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# Daily News #3

BY PAUL BRONFMAN

## DISTRIBUTING ADVICE



WHEN Comweb began in 1988, I envisioned a collection of complementary, horizontally-integrated companies, each dedicated to supplying services and equipment to the production community.

Ten years later, that vision is a reality. More than that, we have realised a model for distribution that proves that a mid-sized company need not scramble to open a distribution operation. For us, the successful foreign distribution of our product derives directly from our company philosophy. Our co-production partners are our distribution pipeline.

Five years ago, I teamed up with Steve Levitan to form Protocol Entertainment, which has produced, with Scholastic Productions, the hit kids series *Goosebumps*, and the Warner Bros international television productions of the comedy-action programme *Police Academy: The Series*.

**WE'VE DISCOVERED** that flexibility is the key when it comes to negotiating the foreign rights to our product. For example, we're open to structuring each deal with our partners differently. Once the basic financing requirements have been met, our principal concern is for the longevity of our relationship and we work closely with our partners to ensure excellent product and a lasting association.

We look for continuity - for people with whom we would like to do business this year, next year and the year after that.

We can forge long-term relationships because we have deliberately maintained a lean, hands-on management style. Relationships are the cornerstone of our business.

Comweb began with a partnership with Stephen J Cannell Productions and the creation of Canada's largest studio complex, North Shore Studios, now home to such hits as *The X-Files* and *Millennium*. We now co-manage this facility with its owner, Lion's Gate Entertainment Inc.

**THIS WAS FOLLOWED,** in partnership with Bill White, by William F White Limited (WFW), Canada's largest supplier of camera, lighting, grip and related production equipment, with offices across Canada, the US and eastern Europe. WFW, with Emmanuel Lepine, is a partner in Moli-Flex/White Inc and Les Studios LaSalle in Montreal, as well as with Cinepartners in Wilmington, NC and CAM35/Sparks in Budapest.

After WFW, in partnership with Mark Prior, came Bulloch Entertainment Services Inc, specialising in computer software packages, payroll and accounting services to the film and television industry. It has also developed Bulloch On Location, which is rapidly becoming the industry standard in production payroll software.

As the global trend, driven by rising production costs and falling licensing fees, moves increasingly towards international co-production, I believe that a company such as Protocol, whose business has been based on relationships since its inception, has a major advantage. Successful distribution depends on the attitude one brings to the table. In our case, that has led to superb relationships and excellent returns, not only for ourselves but for our "partners in production".

**PAUL BRONFMAN IS PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE COMWEB GROUP OF COMPANIES.**

### WORKING TOGETHER

THE OPERATIVE word in our relationships is "partnership" - specifically strategic alliances with companies that have diverse yet complementary sets of skills. As our mission statement proclaims, our business is relationships. This philosophy extends to all our business alliances, be they Protocol's long-term association with Scholastic and Warner Bros; William F White Limited's partnership with Vilmos Zsigmond ASC in Budapest, the company's eastern European base for cameras, lighting and grip equipment; or the alliance with Georges Durst in Montreal to build and manage the 22-acre production facility, Les Studios St Hubert.