



DCB's Belinsky (left) and Benson-Guanci: creating sports entertainment that respects the game

Marketing major in the leagues

The founders of Winnipeg-based DCB Productions Inc. invested a whopping \$3,000 to get their multinational business off the ground. Debra Belinsky and Cheryl Benson-Guanci borrowed the money from their parents and hopped on a plane to Los Angeles in 1994. Their mission: selling sports entertainment to The Walt Disney Co.

Purists may grumble, but Benson-Guanci and Belinsky were among the first to recognize the increasing pressure on sports teams to keep spectators entertained by something more than the game. With most events now broadcast by cable or satellite, fans have become less willing to shell out money for tickets and parking, says Belinsky: "You have to give them more than what they get sitting at home watching on TV." Dozens of TV commercial time-outs also slow down sports for the paying fan. The challenge was to build entertainment packages that would feed

Two women from Winnipeg teach Disney about hockey – and entertainment

BY KEITH McARTHUR

off the energy created between the teams and the fans without affecting the flow of the games.

DCB had the experience to fill the gap. Benson-Guanci had choreographed the Winnipeg Blue Bombers' cheerleaders part-time while at university, then moved into a job running entertainment and promotions for the Winnipeg Thunder, a semi-pro basketball team. Belinsky had played competitive sports while completing her administration degree at the University of Winnipeg.

The two teamed up to form Con-sierge, a company that ran promotional events. One of their early contracts was to produce the entertainment during a Winnipeg Jets game. Seeing an opportunity that fit their sports backgrounds, they decided to focus exclusively on sports entertainment and changed the company name to DCB. Next, the partners drew up a detailed business plan based on their philosophy – as Benson-

Guanci says, “we don’t want entertainment for entertainment’s sake. We want entertainment that enhances the product and respects the traditions of the game.”

The ultimate goal was always to expand to the U.S., so Benson-Guanci and Belinsky moved fast when a family friend told them that Disney had fired the in-house team that produced games for the National Hockey League’s Anaheim Mighty Ducks. The opportunity was just too good to pass up.

Disney realized that its in-house entertainment team was clueless when it came to hockey. DCB got the business and still produces the Mighty Ducks’ entertainment packages. “Their knowledge of hockey was the missing link that helped take us to the next level,” says Robert Wagner,

vice-president of advertising, sales and sponsorship for Disney subsidiary Anaheim Sports. DCB’s packages for the Mighty Ducks – which have included

animated ducks flying on the electronic scoreboard and the giant duck-billed goalie mask through which Anaheim players enter the rink – helped build fan excitement in rhythm with the games.

Over the past five years DCB’s client list has expanded – mostly through word-of-mouth – to include several NHL teams (Tampa Bay Lightning, Calgary

Flames, Carolina Hurricanes), major league baseball (Anaheim Angels) and pro basketball (L.A. Clippers). DCB designs entertainment elements for each team, from music and sound effects selection to corporate promotions, mascots and props. During a match, a “game director” schedules the elements on the fly, deciding how to capitalize on the energy created by the game and the crowd. An example: each Calgary Flames’ goal ignites two 25-foot gas flames on either side of the scoreboard. DCB has kept its payroll small by focussing primarily on consulting, contracting out most production functions. The company has five employees at the Winnipeg head office run by Belinsky, while Benson-Guanci runs the L.A. subsidiary with two employees.

DCB continues to sign sports contracts – including one with the East Coast Hockey League that takes them into the eastern U.S. for the first time. They are also looking to grow by diversifying into the broader field of event planning and promotion. They plan to leverage the marketing contacts they’ve made through their sports clients. “We’ve moved into a more broad approach to marketing and communications,” says 34-year-old Benson-Guanci. Since working on curling’s Labatt Briar in Winnipeg, they have done many non-sports promotions for Labatt in Manitoba.

DCB’s contract with Disney specifies that it can’t divulge revenues or profits, but Belinsky says the company’s consulting revenues have grown by about 300% since 1996. “We’re not a million-dollar business yet,” says Belinsky. “I’m stressing the ‘yet.’”

DCB replaced Disney’s own promoters, who were clueless about hockey


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