

Door opens for creativity: Big Door Studios in El Segundo is open for video production to digital media

by Michael Hixon

When Max Yoffe, who had been working in the television industry in Boston, moved to California in 1993 his office was his bedroom in a small Manhattan Beach apartment that he shared with two other people.

“I did a short film and it played at the DGA and I got a cease and desist letter from a company called Atlantis Films, which was a huge company up in Canada that does a lot of television. At that time my company was named Atlantis ... I was like, 'Really, are you guys worried? I'm working out of my bedroom. You're a \$500 million company.' They're like, 'Well, we never know what you may become some day.' I'm like, 'Wow, that's a vote of confidence,” he said.



Big Door Studios founder Max Yoffe pictured shooting a pilot in Manhattan Beach.

Yoffe, who has a wife Marian and a son Cole, changed his company's name to Big Door Studio, and it was located in Redondo Beach until he purchased a double lot in El Segundo's Smokey Hollow area three years ago. He remodeled and developed a 9,000-square-foot facility that can be used for video production, post production, studio rental, webcasting, digital media and other creative services.

“We've done a lot of network promos and specials and we've done commercials, but we've always been interested in what's around the corner, what's new,” Yoffe said. “We always try to be innovative, we've always made that our DNA. We're a company that's been around for 20 years, but I try to run it as a scrappy start-up to keep that young passion, that curiosity. We've always felt it's OK to try something new, and even if we trip a little, we'd rather be early adopters — first in trying to figure it out.”

Big Door has produced numerous specials with every major network and its clients include Fortune 500 companies and world famous brands. Branded entertainment, a blend of advertising and entertainment, has become Big Door's bread and butter. Big Door produced several scripted and non-scripted digital series with ABC Family; the first ever digital series for one of ABC's prime-time shows with "Ugly Betty"; the first ever live online scripted music video with Death Cab for Cutie; the first ever branded entertainment series for Esquire TV; and the first ever commercial pod takeover at the MTV Video Music Awards with Pharrell Williams, N.E.R.D. and Ciarra, to help their client sell the new Chevy Cruze. Another recent collaboration was a 12-part vignette series, "Single Stories," for Sundance TV and The Glenlivet distillery, which produces single malt Scotch whiskey, that featured Ed Burns, Bryan Cranston, among others, and their stories about moments that changed their lives.

"Branded entertainment has developed from when we did the Chevy piece, which I would call not subtle branding ... a lot of branding now is very subtle where you may just match the ethos of the brand to the nature of the spot," said Yoffe in regards to The Glenlivet series.



A commercial is pictured being shot on a stage at Big Door Studios. (submitted photo)

Other recent shows Big Door produced include: "Love is Love," a secret marriage proposal for Absolute vodka; "Dirty Little Secrets," a scripted digital series for ABC Family's "Pretty Little Liars"; "Girls United," a scripted digital series for The Fosters"; "Brotherhood," a digital series for Chivas and Esquire TV, featuring Jason Sudeikis, Brandon Boyd and Jon Baptiste; and "The Dream," a digital series for Cadillac and the Producers Guild for the Oscars.

"They wanted to try out a new series so instead of creating a full pilot, they created a digital series to test it out," said Yoffe of "Girls United." "Because they're using some of the characters from 'The Fosters,' and it's a spinoff ... they get to do a web series that's derivative of their show, but they also get to test the waters with a pilot."



Big Door Studios founder Max Yoffe is pictured right working on a digital commercial for NBC/Nissan. (submitted photo) Walker Dalton

Yoffe sees media technology companies spilling over into El Segundo from Silicon Beach, where hundreds of start-up companies have made their home in the westside, from Playa del Rey to Santa Monica. He purchased his current location in El Segundo from a cabinet maker and spent a year and a half tearing the place down and remodeling it. He has six full-time employees, but uses on average 30 to 40 indie contractors for his productions, while 10 to 50 people are used for a normal stage shoot on site.

“One day we could have Power Rangers walking by and another day I saw Sumo wrestlers,” Yoffe said. “We've had cheerleaders and musicians and corporate people in here.

“It's always different, a different show or a different challenge. We get to start all over again and that makes it a lot of fun.”

Big Door Studios is also open for rental for corporate events, private parties, weddings, receptions and other festivities.

For more information, visit bigdoor.tv.



Max Yoffe founded Big Door Studios.