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New \$25M fund launched to back film projects

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Atlanta-based RoadShow Management Partners is launching a \$25 million film fund to back small independent projects in the Peach State.

The investment fund was founded by [Whit Blakeley](#), a career coach of over 30 years and founder of The Ritz Group, a nonprofit that connects entrepreneurs with private equity.

"I'm constantly looking for ways to mitigate risk, because film is a very risky investment, particularly studio projects," Blakeley said.

Blakeley has partnered with startup Gramarye Media, which will receive \$5 million of the initial funding, to kick off the fund's first projects.

Gramarye aims to change the way film franchises are created by evaluating the potential of book manuscripts before they hit shelves.

Roadshow's partnership with Gramarye will allow investors to take money that otherwise would be used to fund one film and instead invest it in several projects with the potential to become cross-media event franchises.

Gramarye CEO [John Adcox](#) likens the film fund to investing in a startup incubator like [TechStars](#) rather than a single promising startup.

"The rigorous process increases the odds of success significantly, from under 5 percent to around 80 percent," Adcox said. "Savvy investors know that film is one of the very few investments that is literally all or nothing. If the film misses, the investment is gone."

The film fund will specialize in small budget films that target the 18- to 35-year-old demographic, primarily in the horror/thriller, romantic comedy or faith- and value-based genres. Films in these genres tend to cost less and make more money.

"[These genres] have more in common than not, I would argue, if you take out the content," Adcox said. "They often have lower budgets, fewer locations, simple marketing strategies."

In the fund's first phase, Gramarye will give Roadshow's investors the opportunity to spread their risk over four intellectual properties and turn the hits into films. Phase two will be a \$26 million raise that will be spread over 24 projects.



SPECIAL

John Adcox of Gramarye Media, left, and Whit Blakeley.

“If one of the films is successful, we have a potential for a franchise that is worth billions,” Adcox said.

Gramarye looks for projects that could attract dedicated legions of fans, like “Star Wars.”

“The trick is finding those core audiences that congregate, those communities that form,” Adcox said. “Think Dragon Con, think a ‘Harry Potter’ pub crawl. We define larger intellectual properties that are the right sort of books to make these communities passionate and adapt them with integrity, so we don’t dilute the reasons they’re passionate.”

The remaining \$20 million of the fund’s first phase will be dedicated to other original independent projects. Blakeley said he has had about \$12 million in commitments since January 2017, and another group is interested in investing the full \$25 million by itself.

Despite boasting a film industry with an economic impact of \$9.5 billion, Georgia is still producing little content of its own. Blakeley pointed to [Apple](#), [Netflix](#) and Amazon’s recent multibillion dollar investments in original content as proof that “content is king.”

“Content is an important piece that is missing here,” Blakeley said.

Blakeley hopes the fund will help entice the independent film industry to build a base in Georgia, where he says it costs just one-third of what it costs to make a movie in Hollywood.

Another goal for Roadshow is to strengthen the industry’s infrastructure, so that if something happens to the Georgia’s lucrative film tax incentive, film projects here won’t completely dry up.

“So many film companies come here, shoot and go back to L.A. and New York after they’ve gotten their generous tax credit,” Blakeley said. “We want to build a lasting asset here, so that if some other state comes up with a better tax incentive, there will still be an industry here in Georgia because of the desirability of living here, the low cost of production and all the support here for the industry,”

Ellie Hensley
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