



Thinking like re:think

by: Lindsay Gibb Oct 29, 2009

Paula Hutchinson wishes she could clone herself. She probably wishes she could clone her partner in re:think Entertainment Inc., Susan Boshcoff, as well. The two are incredibly busy right now, having grown their distribution business over the last six years into a production/distribution company covering a range of genres from factual to children's programming. Hutchinson spoke with *realscreen* about what has changed over the years since they launched and what audiences and broadcasters are looking for in non-fiction.

How do you and Susan balance the workload?

Because we're a small company we've got to split up the interests. We're both producers and we both have distribution backgrounds. Susan's purview is hands-on development and production [and] I handle sales of finished product and also acquisitions. I'm also executive producing *Shreducation* [a reality series focusing on young pro-snowboarders]. Having said that, it's a little hard to create those dividing lines quite as clearly as they're drawn in larger production/distribution companies. You have to have your foot in all ponds in order to know what's going on. *Shreducation* certainly has been a great project for us this year. We've got a second season in post right now and third season in pre-production. Nickelodeon and Disney XD have picked those up.

You're moving away from taking on straight one-off docs and are focusing more on series. What triggered this decision?

It's a practical move. Documentaries are still an area of great love for us, we both love them and we both watch them. We'd both love to be able to afford to produce them. But to produce a documentary in today's market takes a long time [and] takes a chunk of change. In order to broaden our range, broaden our scope and broaden our real remit, it's important for us to stick to things that are going to make us the most money and still maintain our creative values. [Thus,] one-off documentaries we're just not focusing on anymore, unfortunately. We're going to be looking at entertainment series, lifestyle series, [and] children's programming. A

lot of broadcasters are looking, watching [the success of] strands for the tweens and the teens. We've been quite successful with Nat Geo's tween strand; we've been successful with Disney and Nickelodeon to date. So we're really thinking that this is a good direction for us. We can continue along those lines and be able to create something independently that will meet those needs.

You work with both factual and children's programs. Which is more in demand right now?

To be honest with you I find that there's a lot of factual programming out there, a lot of series, but there's a certain line drawn because of the way that budgets are performing, or not performing internationally.

There was a time when factual programming could be made fairly inexpensively and would work well for lifestyle channels around the world. But the remits have become very specific and the quality of programming, I find, is quite high. So in order to have programs that are going to work internationally as well as domestically - we've said this all along - we prefer to work with producers from the beginning so we can look at those international markets and prepare for them. Look at specific broadcasters and create specifically for them, as opposed to going to a market with your basket full of factual going, "Who wants it? Who would like this cooking series? Any takers? Anyone? Bueller?" (laughs)

What was the mandate for re:think when you formed and how has it changed?

It's never been our objective to stuff our catalog with programming that we think we may or may not be able to sell. We've always been very particular about what we take on and the genres we take on in terms of their marketability. [We've always had] the goal in mind that we would be producing with other people and producing our own programming. The first three or four years of the company we mostly did distribution, although we did do some development. Recently it's become more of an even mix of both.

Six years on, we're exactly where we'd hoped we'd be. Still small, but the smallness gives us the freedom to do the projects that we want to do. We also made it our goal from the very beginning that we would work internationally because [with] the Canadian market, to depend on it solely for your income is just putting all your eggs in one basket. Not a great idea.