantproductions.com

Website: <http://www.skollfoundation.org/>, www.participantproductions.com/company/About+Participant/, www.participant.net

Work: 310-550-5100

Cell: xx

About

In his talk at the 2007 TED Conference, Skoll says he has been referred to by people in the media industry as an "enigma." What drives him?

He says that what drives him is a vision of the future, which he believes we all share: one of peace, prosperity and sustainability, which if accomplished, can then lead to what he calls "Humanity 2.0."

Growing up, Skoll read authors like James A. Michener, James Clavell and Ayn Rand, who all wrote about worlds that seemed "small and interconnected." He believes that if he himself could make his own "small and interconnected" stories, he could make a difference in the world. He sought to become financially independent so he could begin to write his stories.

This all leads to his wake up call. When Skoll was only 14, his dad announced he had cancer. Skoll came to the realization that one never knows how much time he has left. Skoll studied engineering and became involved in companies he believed would lead to financial freedom.

He went to Stanford University to study business, where he became friends with Pierre Omidyar , the co-founder of eBay, which they created in 1996. In 1998 the company went public and became one of the best known companies in the world. eBay's success changed his world entirely. He now had an abundance of resources which he wanted to share with the world. Around this time he met John Gardner, the architect of the Great Society Programs under Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1960s. Skoll asked him what he could do to

make a difference in the long term issues facing humanity. Gardner replied, "Bet on good people doing good things."

With that advice, Skoll founded the Skoll Foundation (1999), which acknowledged non-profit innovators who were using their business skills to make a difference in the world. These social entrepreneurs include Muhammed Yunus (Grameen Bank), Ann Cotton (CAMFED), and Victoria Hale (Institute for One World Health).

The Skoll Foundation comes together in a philosophy of change, which he calls Invest, Connect, Celebrate. *Invest* in people you see making a change in the world, *connect* them together with each other through conferences, and them *celebrate* them and tell their stories.

This last part, Celebrate, brought him back to his original idea of creating stories to make a difference in the world. He realized that instead of him writing the stories himself, he could find writers who would tell these stories, and then use film and television to reach people in a big way. He thought about the films that inspired him, like *Gandhi* and *Schindlers List*, and wondered who was doing these films today. In 2003 he talked about starting a pro-social media company, and in 2004 he launched Participant Productions, a global media company focused on the public interest. Its mission is to produce entertainment that inspires social change. Not only does he want audiences to see these movies, he wants people to get involved and contribute to these stories themselves.

In 2005, Participant Productions launched their first slate of films: *Murderball*, *North Country*, *Syriana* and *Good Night, and Good Luck*, four movies that were noticed and earned 11 Oscar Nominations that year.

Participant Productions also produced *An Inconvenient Truth*, the Academy Award winning documentary on global warming narrated by Al Gore. The company currently has ten films in production and development, two of them being *Charlie Wilson's War* starring Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts, and *The Kite Runner* based on Khaled Hosseini's best-selling novel, movies both based in the Middle East. The company is also working on a documentary following Jimmy Carter and his most recent controversial book tour for *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*.

Skoll concludes that "Everybody has the opportunity to make change in their own way, there's never one right way to make change." If people work together, great things can happen.

UPDATE:

Jeff Skoll of the Skoll Foundation and founder of Participant Productions and eBay, talks about making movies that make change at the 2007 TED Conference. [Click here to watch.](#)

Jeff Skoll, born in Canada and educated as an electrical engineer, tried writing, moved to San Jose, Calif., got a Stanford MBA, worked briefly for Knight-Ridder newspapers and then became president of eBay. By the time the company went public, Skoll found himself worth billions. He now heads Participant Productions LLC, a Beverly Hills-based film production company, and the San Jose-based Skoll Foundation, with \$300 million in assets. One of its projects was underwriting of a PBS series, "The New Heroes" about social entrepreneurs worldwide.

WikiPedia profile of Jeff Skoll

The Skoll Foundation's mission is to advance systemic change to benefit communities around the world by investing in, connecting and celebrating social entrepreneurs.

Skoll Foundation
250 University Avenue, Suite 200
Palo Alto, CA 94301
tel: 650.331.1031

BELOW FROM:

<http://www.dailytelegraph.news.com.au/story/0,20281,17926229-5001026,00.html>

Charlize holds her own in harsh old Hollywood

By MICHAEL BODEY

January 25, 2006,br>

SHE'S one of the world's most beautiful actresses, a model who moved to Hollywood as an 18-year-old. But somehow, Charlize Theron hasn't been sexually harassed.

Not even in Los Angeles, a town known for its lechery, and not in the circumstances portrayed in her latest film, *North Country*, about the American miners who fought the first major successful sexual harassment case in America.

"I feel fortunate I've never been in any circumstances like women in the film," she said. "Also a lot of it has to do with some people having a bit more strength. When you have the luxury to stand up for yourself without any harsh consequences, it's easier. Those miners had families to feed. There was never room for anything like that to happen to me because I had a mother who instilled in me at a young age that that doesn't happen."

North Country, the latest film by Whale Rider's Niki Caro, is not a typical Hollywood film, if only because it was funded by former eBay president Jeff Skoll, estimated to be worth \$US3.5 billion (\$4.65 billion). He established Participant Productions to make socially-minded, political films. It has probable Oscar nominees *Good Night, And Good Luck* and *Murderball* to its name.

"Jeff said he's made his money and he wanted to do something that makes him feel good and is not just arty so nobody's going to see these movies," Theron said. "They're showing that these kinds of films are financially viable."

Just don't ask Theron about Skoll's former business. She's never "eBayed". "I'm technology illiterate," she laughed. "I still look at a fax and go "Wow"."

BELOW EXCERPTED FROM THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060123/ENT02/601230366/1032/ENT>

Sundance Film Festival

By Sean P. Means / Salt Lake Tribune

PARK CITY - Can a movie change the world? Robert Redford, who has tried a few times, calls himself a "cynical optimist" on the subject.

"I don't know how much films actually impact social movements. Fashion, maybe," Redford said at a panel discussion Saturday at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. "Did 'All the President's Men' really change journalism?" Redford asked. "Did the film impact anybody but maybe a bunch of young journalists who got into journalism for the wrong reasons because they thought there was glamour there? I don't know. Did 'The Candidate' change anything? No."

Not that filmmakers shouldn't try. "It's not only possible but actually exciting to entertain and inform at the same time," Redford said.

One producer who is trying is Jeff Skoll, who used some of the money he made as eBay's first president to create Participant Productions, which aims to make movies that are socially aware as well as profitable. "The goal is social change," Skoll said. "If we do a movie that doesn't have that impact, then we've failed, no matter how commercially successful that film has been."

In 2005, Participant produced four movies - the sexual-harassment drama "*North Country*," the oil-and-politics thriller "*Syriana*," the wheelchair-rugby documentary "*Murderball*" and one of the year's top Oscar prospects, George Clooney's examination of Edward R. Murrow's challenge to McCarthyism, "*Good Night, and Good Luck*."

For each film, Skoll said, the company also launched a campaign to raise awareness of a related social issue: citizen journalism in the case of "Good Night, and Good Luck," energy independence with "Syriana," and sexual harassment and women's equality with "North Country."

It's impossible to say what effect those movies had in raising awareness of those issues, but Skoll offered an anecdotal example: Last fall's release of "North Country," a movie about the first class-action lawsuit filed for sexual harassment, coincided with congressional debate over renewal of the Violence Against Women Act. The renewal was passed, and President Bush signed it into law earlier this month.

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