

Worry-Free Filming

Real to Reel Inc. thrives as talent agency for properties

By **Mark Madler** Monday, August 15, 2011



Real to Reel Inc.

YEAR FOUNDED: 1982

Gross Revenues 2009/2010: \$3.5 Million

Gross Revenues 2010/2011: \$4 Million

Employees 2011: 9 full-time; 10 independent contractors

Between the first and second seasons of the medical drama “Hawthorne,” the show’s producers shopped around for a new hospital where they could shoot the show. The search ended at the shuttered Northridge Medical Center on Sherman Way. Real to Reel Inc., a Van Nuys firm that pairs up feature films, television shows and commercials with the appropriate filming locations, facilitated the deal, and “Hawthorne” has since filmed there for two seasons.

The “Hawthorne” deal took a “Herculean” amount of work, said Real to Reel CEO and President Gary Onyshko. However, it was a testament to the company’s determination to deliver the goods for property owners and production companies alike, he said. In a city that has lost film and television production to other states and countries, Real to Reel takes the position that a worry-free filming experience results in owners keeping their properties available for projects, and

that in turn, keeps casts and crews in California. "I've become a good hair splitter to get everyone happy in a transaction," Onyshko said.

Started in 1982, Real to Reel was location manager Jim Thompson's answer to an easier way to find buildings in which to film. Onyshko, who joined the company in 2001 and became the owner two years ago, calls Real to Reel "a talent agent for properties." Real to Reel employs nine full-time staff members and uses 10 independent contractors as site managers. The company brought in \$4 million in gross revenues in the 2010-11 fiscal year.

The company has served the entertainment industry for nearly 30 years, which shows Onyshko and his staff are devoted to giving good service, keeping up locations, and providing a value, said Brian Haynes, a location manager for drama "Private Practice." "I have recommended (Real to Reel) to people looking for representation and (who) want a company to help them through the filming process," said commercial location manager Keith Nakata.

Portfolio of Properties

The extensive and varied portfolio of properties keeps location managers coming back. Real to Reel provides desert backdrops, office buildings, hotels, private homes and apartments, schools and warehouses. The Hollywood & Highland entertainment and dining complex and Universal CityWalk are among the high profile properties the firm represents. Where Real to Reel shines is its offering of medical buildings. Making location managers aware of these facilities is just the start of the services offered. Real to Reel coordinates site visits, contracts, insurance, parking and any clean up and repairs. All concerns and issues are addressed before the cameras even roll. "The owners understand they are not going to have to do a lot or disrupt their jobs or their operations," said Nick Arquette, a senior acquisitions agent with the nickname "Mr. Hospital." St. Vincent Medical Center, the House Ear Institute, both in Los Angeles, and the closed St. Luke's Hospital in Pasadena are represented by Real to Reel. The NBC/ABC sitcom "Scrubs" filmed for seven years at the former North Hollywood Medical Center. That building is now being demolished for an apartment project. When "Scrubs" went on hiatus during the summer months, Real to Reel searched out other work to take place in the building — short films, TV shows and commercials, said Liz Goldman, executive vice president with PCS Development, the property owner. "They always looked to maximize our revenues," Goldman added. PCS now has listed its corporate offices on Wilshire Boulevard with Real to Reel to get use out of vacated space while trying to lease it out, Goldman said.

What Onyshko took from pairing up North Hollywood Medical Center with "Scrubs" was the importance of making a deal beneficial for both sides. PCS made money from a closed building and ABC Studios, the production company, got a reliable location that transcended being just a backdrop for Zach Braff and

his fellow actors. "The building became a character in the show," Onyshko said. When "Private Practice" filmed at Valley Presbyterian Hospital during its fourth season, the crew wanted access to busy areas. Real to Reel came up with a solution that made the hospital happy, Haynes said. "They brokered a workable structure so they could stay open and we could shoot," Haynes said.

Onyshko credits his staff for satisfying the needs of the owners and the production companies. The staff is divided into the acquisitions, booking and coordination departments. The team in place combines a savvy in film production with a deep knowledge in real estate, Arquette said, adding, "That combination seems to be reassuring and successful in terms of having a long term film program." Before joining Real to Reel, Onyshko was counsel for Tejon Ranch, a sprawling 270,000 acres beyond the Santa Clarita Valley. Among his duties was handling filming requests on the property. Thompson hired Onyshko away to be Real to Reel's staff attorney. It was a time when location agreements became more complicated and lawyers became more involved, a marked difference from a time when a deal could be sealed with just a handshake, Thompson said. Having an attorney on staff became a major advantage as Onyshko streamlined the contracts and cut through the long negotiations with the studios, said Thompson, who is now the publisher and editor of entertainment industry publication P3 Production Update.

During a period in the early 2000s, when shooting in open hospitals proved difficult, Real to Reel pulled it off by not inconveniencing medical staffs, Thompson said. "Gary was a big part of that by working out the details," Thompson said. When those details get worked out ahead of time and property owners know what to expect when the production trucks roll up, it makes for a positive experience when filming wraps. Onyshko says supportive property owners are a key part to keep filming in the Los Angeles area.

Owners can be supportive to the industry with fair and reasonable financial terms to film on their properties, Onyshko said. As filming is an event, the best pricing is based on the impact the event has on the property, Onyshko said. Using a piece of property to place a piece of equipment on would be less costly, say, than a property on which there are large explosions and other pyrotechnics. The company's role is to work within the production budget, yet get a fair deal for the property owner. "The property owners who find the most success tend to stick with (filming,)" Onyshko said. "They are flexible in the things they allow and the pricing they accept."