Hungry Man's 'Anti rock star' commercial for the Wonderful World Of VH1, which spanned TV and the web

North America: IT'S A BLAST!

OK, IT MAY NOT BE THE CHEAPEST, BUT IN TERMS OF TALENT, TECHNOLOGY, TAUT CREW DISCIPLINE AND VARIED TERRAIN, NORTH AMERICA IS STILL TOPS FOR MANY CLIENTS, REPORTS MARLENE EDMUNDS

CREATIVES across the US and Canada are seeing sea changes in the way they work as they move from traditional production to integrated campaigns, but some essentials do not change, according to Mark Thomas, managing director and executive producer of TWC Films: "You get a good idea and you don't screw it up." TWC Films, in Los Angeles, has thrived in during one of the toughest times in the industry. The company's branded webisodes have drawn a lot of industry attention. Thomas says they are part and parcel of the move across multiple platforms that is central to the business today. Among recent executions on multiple platforms for TWC Films are Asics and Newcastle Beer campaigns. Think LA and you think glamour, great weather, gorgeous locations, possibly runaway production costs. Or maybe not. Thomas admits that tax incentives in other states tempt him to look elsewhere, but: "That being said, we've found over the last couple of years that we're staying in LA more often than not." He adds most of his work involves on-location shoots in Los Angeles. "We rarely do a stage job these days. It just seems like a given that unless we're doing green screen, or there is a really good reason — like shooting in a small interior is impractical unless it's a set — we're on location." Most companies in the US are at least bicoastal, with offices in Los Angeles and New York or Miami or both. Many, such as Hungry Man and Epoch Films, started off in New York and now have offices not only in LA but also Europe and other territories. For Hungry Man, the draw of LA is a bit more than the glamour of shooting in Hollywood or the year-round warm climate. "LA is just a great hub of talent and resources, art directors, designers, DPs and support crew, and that makes working here easy," says Dan Duffy, executive producer for Hungry Man. "We were doing so much work on the West Coast that quickly after opening NY we opened up the office in LA." The offices in Culver City are quickly becoming the hub of the company operations in the US, he adds.

Hungry Man has won the Palm D'Or for Best Production Company in Cannes and finished in the top 10 for 11 years in a row. "It says something about how we are perceived and our track record in the industry," Duffy says.

Hungry Man's 'Anti Rock Star' commercial for the Wonderful World Of VH1, which spanned TV and the web, was shot mainly at the company's new studio and offices in Culver City. The idea evolved from a collaboration between Y&R and Hungry Man's director, Bryan Buckley. Duffy explains: "The three-day shoot was the kind of work that Bryan was really excited about. It is really distinctive and memorable, has great casting, almost a poetry to it, with a storyline that has some definite surprises along the way." Jerry Solomon, managing partner at Epoch Films and Dandelion, says his company still get queries from clients on why it doesn't take advantage of tax breaks in other parts of the country or the world. But he points out that there are differences between feature film and TV shoots and commercials work. "We need to be able to do things quickly and on a two- or three-day shoot, it's just not that economical if you figure in the cost of hotels, air fares, and travel days, as an example, even with a tax break.

"It makes sense if you are doing a feature film or TV shoot, but for a commercial shoot it would need to be an over-seven-day shoot before it started to make sense."

He adds that talent issues are what pushes a production overseas. "If there are a lot of non-speaking roles, it may be more economically viable to shoot where you can buy out talent." Epoch is a narrative company that does a lot of dialogue and performance, and requires talent with American accents, Solomon says. "That usually means shooting in the US, usually in New York or Los Angeles." Key projects in recent months included offshoot company Dandelion's 360 campaign for Sun Life out of the Martin agency. It ran to print, webisodes, Twitter feeds, blog posts, Facebook fan pages, profiles for the Sun Life characters and photographs on Flickr. The storyline for the campaign involved a tour of the country in which people such as KC And The Sunshine Band were asked to change their names to Sun Life. A micro website (gettoknowsunlife.com) was also involved.

MOST COMPANIES ARE AT LEAST BICOASTAL, WITH OFFICES IN LA AND NEW YORK OR MIAMI

Solomon says: "The process was a great learning experience on what to do and what not to do when integrating through a 360 approach." Epoch's New York office facilitated Azazel Jacob's illustrative art tale for the MOMA, out of Taxi, New York. "Aza is a talented young independent filmmaker, having directed two independent films but nothing for advertising." Epoch likes to support young talent, Solomon says. "The Taxi spot was done for next to no money, but we love MOMA so it was a chance to simultaneously support an important cultural New York institution and create an opportunity to expose interesting talent to commercials." New kids on the block Beef Film and Chop House Edit have been stacking up jobs since they launched just over a year ago. One of the latest is a PSA commissioned by the International Fund for Animal Awareness. Beef produced the job for the Malibu beach shoot and partner company Chop House Edit was responsible for the post. In the shoot, actor Pierce Brosnan is asking President Obama to stand behind his promise to oppose any proposal that legalises whaling. The shoot involved three versions, a 60-second spot for viral online, and 30- and 45-second spots for TV.

Ashley Adams, partner and executive producer for Beef Films and Chop House Edit, comes from a background of advertising, marketing and media relations. The company works with ad agencies, direct to client and business-to-business. "This opens us to a lot of more projects that most production companies cannot take on," Adams says. He adds that Beef and Chop's team members play a distinctive collaborative role that works better in the digital era. "The production model that was successful for so many years has changed almost overnight. Beef offers an all-in-one creative solutions shop to clients."

Noel Cottrell created and owned two agencies in his native South