

Showtime for B.C.'s corporate film industry

Rise of YouTube, more Internet bandwidth and entertainment industry struggles helping build sector focused on company productions

By Jenny Wagler

Buoyed by the rise of YouTube and the growing popularity of digital advertising, Vancouver's corporate filmmakers are riding the growth curve of an expanding industry.

"We believe that we're in one of the best growth media in the world," said **Martin Fisher**, founder and CEO of Vancouver-based **On Demand Production Network** (ODPN).

Most of ODPN's work centres around corporate videos and TV commercials, but it also operates music video brand **Insider Films** and ideas studio **Pink Buffalo Films**. In five years of operation, Fisher said ODPN has tripled its full-time staff to 12 employees and expanded its contractor pool to 80.

"We got into an industry that, when we started, YouTube was just a baby, so we knew there was a lot of room for growth," Fisher said.

"We're still only at 50% or 60% market acceptance that people need [corporate film]."

Colter Ripley is a producer at **Video in Vancouver**, a three-year-old corporate film company. He said the corporate film industry is being propelled forward by YouTube and Internet bandwidth gains that have made videos accessible to the majority of Internet users.

"I think video production is the bomb; it's the thing; it's really taking off right now," Ripley said, pointing out that Video in

Vancouver's revenue has grown 40% in the past 12 months.

He added that the company's staff has increased this year to four full-time employees from three.

Basetwo Media Inc. and **Go 2 Productions, Inc.**, perhaps the two most established corporate video shops in town, have also grown recently – particularly in the wake of the recession, which hit ad dollars and briefly slowed corporate film companies' momentum.

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co-founder and sales manager,
Basetwo Media

Jeff Pelletier, Basetwo's co-founder and sales manager, said the company's revenue dipped in 2009 when marketing budgets got cut back.

But he said the 2010 Olympics improved business by providing Basetwo with opportunities to crew and provide production support to international producers in town for the Games.

Pelletier added that since fall 2010, the corporate video business has been growing again. This year, he said, Basetwo has hired two new employees and now has seven full-time staff.



Gaining altitude: Basetwo Media incorporated a helicopter film shoot this year in a project for Colliers International

Ross Huguet is president and partner of Go 2 Productions, which has carved out a niche in animated TV commercials and corporate films. Its customer base is primarily U.S.

Huguet said since its 1997 incorporation, the company has grown from two full-time staff to 15 and is looking to hire more.

While the corporate film business is more closely aligned to advertising than to film, Vancouver's corporate filmmakers say recent film industry struggles have added new talent and competition to the local corporate film market.

"Corporate work tends to be a fallback for a lot of people in the film industry, which can create fly-by-night competition," said Pelletier.

"But it took us years to build

up the brand equity that we have, so we don't really see that as competition – it's more noise in the marketplace, to be honest."

Pelletier said film industry struggles have also increased the number of resumes he receives, but he added that film industry applicants are often overqualified.

"If they've been directing feature films for 10 years, and then they want to direct corporate; usually we know that they're not trying to make a career out of it, so it's not somebody that we're going to invest in necessarily."

But Fisher is positive about the talent influx.

"I see it as a bit of an opportunity for some great talent on the street that's half open-minded to looking at some other things [outside the film industry]."

The advent of cheaper, higher-quality video cameras has also brought new players into the corporate film market.

That trend has raised concerns at the **BC Professional Videographers Association** (BCPVA), which represents some of the smaller corporate film players in town.

"Anyone can jump into this market and call themselves a videographer, but that doesn't mean that they know what they're doing," said BCPVA spokeswoman **Sue Greening**, who also runs corporate video shop **Reeltime Videoworks**.

Fisher agreed that technology gains mean "anybody with a Mac and a website can be a production company."

But he argued that those changes can help the industry.

"We think that's encouraging more people to look at the space, and, if anything, that helps our space."

Fisher added that the market distinguishes between amateur and professional production.

"There's a certain quality of work that you need to work with professionals on," he said.

"That's where we drive our business."

As to the future of the corporate film market, Fisher said there's a lot of room for growth.

"We could have On Demands in every city across the country," he said. "It's just a matter of how many hours you want to sleep at night." ■

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