

[Growing flowers in the desert](#)

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Derek Riedle is an entrepreneur and a visionary and has a unique gift of launching companies around his various visions of the future. He used these strengths when, along with his wife Terri, he launched Revolution Strategy (a marketing communications agency in Saint John), Talons of Venice (the content creation arm in California) and Riedle Urban Spaces (a real estate company).

I first interviewed Derek the day before he jumped on a plane to California with the goal of exporting some of our province's finest talent (published on Dec. 15, 2014 in the Telegraph-Journal). I then caught up with him again four months after his move to find out how things had gone and how Revolution Strategy was making out with the next chapter of the agency's life – to deepen their use of entertainment as a channel with a promise to stay rooted in New Brunswick while growing to identified opportunities in California and across Canada.

Q: When we last spoke you were moving to California, how have things played out?

A: It's been an incredible four months both from a professional perspective and a family perspective. The day after our first interview, as soon as we got through security at the airport, we received an email that said a Canadian broadcaster was interested in one of the shows that we'd pitched.

To date we have about eight episodes of the show shot and our team is in California shooting another six episodes now. Then we're off to Texas and British Columbia.

Q: What impact has this development had on your goals for business development in California?

A: We're still trying to sell in the United States but, it's funny, it just completely shifted our focus. I've actually done very little outreach in California since we arrived because we've been obsessed with making the show.

Q: So the concept you envisioned, exporting New Brunswick talent, is working?

A: The concept is working. The goal is still to sell content in California. This actually strengthens our position to do that. There were a few meetings that I had already setup with distributors, producers and networks in Los Angeles and when they asked, "What are you doing now?" we were able to say,

“Well, actually, we just signed a contract and we’re doing this TV show for a broadcaster in Canada,” they go, “Pardon me? You’ve sold a show? You’re actually making something?”

They’re gob smacked, because 95 per cent of the people who are running around Los Angeles selling things rarely sell anything. We sold something. All of a sudden we’ve got a credit and with that comes credibility and we’re real.

Q: Can you tell us about the show?

A: The show is called Real Houses and features extraordinary houses created by interesting people in various locations around North America. So we’re interested in people who really take an interest, whether they’re a musician, designer, architect, or just an everyday Joe in their home, and are expressing their personality within their home.

Q: If you rolled back to July, not knowing this was coming, would you change anything?

A: The fact that we’ve got this arrow in our quiver now is going to help us even more in California. Would I go back and change things? No, we plan as much as possible but also respond when opportunities present themselves. You can aim all you want but if you never pull the trigger you’re never going to hit the target. You may miss the bull’s eye, but you can always correct and pull the trigger again.

Q: Was the leap as scary as you thought it was going to be four months ago?

A: It’s been tremendously rewarding to have jumped out of the nest. This change has been really interesting for our family and is pulling everybody up and changing everybody. I’m less terrified, but still frightened – in a good way.

Q: How are you feeling right now about your business?

A: Well first and foremost, we have an exceptional team running Revolution so Terri and I can explore these new opportunities – we’re still very heavily involved, just not as minute-to-minute as we used to be. This has been very good as it has elevated us and everyone we work with. I’m genuinely excited that we’ve been able to prove the concept of taking New Brunswick talent and exporting it. None of this would be possible if we did not have the talent, the ability and the drive to do really compelling things – we truly do have the goods to do it.

We’ve also got the cost advantages here – the cost of labour is a little bit cheaper and there are tax credits and incentives that allow us to compete on price.

Q: Tell me about selling “Real Houses” in the U.S., now that it’s actually being made.

A: We sold the show in Canada, so it’s 100 per cent paid for and financed through the cost structure that we have with the broadcaster. They have exclusive rights for this show for five years in Canada. It’s a different conversation with U.S. broadcasters. The show is made and the whole thing is paid for now. Any sales right now are pure profit; we can sell in the U.S.; we can sell Great Britain or in Australia; we can dub it in German; we can dub it in Spanish; we can sell it to Air Canada; we can sell it to United Airlines.

Q: That sounds like a different sales structure than what you are used to?

A: It's really exciting for me because my entire career has been spent in the service business. We are used to building something once and selling it once. Build it once and sell it many times? That's a dream. So in one fell swoop we've been able to transform what our offering is.

Q: What is the lesson for someone who is in a service-based business?

A: If you're in the service business, I would encourage you to look for ways to get more recurring revenue based on product and reach out to global markets, particularly if you're in Atlantic Canada.

Q: What have you learned from doing business, and cutting your teeth, in New Brunswick?

A: I've learned that New Brunswickers can compete in any global field. We're exceptional at what we do and the talent here in Atlantic Canada is incredible. We have also had to figure out how to grow flowers in the desert. We're tough; we're smart; we're resourceful; we're innovative. We've just had to do that to survive.

I honestly don't think people in Los Angeles and Toronto have had to be as resourceful to survive and consequently I think we're better, or perhaps more resilient, than many people in those markets.

Q: Is it fair to say that I'm hearing more confidence in your voice now than I did in our first interview this summer?

A: I think when we spoke last time I was literally in mid-air. I was untethered. It was that moment when you're between trapeze bars.

I think now we've just grabbed the bar on the other side. The path forward on July 30th was very, very blurry but now we're feeling more focused. I also know that we wouldn't have come were it not for that moment of absolute freefall and that untethered moment.

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