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Depth of Field

By Megan Dobransky



The spotlights are almost blinding, making the maroon and gold of Arizona State quarterback Rudy Carpenter's jersey pop against the lush green of the Sun Devil Stadium grass.

"Cumquat! Cumquat!," a player yells. Everyone smirks. The football is snapped. A clash of helmets, loud grunts and the sound of sod being trampled fill the air for a few seconds.

"All right. That was real nice. Give me another one of those," Cary Truelick yells, swinging a hand up to adjust his headset.

The football players scuttle back to their positions, an impressively large Super Techno Crane Camera retracts to its starting point and the crew of True Story Films all return to their marks at various sound boards and cameras.

The sun has long since set and the crew at Sun Devil Stadium have been filming a new commercial for the upcoming ASU football season for hours, repeating the same plays over and over until they are perfectly captured by the four high definition cameras.

The excitement on the set ebbs and flows, first as multiple camera problems disrupt the action and then as the shots are meticulously studied.

What was supposed to end at 10 p.m. lingers past midnight. The crew finally wraps at 2 in the morning.

The turn-around time for this commercial is a mere three weeks, meaning that voice-over work, color correction, sound design, all graphics and final editing will be completed.

All in a day's work for **True Story Films**.

As one of the Valley's only full-service production companies offering talents from script to screen, True Story Films has their hands in a little bit of everything concerning film. And because they're so good at what they do, they're helping to put Phoenix on the national film industry's map.

OPENING SCENE

ASU graduate Truelick and Rob Beadle, who attended Glendale Community College and the Art Institute of Phoenix, started True Story Films in 2003 after leaving another film company they both worked for.

"We kind of hit a glass ceiling," Truelick said. Beadle added that they got out of the old company and started something on their own to "push ourselves."

“We developed a business plan,” Truelick said. “It scared us at first because we didn’t know what’s going to happen. We were kind of going from project to project.”

He said that each project was an audition for another project and they quickly garnered a base of loyal clients. Beadle, who runs the post-production side of the company, has been working with many of the same customers for six or seven years.

But the biggest and most important client is clearly ASU.



Way back in the mid-'90s Truelick did a spec commercial for ASU as his first endeavor into television. From there, a solid affiliation bloomed, peaking in 2005 with a three-year contract with ASU Athletics.

“The institutional commercials followed,” he said.

True Story Films has shot a number of commercials for the university as well as their recruitment video, which was one of the largest and most involved projects they ever embarked on; start to finish taking almost a year.

The ASU contracts, along with a steadily growing client list, cemented True Story Films’ success almost immediately. “Six months in we knew we were going to make it,” Truelick said.

Instead of trucking it to California for the glitz and glamour of Hollywood, the duo decided to stay in Phoenix; the city that Beadle called “the land of sun and opportunity.”

“We realized that Phoenix is a great market and we were at the forefront of what was happening,” Truelick said. “You can make a bigger dent here.”

So far, the company has made a huge dent, working on about 75 projects since its inception; 20 of them just in the past year.

They’ve also grown from just the two of them in one office to eight full-time employees spread among three design suites.

All of the success allowed them to feel comfortable taking some bigger risks with the company.

That’s when the pair started investing money in projects like a feature-length documentary film called “Jerabek,” which was selected to premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival this year and filming the MOJO High Definition Network sports series “The Show” about the struggles of minor league baseball players.

CREDITS

Both Truelick and Beadle are quick to point out that nothing would be possible without their talented crew, which also happens to be quite young.

“We do always try to have at least one college intern working with us and have several other young college or recently graduated students working for us as production assistants,” Truelick said.

23-year-old Gabe Naylor is one such recent graduate, completing his degree from the Art Institute of Phoenix in 2005. He started freelancing for True Story Films six months before he graduated. At the beginning of this year, he landed a full-time job working mainly with video and graphics, but because of the nature of True Story Films, he gets to work in all aspects of production and post-production.

“It feels like a family; everyone gets along and there’s a lot of creative energy not only in this building, but also in the Valley in general,” he said. He added that while film students have to follow where the industry goes (i.e. Los Angeles), once he started working locally, he realized that there’s a lot more going on in the Phoenix area than he thought.

“Phoenix is expanding and many people are going to digital process,” he said. The propagation of digital media means that “location isn’t as important as it used to be and there’s more of a focus on talent, which I think is a good thing,” he said.

And when it comes to talent, Phoenix is full of it. According to Truelick, “There’s great talent here and we keep getting more and more talent.”

But the Valley film industry wasn’t always this dynamic. The current fertile environment may be the culmination of years of effort on the part of state officials to foster the growth of a film industry.

WIDE ANGLE

In the early 1900’s Arizona was a prime filming location for a variety of movies and that trend continued well into the 1990s. “Until the late ’90s Arizona was considered one of the top US locations outside of Southern California,” said Ken Chapa, program manager for the Arizona Film Office – a division of the Arizona Department of Commerce aimed at marketing the state to the film industry.

But about eight years ago other states started passing financial incentives to lure filmmakers and their coveted dollars; Arizona didn’t follow suit and rapidly lost its luster.

To viably compete with other states and continue its rich film tradition, Arizona officials realized they needed to something.



Just two years after Truelick and Beadle were getting their business together, the Arizona legislature and Governor Napolitano were making their biggest push yet to re-establish the burgeoning film market in the metro area: the Arizona Motion Picture Tax Incentive Program.

“The program officially began in January 2006 and has since sparked a renewal of interest in the Arizona Film Industry from local officials and industry professionals alike,” Chapa said.

While the program is still too new to report any concrete trends, Chapa said, “based on discussions with local professionals and business owners they are seeing a rapid increase in work from a few years ago.”

And what’s good for the film business is good for Arizona. “Film is just one of the avenues being used as a way to improve the state’s economic vitality and the retention of our young, and very sought after, talent pool,” Chapa said.

Companies like True Story Films, with their youth and skill, are not only reaping the benefits of an increased interest in Arizona, but also contributing to the rebirth of an entire Arizona film industry.

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