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How local companies are taking advantage of B.C.'s production boom

For the first time in its history, Burnaby's The Bridge Studios is fully occupied by a local prodco, Shawn Williamson's Brightlight Pictures.

By [Jordan Pinto](#)

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For the first time in the 31-year history of Burnaby, B.C.'s The Bridge Studios, a single production company is occupying all of its sound stages.

And it's not, as one might suspect, a U.S.-based company. While MGM and Legendary Entertainment have occupied large portions of Bridge Studios in recent years, the tenant in question is Vancouver's Brightlight Pictures, which is itself experiencing one of the busiest phases in its 17 years in business.

Led by president Shawn Williamson (pictured), the prodco is in production or pre-production on a trio of projects across Bridge Studios' nine stages. The first of those is *The Good Doctor*, which Brightlight service produces for ABC. The series moved from its previous location at The Crossing Studios after *Once Upon a Time* (ABC) was cancelled after seven seasons. Brightlight is also service producing the third instalment of Disney's *Descendants*, as well as a Canada/U.S. coventure *Two Hearts*, an indie feature helmed by Mexican director Lance Hool.



In recent years, the growth of B.C.'s production industry has created a sustained demand that has allowed production sites such as Bridge Studios to invest in significant expansion. According to CMPA's annual Profile report, production spending in B.C. hit **\$2.99 billion in 2016/17**. And with streaming services such as Netflix promising to increase their investment in original content, that demand shows no signs of decreasing any time soon.

Bridge Studios is currently in the midst of a multi-phase expansion plan that will this year see the addition of three new 17,000-square-foot stages and a further 50,000 square feet of support space, increasing the studios' capacity by around 25%. The investment in the three new stages is around \$20 million, according to general manager Ron Hryniuk. In the coming years Bridge Studios plans to add two more sound stages as well as a 240-vehicle parkade to meet the increased levels of work taking place there.

Though the studios' growth has been significant, Hryniuk said it is sustainable. "We've done it slowly and systematically to make sure that what we're building matches the demand," he said, adding that, over the past few years, episodic TV has typically accounted for around 90% of the studio's business. Other projects recently shot at Bridge Studios include Netflix's reboot of *Lost in Space* and USA Network's sci-fi series *Colony*, both of which were produced by Legendary Entertainment. The studio is currently fully booked for the next 10 months.

While the increased demand is creating a boom for studio operators, production companies in B.C. are also reaping the benefits of the uptick. According to Williamson, the surge in demand in recent years has driven Brightlight to three of its best years on record. "There's such a demand for content that I think every company has been quite busy," he noted of the B.C. industry.

While studio capacity is a concern in Vancouver, **additional space is opening up in other areas of B.C.**, with crew capacity growing as well. "It is very busy in Vancouver, but I'm never worried we can't find the space for [a project], or the crew or cast for it," said Williamson.

And through Vancouver's prolonged boom, Brightlight has expanded its business and brought some of its younger producers, including Arielle Boisvert and **Jameson Parker**, onto bigger projects. "I'm the older guy that helps bring the work in and provide comfort to the studios, and they're the smart ones that get their hands dirty and come back to me as needed for questions and advice," he said. "And those young producers are building resumes that now make studios feel comfortable working directly with them," said Williamson.

Brightlight's other recent productions include the indie feature **Summer of '84**, which it produced in partnership with L.A.-based global content studio Gunpowder & Sky. The prodco also partnered last year with California-based Myriad Pictures to produce **The Kid Detective**, starring Adam Brody (*The O.C.*).

TAGS:

Brightlight Pictures, Ron Hryniuk, Shawn Williamson, The Bridge Studios, The Good Doctor
