

JIM BERGER, CEO, HIGH NOON ENTERTAINMENT [DENVER/ LOS ANGELES]



How is High Noon faring during this recession?

We're actually faring quite well, and we restructured prior to the recession so that now we are finding success. We still continue to be a top supplier for the Food Network, Home & Garden Television, as well as Discovery and TLC. But the big news for us is that we're diversifying beyond that with our relationships with VH1, WE tv and a few others, and we're pretty excited about that.

So what challenges are you facing, notwithstanding the downturn?

I think our biggest challenge is to continue to be the production company that can find the best new breakout talent, either in America or in the world, to create the formats that work around those people and to get them to market quickly. We're out there looking for the next big hit and the next big talent in the reality world, or the next format that's super successful overseas.

“We recognize that you’ve got to reinvent yourself.”

How has your business model changed over High Noon’s 13 years as a prodco?

[For] the first seven or eight years, we did a lot of servicing programming for networks like Food Network, HGTV, Discovery – channels that had an insatiable need for programming as they were growing and maturing. What's changed the most is the pitching process; when you pitch a show now,

you have to have tape with it, and ideally, you have to have your talent in the room with you.

So how has the landscape of reality TV changed over the last decade or so, and where do you see it going in the next few years?

I think the reality television landscape has really changed a lot in the last two years. I think there's broader range of formats that are being created and developed. Viewers are more literate to reality television; they're more open and embracing of new worlds and new talent... I think we're entering a world that's very different from what we've seen in the last eight years. You'll probably see a lot less “mean-spirited” programming, and maybe a little more aspiration-based programming. Transformational shows, I think, are going to be on the top of everybody's radar over the next period of years, like our shows *Tough Love*, where the women go through [dating] boot camp or *I Want to Save Your Life*, where we take somebody who's morbidly obese and get them to lose weight. With these kinds of shows the viewer can actually see people move emotionally from one place to another.

Are you looking for more coproductions?

That's a part of our next phase: for the first period we were in business it was all work-for-hire, and now we want to have high profile shows, and large-scale projects. *Tough Love* was our first effort with Drew Barrymore's Flower Films

for VH1], and with *I Want to Save Your Life* we control the rights and we're talking to distributors.

Why did High Noon make the move to diversify?

Primarily survival. We recognize that you've got to reinvent yourself. In our industry you can't be pigeon-holed in one sector or category. So we recognize that we've got to get into business with a variety of networks and we have the ability to compete with a wider range of formats and shows. We have to become one of the A-list production companies in over a year or two with a high-profile portfolio of shows, and become a production company that has the range to be producing for eight [to] 10 networks. Right now, we're producing for eight.

How important is it to be prolific in this market?

I think it's critical. You take a new format that you work on, and that translates into helping out on other new formats. Your ability as a producer to be strong in multiple formats only makes your next show better because you're going to eventually tweak and create new formats yourself.