

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 17

US \$7.95 USD | Canada \$8.95 CDN | Int'l \$9.95 USD

1

real

screen™

A PUBLICATION OF BRUNICO COMMUNICATIONS LTD.

the best in non-fiction


**NATIONAL  
GEOGRAPHIC**

GOING FURTHER IN 2017



IN THIS ISSUE: DIVERSITY IN UNSCRIPTED | TRAILBLAZERS 2016 | KEN BURNS ON ALCHEMY AND ARCHIVE





## TRUE ENTERTAINMENT, ORIGINAL MEDIA MERGE

New York-based prodcos True Entertainment and Original Media – overseen by producers Glenda Hersh and Steven Weinstock – have merged to form Truly Original.

The arrangement puts production, post-production, business and legal affairs, and finance under one roof. The two production shops are expected to amalgamate into one office space in New York City later this year.

The merger will also see resource sharing and will bring the staffs of both production companies together as one team. A spokesperson for the company said no layoffs are planned.

The company will maintain the True Entertainment and Original Media creative labels for brand consistency, and will continue producing distinct programming for each, including *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* and *Vanity Fair Confidential* from True Entertainment, and *Dual Survival*, *Ink Master* and *Swamp People* from Original Media.

Hersh and Weinstock will serve as co-presidents and co-CEOs of the new company, and Truly Original will remain a subsidiary of Endemol Shine North America.

“We are genuinely thrilled to be announcing Truly Original, which represents a blending of the respective strengths of two successful production companies, while maintaining the creative identity of each,” said Hersh and Weinstock in a joint statement.

Hersh and Weinstock launched True Entertainment in 2000, which was acquired by Endemol Shine North America in 2003. They later became co-CEOs and co-presidents of Original Media in April of 2015.

**DANIELE ALCINI**



## POINTED ARROW: A Producer's Perspective

BY JOHN SMITHSON

**W**ho said TV was a young person's game? As we wave farewell to another eventful year in the global TV business, one of its brightest lights is a mere 90 years old.

Sir David Attenborough may be in the twilight of his distinguished career, but pulling in 12 million UK viewers on Sunday nights for six episodes of *Planet Earth II* is impressive. Despite seismic changes in our viewing habits, it's remarkable that the new *Planet Earth* is rating significantly better than the original landmark series first shown a decade ago.

There's a new spring in the step of BBC execs after a tough year in which they lost one of their other monster hits, *The Great British Bake Off*, to Channel 4.

The new *Planet Earth* is a fine piece of work, brilliantly deploying the latest technology. Although Sir David largely exists as just a voiceover, his DNA is in every single frame.

I had never imagined that a scene of baby iguanas fleeing from evil racer snakes would be one of my favorite viewing moments of the year. In terms of visceral drama, this was like a brilliant Paul Greengrass-directed chase from one of the Bourne films.

And I'm not alone in my enthusiasm. There's something about natural history clips that work perfectly in the YouTube world, as we discovered when our “Homewrecking Penguin” from our Nat Geo Wild show, *Animal Fight Night*, went viral globally. *Planet Earth* has produced a set of clips that have been seen by an amazing number of people.

There are a number of takeaways from the somewhat unexpected success of *Planet Earth II*.

Firstly, blue-chip natural history is alive and in good health, with banker appeal around the world. These are big, expensive shows and BBC Worldwide is a major investor. I'm sure they've got a best seller on their hands.

Once upon a time, prime natural history shows ended up on Discovery in the U.S., as part of the then-joint venture between the BBC and

Discovery. Now they go to BBC America after a DVD/download window.

Also what's all this about young people deserting traditional viewing? *Planet Earth II* has lured two million of its audience from the much sought after 16-34 age group.

With so many big scripted series dominating the global TV market, it's gratifying to see something of such quality earning its keep.

There has also been plenty of talk about the death of linear television. Perhaps this is premature.

BBC1 put together a monster Sunday night with the results show of *Strictly Come Dancing* and then Sir David working his magic. Maybe the feel-good combo of sparkly sequins and cute baby creatures is the perfect antidote to the grimness of the big, bad world outside.

My sense of the year ahead is that as content producers we might all need something to cheer us up.

At December's World Congress of Science and Factual Producers in Stockholm there were many alarming reports from the front lines on just how tough the market is getting in both the U.S. and Europe. Productions were being delayed or canceled. Networks, wrestling with falling ad revenue, were cutting costs and budgets. Former hits were not working for today's audiences.

I remain excited about some of the big opportunities that are still out there, but I think it's particularly tough on small and emerging indies, outside the protective embrace of the big groups.

It rather reminds me of another Attenborough moment, with Emperor Penguins huddling together to brave the bleak Antarctic storms – a scenario eerily reminiscent of the producer huddle in the packed bars of the Realscreen Summit in chilly, post-inauguration Washington DC. Stay warm.

*John Smithson is creative director of Arrow Media, an indie he co-founded in 2011. Previously he was chief executive at Darlow Smithson Productions.*