

# "A Swarm of Angels is an agile raptor compared to the ponderous diplodocus of Hollywood"

## Matt Hanson

[www.aswarmofangels.com](http://www.aswarmofangels.com)

Film producer and director Matt Hanson is a pioneer of digital film. **Oliver Lindberg** meets him as he embarks on his most ambitious project yet, aiming to use the power of the internet to make a £1m movie and give it away to one million people in a year

**Matt Hanson has got a headache. He should really be working on A Swarm of Angels, his venture to reinvent cinema for the digital age and make movie history; but he sustained a mild concussion over the weekend (too much dancing), and he has to limit his screen time to recuperate.**

Matt's a bit annoyed about this turn of events because his project depends on the internet. A Swarm of Angels will produce a £1m feature film, to be distributed freely to one million people in one year, under a Creative Commons licence. The film will be funded by small donations from 50,000 people, gathered through the net, who can also take part in the production process.

It's a massive project, and one that might sound like it's born out of a madman's ramblings, but the Brighton-based pioneer is an accomplished filmmaker. He founded the influential onedotzero digital film festival and has directed dozens of short films (including the award-winning *Salaryman 6*), all while writing a series of books on the future of film. So we had to ask: why feature films, and why the internet?

"The idea came to me when I wrote a book called *The End of Celluloid: Film Futures in the Digital Age*,"

Matt says. "Recently, with the advent of the social web and online communities like Flickr and MySpace, I thought: 'There's all the technology here for me to put my ideas into practice in a really radical way.'"

"The standard feature filmmaking route felt too traditional. I always try to push the boundaries and be at the cutting edge of the digital arena. So this would be a great way to make my first feature film – it feels completely compatible with my outlook and everything I've done before. It's like a natural outgrowth, an extension."

It doesn't take a genius to figure out that Matt is slightly obsessed with the whole Web 2.0 hype. A Swarm of Angels is partly inspired by The Million Dollar Homepage ([www.milliondollarhomepage.com](http://www.milliondollarhomepage.com)), and on his project's website, Matt calls the future of film Cinema 2.0. "Obviously, Web 2.0 is all about collaboration, creative communities and the idea of crowd sourcing," he says. "There's a lot of expertise in the crowd and you can tap into that through the net. It's also a fantastic opportunity for developing exclusive communities."

"I need 50,000 people to fund this £1m project, and those 50,000 are an exclusive community. That's about

the size of a football crowd on a Saturday afternoon, but on the internet and with a global audience, that's not very much; and there's a lot of people who are excited about the idea of being part of an exclusive community and wanting to be involved in a very innovative feature film."

### Join the swarm

Anybody who wants to join Matt's community (and become "an angel in the virtual swarm", as he puts it) needs to pay £25 to help fund the project. You get audio and video podcasts of exclusive material as part of this subscription, as well as merchandise. More importantly, however, you can participate in the film's production. Members are signed up in batches (first 100, then 1,000, 5,000, 25,000, and finally 50,000): the earlier you join, the more involved you can be.

The first 1,000 supporters, for example, become part of a gated community called the Nine Orders, where they get a say in the project's construction and can put themselves up for roles within the production. "The leader of the Nine Orders bulletin board is in Honolulu, which is great because he can look at the board while I'm asleep," Matt explains. "And there's a photographer in Tokyo who can scout for locations and take photos. He can post those in our private group on Flickr. I've got people from Chile, Australia, New Zealand and China, which is quite amazing, because I've really only done one major promotion on the internet,

# “The standard feature filmmaking route felt too traditional”

**Matt Hanson** The onedotzero founder is seeking 50,000 backers for his first full-length movie

Photography / Rob Scott

through blogging. I haven't touched any of the mainstream press yet, because I want to use the power of the internet.”

Among the most high-profile people Matt has got on board are the comic book writer Warren Ellis; digital film pioneer Tommy Pallotta, who has produced the \$8m Richard Linklater animation *A Scanner Darkly*; and writer, actor and Boing Boing co-editor Cory Doctorow. The Kleptones, best known for their mash-ups, are working on the soundtrack.

Although Matt is optimistic that he'll get to 50,000 people (“I've already got 600 people when there's no trailer”), he admits that the project is currently in its least tangible phase, where it's hard to grasp quickly how the project works. “But the amazing thing is that we've already got more money than someone like Darren Aronofsky got for his first feature film, *π* – and we don't have a script yet.”

### The story unfolds...

The script, in fact, is part of the problem. Matt thinks that a lot more people will get his vision once they see the scripts and trailers, which he'll seed around YouTube and similar video sites. The self-proclaimed film futurist promises “a thriller with certain sci-fi elements”, but there's no actual script in place as yet.

Prospective outlines have been posted on the

forum ([www.aswarmofangels.com/thenineorders](http://www.aswarmofangels.com/thenineorders)).

*The Unfold* is about “a disaffected musician who receives a phone call from his mother, who everyone believed died five years ago, triggering a search to rescue her inside ‘The Fold’”. The other script, called *The Glitch*, starts: “In a world of the wireless, the powerless and the loveless, three strangers all make a connection that sets their world spiralling out of control.” Eventually, Matt will post the initial drafts on a wiki – but to prevent this experiment from descending into chaos, Matt will be a benevolent dictator approving any changes.

In its later stages, *A Swarm of Angels* will go viral: Matt and his team are going to use Digg and other aggregator sites, which monitor buzz on the internet, to promote the film. Once the film is out – and if everything goes according to plan, this will be in time for the Cannes and Venice film festivals next year – people will be encouraged to remix it. “People can actually use the film for what they want,” says Matt. “When you remix *Star Wars* or *Pulp Fiction*, another company owns it and it's illegal.” There will also be spin-off media for mobile phones, so that you can watch the whole film on the move.

*A Swarm of Angels* is also an artistic statement on Hollywood. “The film industry really needs to embrace the internet,” sighs Matt, “and the way to do this isn't

by licensing movie download sites, where a film costs more than a DVD. That's totally not the way to go. I think they will soon realise that, but they haven't worked out their business model yet. It takes people like me, who are outside the system, to do that. *A Swarm of Angels* is a raptor – more agile and quicker thinking – compared to the diplodocus of Hollywood, which is ponderous because of its size, and the blockbuster model it has created where films are a big bang or a bust.” Whether the raptor can really reinvent the future of film, we'll all discover in about a year. Stay tuned... ●



### Matt Hanson

**Job** Film producer

**Age** 34

**First job** Film critic

**Education** BSc Business Management at Kings College, University of London

**Short films produced** *Salaryman 6*, *City of Hollow Mountains*, *400 Anarchists*, *Thumbnail Express*, *Underdog*

**Favourite film** *Blade Runner*

**Blog** [www.eternalgaze.net](http://www.eternalgaze.net)