

With minuscule budgets and unstable financing, Canadian film and television productions often rely on the generosity and cooperation of firms that supply everything from film stock to food. Many productions would never make it to the screen without the willingness of these firms to make special deals. One of these firms is PS Production Services Ltd., Canada's third largest rental equipment supplier. PS is now also providing a helping hand to fledging production communities in Southeast Asia and Africa.

PS, which has 20 per cent of the Canadian rental market, supplies cameras, lights, grips and more in Toronto, Halifax, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Regina and Vancouver. It also has operations in Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and South Africa. With this new international business, along with the ever-growing domestic industry, PS is busier than ever. "Every year our business expands by three-fold," boasts PS marketing director Khanh Nguyen, surrounded by the hectic atmosphere of the PS Toronto warehouse. It's the height of busy season, which runs from April to December. As one truck is unloaded, a second is loaded up for another shoot. Inside the warehouse, which is packed with a multitude of gels, tripods, ladders, dollies, clamps, cables and high-powered generators, people are busy prepping or repairing equipment.

During the peak season, PS operates around the clock.

It wasn't quite so hectic when PS president and founder Doug Dales started his business in 1972. A friend's father approached Dales to buy the assets of an equipment rental company. Using his personal savings and loans from close relatives, he took the plunge. "It looked like a great opportunity and I saw a future in it." With three cameras and dozens of lights, Dales and his small team began renting equipment for commercial shoots. Since the NFB and CBC had in-house equipment, PS worked with the growing independent production community. "As Canadian independent producers began to grow, that was our market," explains Dales.

PS has expanded along with firms such as Playing with Time (now Epitome) and Alliance. "We have a lot of long-time relationships. For instance, we've worked on all of Atom Egoyan's films. I must admit, I do feel we share in their success as well." One of those small independents was Atlantis. When PS required more space in the early 1980s, it approached Atlantis. The two joined forces and created Cinevillage in Toronto. This 97,000-square-foot facility is

home to PS, Atlantis, four other firms, as well as two large sound stages that house The Life Channel and the Atlantis series *Traders*.

What's the secret behind PS's success? Dales says it's simple. "Once we pull customers out of a fire a few times, they keep coming back." Roberta Pazdro, a production manager at Rhombus Media, has worked almost exclusively with PS during her production career. She says PS was always able to accommodate small \$50,000 projects and now does the same on larger-budget productions. "I find them very reasonable and easy to deal with. When I'm busy, they always get the equipment I need. It's a good two-way thing. They're team players." Sari Friedland, supervising producer on Epitome's new CBC series *Riverdale*, finds them very supportive and likes their "personal service." For *Riverdale*, PS provided miles and miles of electric cables especially built for this huge production. Friedland finds it refreshing to work with a supplier that gives a smaller Canadian production the same level of service as a large Hollywood project.

PS is now continuing its tradition of helping fledgling producers through its work in Southeast Asia and Africa. PS first worked in Asia when it supplied equipment for the film *Bat 21*, shot in Borneo in 1987. That led to the establishment of operations in Vietnam and other parts of Asia. When PS arrived in Vietnam, the nation had no financial resources for production but required technical expertise. PS worked with Vietnamese officials to create a comprehensive crew-support training program for people involved in film productions. Dales was involved in the training sessions which provided grip and electric training. Training was done in English to provide participants with the correct vocabulary for different pieces of equipment. According to Dales, each person had been using different terms for the same piece of equipment. The Vietnam government has already asked PS to conduct further training sessions.

*"We want to have a good skill level on the ground—capable, good crews. We want to have on-the-ground support staff in all the new markets."*

PS is also now in South Africa, where it's providing equipment for the Atlantis TV series *Sinbad*. Dales is looking forward to doing more work throughout Africa. "There's a growing market in Africa, and we want to serve the whole continent." Back at home, PS recently made a major deal with one of North America's biggest commercial producers, Partners. Unhappy with its old supplier, Partners is now relying on PS to handle all of its equipment rental needs. Dales says there's tremendous growth on the Canadian production scene now because of new specialty cable stations. "I'm very bullish on the industry as a whole," he adds. "When production work goes up, as it is now, we go up." He adds the privatization of the TV industry in the developing world is also creating new independent productions. Dales finds the production industry in Southeast Asia and Africa similar to the Canadian scene when he started PS back in the early 1970s. After 25 years, it appears PS has come full-circle. ■

