

New Westminster's Village on a Diet connection



Rob Bromley's production company, Force Four Entertainment, created the reality series Village on a Diet for the CBC.

MARIO BARTEL/NEWSLEADER

By [Grant Granger - New Westminister News Leader](#)

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After Rob Bromley graduated from New Westminister secondary in 1977 he soon landed in Victoria working construction.

The money was good, but job satisfaction wasn't.

He had a bent for business and a creative side he wanted to explore. So one day he went into the boss's office and

said, “I quit. I’m going back to school.”

The boss looked at him like he’d just walked off the set of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.

“Why would you do that?” asked the boss. “Why would you take two years out of your life and not make money?”

Despite the boss’s logic, Bromley headed to BCIT anyway to earn a marketing diploma. He thought he’d get into the advertising business because it blended business with his creative side. His instructor, though, convinced him to do his practicum with a production company.

That’s where he met John Ritchie, and after they graduated the duo went to work for Force Four Entertainment in 1990. Now they, along with Gillian Lowery, own the company—Bromley is the president—and deal with the likes of CBC, CTV, W, Lifetime Channel and the Oprah Winfrey Network on a daily basis.

Now his tools of the trade are a pen and a Blackberry rather than a hammer and wrench.

Deep Royal City roots

Bromley’s New West roots run deeper than a 100-foot Queen’s Park Douglas Fir. He grew up in the West End and his wife is from Sapperton, and they are raising their family in a home near her old ’hood.

At first, Force Four specialized in corporate videos, a profitable enterprise for a time. But when the Internet came along companies began wanting to control the message so they started their own in-house communications departments. Force Four decided television was the way to go.

“The times were changing and we knew how to tell stories, but we didn’t understand the business side of television, how to get funds and putting budgets together,” says Bromley.

They discovered it’s much more of a collaborative business, piecing together contributions from broadcasters, film funds, writers, directors and much more.

“It was a different beast than the corporate world where you had free rein because you knew your business better than the business that hired you,” says Bromley. “All these things were on a massive learning curve for us.”

But learn they did. These days Force Four has scripted shows, reality TV shows, documentaries and biographies popping up all over television channel menus. They also have a development team of three people out there coming up with ideas and then selling them.

When they got to more than 200 episodes of *The Shopping Bags* television series they realized, “OK now, we can safely leave the corporate business behind. OK, we’re television producers doing business with broadcasters.”

Biggest Loser New West Challenge

Some stars from Force Four’s show Village On A Diet will participate in a Biggest Loser New West Challenge rally at the Queen’s Park Arenex on Sunday from 1 to 2 p.m. Trainers Garfield Wilson and Mike Veinot will be there along with participants from the “village,” Taylor, B.C., Glen Cross and Jamie Kinzett. The show’s finale will be on CBC Monday (March 7) at 9 p.m. with a follow-up episode on March 14.

Why not buy in?

About five years ago, Bromley, Ritchie and Lowrey realized they were more or less running the business, so they figured they either should buy it or start one of their own. They took Option No. 1.

“We really felt the weight of responsibility of everybody working there already, so at that point why not have them work for us.”

Part of the perks of his job include traveling regularly to events like an annual television marketing conference in Cannes, France.

“It can be an exciting business, although it has its moments of stress, I won’t lie to you. But it’s been good,” he says.

“We work with talented and good people. That has really paid off. The product you end up getting is far superior.”

Bromley says in the current market fewer and fewer producers are being entrusted to do programming for networks, but their track record has paid off.

They’ve done such shows as CBC’s Village on a Diet, Cupcake Girls, The Shopping Bags and Manhattan Matchmaker for the W network, the movie Playing For Keeps for the CTV and Lifetime networks, and 65 Red Roses for CBC Newsworld’s Passionate Eye.

Cupcake Girls, about two young women entrepreneurs, has been sold for broadcast in 79 countries. “That story has resonated in places like Afghanistan and all over the world,” he says.

And 65 Red Roses, about New Westminster native Eva Markvoort’s battle with cystic fibrosis, has won many awards and has been sold to the Oprah Winfrey Network—which Bromley estimates will mean it will be seen by 70 million people.

When local filmmakers Nimisha Mukerji and Philip Lyall came into Force Four’s Vancouver office it hit home for Bromley because his son had gone to school with Markvoort.

“It always makes me emotional,” says Bromley as he takes off his glasses and reflects on the powerful documentary. “I couldn’t be more proud than to be part of that.

“They were so giving of Eva and that family in entrusting her story to us.”

Bromley says Mukerji sent him an email saying she’d come to the realization it was a story that will be with her forever.

Proof is in the product

Although he’s come a lot farther than he ever imagined in a business he’s passionate about, he and his partners are a long way from declaring they’re satisfied.

“Recently a broadcaster mentioned we were one of the top three production companies in Canada, and that’s pretty high praise,” says Bromley. “But now we turn our attention to the work. The proof is our products are out there and they’re selling. That’s pretty exciting.”

The broadcast industry is worried about “trans-media,” as Bromley calls Internet powers like Netflix, circumventing traditional methods to acquire programming for distribution. But those ventures, he says, don’t reinvest profits to

make future quality products to deliver.

“You have to put money back into the system if you want quality put back in the system,” says Bromley.

“We as a production company have to be nimble and keep doing good work.”

His passion has paid off financially, but more importantly, on a personal level it’s meant much more to Bromley than donning a hard hat and tool belt ever would have.

“It’s like my dad used to say, ‘If you enjoy what you’re doing then you’re going to be successful.’

“The opportunities that I’ve had are incredible.”

ggranger@newwestnewsleader.com

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