



An IMAGINE interview by JD Freedman

Powderhouse Productions

On the Subject of being based in Boston

JD Freedman: What is your core business?

Joel Olicker (CEO): Our core business is prime time programming for cable networks. Our business is storytelling and non-fiction entertainment.

Seanbaker Carter (Sr.VP Programming): This market is very competitive. Many of the networks are looking for product that is less expensive but better at the same time. Actually we happen to be very good at making that type of TV...for a couple of reasons. Where Joel and Tug (President Tug Yourgrau) come from is a kind of an auteur experience where they learned to cover all parts of a project.

Following that tradition, we are able to do pretty much everything needed to produce a show – in house. The staff here has made a lot of shows and, over time has refined a process, an expertise and an economy as a result of just having made a ton of TV. We also adhere to very high standards. It is our mission at Powderhouse to always over deliver. I think that if you're not doing that in this business, you're not in this business very long.

JD: Why Boston?

Joel Olicker: Boston is a great place to do this type of work. The sheer critical mass of young creative people who want to be in this business is such a valuable resource. We have developed strong relationships with a lot of the colleges in the area through our internship program.

Seanbaker Carter: First of all I think (that, creatively) just being close to this broad an intellectual base is a valuable thing. We're at the epicentre of ideas. Even if you're not having good ideas they are just floating around in the stratosphere and you are near them and I honestly believe that is valuable and... with any luck you may be splashed with inspiration or pick something up through sheer osmosis. We also benefit from a deep pool of very young talent coming out of this huge reservoir of academia that surrounds us. We operate sort of like a teaching hospital, where we will bring people in at a formative stage in their career to be mentored by experts here on our staff and then give them an opportunity to do their best work. Most of the members of my development team put in time as an intern here.

Joel Olicker: Well you know Tug and I started as filmmakers and we are still that at heart but now I have a more important role to play here as a business owner. It's been a big shift and that is something that I still struggle with. Probably something that everybody who runs a creative business struggles with. I have always loved the creative aspects of production and am tempted sometimes to jump back in but, of course, there comes a point where you learn that when you jump in, you're frequently creating more problems than you're solving and that's a really tough lesson to learn. So you have to learn to get your pleasure out of the achievements of others and to support and enable them and stay out of their way.



JD: How is Boston lacking...for production?

Seanbaker Carter: What we need is the scalability of turnkey facilities by which I mean... when I was working in NY or LA if I sold a show and I needed 10 edit suites and I'm going to put a sixty-five member staff to work for thirty-six weeks...I can make two phone calls and have that lit up in a week, totally wired, ready to go, probably in a day - honestly, in LA. But here in Boston - I have got to put that right here, under this roof- which is great, and we have an amazing facility but... for that to exist here? That is a burden that we wear on our backs. One we recognize that we are going to have to pay for and then have to hold onto that infrastructure all the time.

Joel Olicker: A studio would be great. A big sound stage so that would help the feature work but it may also enable episodic television. Anything that we could do to bring a big, episodic, scripted series to town that would help create stable work to provide ongoing support for the growth of the local industry.

There are many other areas where we could use greater depth – audio, post and effects facilities, etc.

We are doing fine now and we like it here. We have a growing production community but you still have to deal with some limitations. If we had a steady source of regular work then as the production community grew to meet those needs more customers would have the confidence to bring a higher level of work here and then, in turn, more people (with a wider breadth of experience) would be here to fulfil those needs. One thing would build upon another.

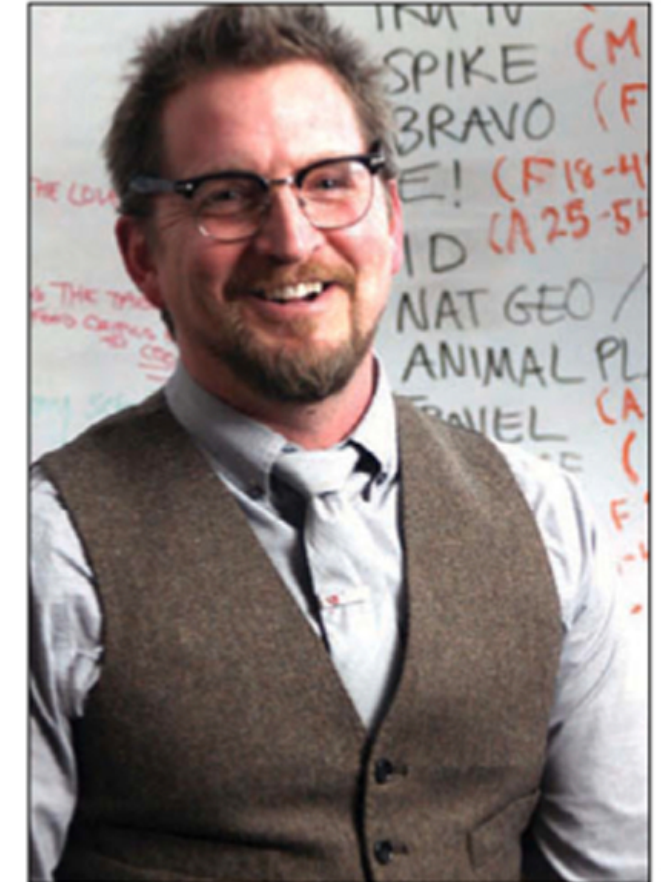
In that regard it is important to mention that the tax credit has been just an amazing thing for this industry. Right now, this industry is exploding in this state and in the Boston area. The number of features that have come to the area and the kind of talent that is coming in because of it. For instance, Powderhouse is producing a reality show in Boston. And there

are two or three other companies, national companies, that we know and respect, that are producing shows similar to ours right in the same area. And, they are here almost certainly because of the tax credit. But that's great we welcome the competition, it raises our game.

Seanbaker Carter: I've been here, with this company for 4 1/2 years. Before that I held a similar position in program development with Scout Productions which was at the time a Boston-based company. When I first started here my job was to help expand Powderhouse outside of the very factual oriented type of programming we had been doing and open us up to slightly more entertainment centered shows with networks that were more entertainment driven. If we weren't in Massachusetts and didn't have the benefit of the tax credit we would not have been able to build a development department that let us take a production company from producing about 12 hours a year to 45 hours a year of programming. That's the great benefit of the tax credit to this community being able to keep those jobs here rather than training people in production and watching them have to move out to the coast to pursue their careers. I had worked for Scout productions and when I came here they were pulling up stakes and were headed west to LA. They really hadn't wrapped their heads around the tax credit and the potential value of that.

Tug and Joel have a great long view. They have had a long view for this company for eighteen years and for this company staying and growing here in Boston. They took advantage of the opportunity that the tax credit opened up and found a way to build on that here and maximize on it and it worked great.

Joel Olicker: I grew up in New York City, love it, very exciting and I'm glad I don't live there. Same with LA. I love LA. I spend a lot of time in New York and Washington and LA. But Boston is my home; it's a great place to live. It's just a great quality of life. You know it's a trade-off.



from left to right
Joel Olicker, Chief Executive Officer of Powderhouse Production a company that creates and produces 45 hours of entertainment television annually. Photo by JD Freedman.

Seanbaker Carter, Sr.VP Programming for Powderhouse Production in Somerville, MA, told IMAGINE, "We bring talented young people in during their formative stage to be mentored by our experts." It a win-win for Powderhouse Productions and for the student or intern. Photo by JD Freedman.

We're not in the mainstream of the industry. This industry exists in LA and New York. The decision makers, the money, the power it's all centered there.

Could we be doing more? Could we be bigger? Could we make more money? Could we be more prominent... if we were in New York or LA?

Maybe...maybe not.

But this is the balance that we have struck and it's a great one.

For more information visit
www.powderhouse.net.

After years of working on numerous productions from commercials to feature films in New York, Miami, and Auckland, JD Freedman recently returned to his hometown of Boston. He can be contacted at www.jdfreedman.net.