



THE CARTOON CREW



ENTERTAINMENT INC.

If we were to list all the animation work done by Emmy Award®-winning Bardel Entertainment, we'd have to push most of the content in this issue to the next just to make room. A few of the instantly recognizable legacy products they've worked on include Rick and Morty, The Dragon Prince, Teen Titans Go!, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, The Ice Age Adventures of Buck Wild – you get the picture.

And those pictures haven't just delighted audiences, they've changed the face of animation and set an impeccable standard for an industry defined by incredible imagination, discipline, and creative chaos. The company's creative clout is awesome in every sense of the word.



The Vancouver-based company produces prime time series and television series for preschoolers, kids and adults alike as well as featurette projects for video-on-demand and subscription on-demand services.

The brightest and wildest minds in animation make up their formidable bench of world-class creators and storytellers, bringing the 2D, 3D, and hybrid animation studio much-deserved global acclaim.

In 2015, the studio was purchased by Italy's Rainbow S.p.A. As a subsidiary, Bardel continues to operate autonomously from its parent company working with A-list partners including Netflix, Disney+, Amazon, DreamWorks, Nickelodeon, Adult Swim and Warner Bros./Discovery.

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BARDEL ENTERTAINMENT JOINS FORCES WITH CLUTCH MEDIA TO SUPPORT THEIR ANIMATED FUTURE

When Bardel Entertainment sought an IT solutions and services partner, they searched for a team that really understood their business. One of the leading 2D, 3D, and hybrid animation studios in the business, they needed specialists in the media and entertainment (M&E) space with the insight and power to help them drive their growth, so they turned to Clutch Media.

A division of Clutch Solutions, Clutch Media is a systems integrator and reseller of IT solutions and professional services catered to M&E. With their mission to empower media productions and content owners by providing game-changing security and technology solutions, Clutch is a perfect partner for Bardel.

“Everybody on our team comes from the industry, understands its challenges and caters technology solutions and services to address the very specific problems of the industry. Our work with Bardel is about improving service for their creatives and enabling them to work as efficiently as possible.”

- Richard Mantle, Clutch Media

The one-stop shop of seasoned industry experts are designing and implementing solutions and technologies for Bardel's content creation, artistic design, and graphics rendering, as well as for other aspects of their highly complex workflows. In addition to supporting Bardel's work from home program, Clutch is creating tech initiatives to drive their growth forward.

Not only does the minority-owned Clutch organization represent the best minds in the industry, they are passionate about diversity and inclusion, working with organizations such as the Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier Council and tech industry group Tribal Hub.



We recently spoke with CEO Tina Chow and COO Richard Grieve to get a glimpse of what it takes to succeed in the fastest growing sector in entertainment – and the transformative power of saying no.

Streaming media has been around since the early aughts, growing steadily ever since. When Netflix shifted from distributing physical media to streaming media, it changed the paradigm for content creation in live action and animation. And it has grown. “Streaming certainly has increased the appetite for content creation,” Chow said. “As a result, we’ve been able to strategize our expansion.”

Historically, animation’s key demographic has primarily been preschoolers and kids 6 to 11, a needle that didn’t budge until streaming pushed it into the realm

of older viewers. While Bardel works on projects for audiences of every age, their content aimed at adults has grown significantly in the past decade. That’s become a powerful differentiator for Bardel.

“The majority of studios in Vancouver are likely bidding on the same projects. It makes it very competitive with bidding wars between studios. It’s the nature of the business, but it’s a race to the bottom. At the time, content for older audiences was on an upward trend. Anime was at an all time high, and we knew working on older skewing content would set Bardel apart. We were open to new partnerships with various creators working on older skewing and serialized storytelling content like *The Dragon Prince*, which has been a huge success on Netflix,” Chow explained.



Since then, Bardel has contributed to projects that are quite different from what any other studio produces. In contrast, many studios work on content for preschoolers and kids 6-11, Bardel is now sought after as a studio that works on content for older consumers. “That’s really helped us to stay competitive against the other studios in town,” she said. Vancouver is a major hub for television and film production, the competition among animation studios is fierce.

While the majority of animation studios take an either-or approach, Bardel produces both 2D and 3D animation productions. In combining 2D and 3D animation, Bardel creates a distinctive look that stands out from the crowd. “Creatively speaking, we’ve been able to



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be quite innovative blending those two styles,” Chow noted.

The diversity of the company’s client base reflects their ability to be nimble and avoid creating content with a signature look and feel, allowing Bardel to stay stylistically unrestrained and fresh. As Grieve put it, “You don’t look at our work and say that’s a Bardel look because it’s always different. There’s no studio style.”

When it comes to choosing what projects to take, Bardel accepts assignments that excite and inspire their artists – ultimately, the project quality is a reflection of their talent. “We decline on projects due to bad timing because saying yes would rush the project into production and that would jeopardize the quality. But we also pass because we know it’s just not going to be meaningful for this studio creatively and our artists have really appreciated that,” Chow said. “That was a big pivot for us.” The conscious decision to know when to pass on certain projects to provide a higher quality and curated experience was a tough one.

“We struggled at times asking ourselves, ‘Do we pass on this?’ But you have to look at all the angles. There is massive responsibility to our partners and clients when we take on a project but also to our artists, and we don’t bear that weight lightly,” Chow continued.

“You can get easily enticed to take on a volume of projects building the business but with that comes rapid expansion, resource and technology strain and all that leads to is a lower quality. Ultimately, staying true to our vision has accelerated



the evolution of where Bardel is now, and we continue to build on that.”

The path to provide the artists and staff flexibility of remote work was a challenge, with security and performance being two of the main issues. The company focused on solutions that involved large financial and time contributions as they felt it necessary to meet all demands.

“The pandemic impact forced investment into technology originally looked at as unnecessary and a ‘nice to have’ option. We could have looked at the investment

as a temporary solution to weather through Covid restrictions, or as a new way of designing our industry under a new standard. We chose the latter,” said Chow.

The new network and operational cloud native architecture is designed around future technology from all vendors and service providers. Doing this means a designed environment for a hybrid cloud standard. The environment allows for a much more manageable resourceset for the diverse production standards Bardel strives towards.



RICHARD GRIEVE, COO

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Traditional studios operate with workstations for their artists and render resources for all the graphical compute they generate. Bardel is now deploying a large server environment that allows for the combination of both into a single platform. This allows for easier staff deployment, better performance in short term and long term usage of the resources, and allows for a much smaller energy footprint, so it can help reach the green resource goals of the business. During the day, the environment is designed to provide workstations for

the staff and standard render capacity. As the artists complete their daily tasks, their environment is suspended, and the farm is essentially doubled in size and capacity.

“We have been working with many vendors to help ensure the stability, and success of this design, and our team have spent years designing and testing this environment to ensure its success. Our approach to technology is to make the lives of our artists easier,” said Grieve. “That’s kind of why we’re in this industry. We’re making cartoons and it’s fun.”

Justifying why certain technologies are developed and used is a critical focus for the studio heads. “We’re very cognizant of that,” he added. “We want to make life easier for others so they can focus on the fun stuff. It’s not there to replace artists. Otherwise, what’s the point?”

The company looks for tech that lines up with what’s important to their staff. Grieve points to the focus on sustainable automation embraced by firms such as game engine pioneer Unreal Engine. “We’re very focused on greener technologies and greener ways of doing things,” he said.

Artists are Bardel’s biggest asset and it’s no surprise they intend to keep it that way. According to Chow, the studio’s creative direction reflects the collective talent and dedication of its artists and management team. “Culturally, there’s this wonderful philosophical alignment across the studio of what Bardel represents. It’s very rare to have that.”

When it comes to making creative decisions Bardel is focused on a fundamental question: Why do they do the things they do? “Sometimes it’s just because we can, but that’s not necessarily a good business proposition,” Chow admitted. “We’re here to set new standards of animation and storytelling, original ideas of others and our own. We’re brave enough to do things differently and embrace that. More importantly, ‘Do we love and enjoy this?’ It’s all hard work, but we work on projects we feel passionate about and want to make it fun and rewarding.” ■



