

CTV's Degrassi series to be syndicated in the U.S.

It's been sold in 60 per cent of 210 U.S. syndication territories

BY MARKE ANDREWS
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Vancouver-based Thunderbird Films and U.S. partner Program Partners Inc. will place the CTV series *Degrassi: The Next Generation* in syndication in the United States next fall.

Thunderbird and Program Partners have already sold the show to 60 per cent of the 210 U.S. syndication territories. Advertisers require that a show capture 80 per cent of the market, and Thunderbird and Program Partners, which have nine months to lock up more territories, expect to repeat the success of their other Canadian series currently in U.S. syndication.

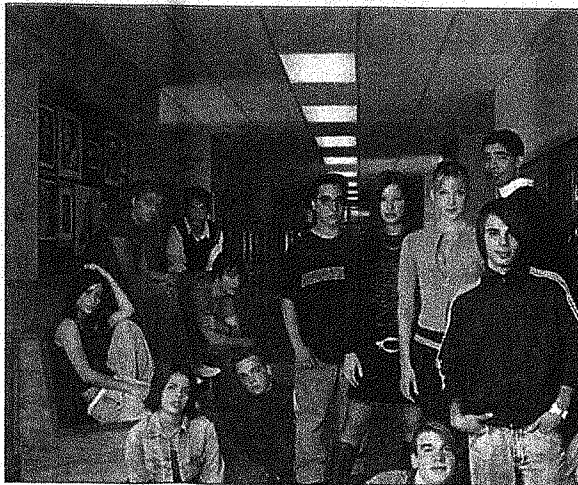
Da Vinci's Inquest, the CBC series now in its second year of syndication, reaches 98 per cent of the U.S. market. *Cold Squad*,

from CTV, and *Stone Undercover*, from CBC, each have more than 90 per cent penetration. Those shows all have 3.5 million to four million viewers a week.

Thunderbird and Program Partners are working on syndication of other Canadian television series, including an international deal involving the new Chris Haddock CBC series *Intelligence*.

U.S. stations affiliated with big TV networks (CBS, NBC, ABC, Fox) generally show first-run network series in the 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. prime-time slot, and first-run daytime series like *Oprah*. The balance of the broadcast day is made up by newscasts and second-run syndicated series (*Seinfeld* being a prime example). When Thunderbird and Program Partners make a deal to syndicate a Canadian series, they basically give the shows to the stations for free, making their money on sale of the show's advertising time, half of which is theirs to sell, the other half belonging to the local stations.

Michael Shepard, president of



Vancouver company Thunderbird Films is syndicating Canadian series in the U.S. *Degrassi: The Next Generation*. It is the fourth Canadian series they've syndicated in the U.S.

Thunderbird Films, said the quality of these Canadian shows and the hunger for drama is driving

demand south of the border.

"The U.S. market is more open than it used to be," says Shepard.

"The rise of reality television, which does not repeat very well, ultimately meant there weren't as many shows going into syndication.

"A show like *Da Vinci's Inquest*, which is our cornerstone, is a well-produced, well-written crime drama."

Degrassi: The Next Generation, shot in Toronto by Epitome Pictures, goes on air in the U.S. in September, and will run Monday to Friday, mostly in the late-afternoon time slot. All six existing seasons, totalling 118 shows, will be shown before they go into repeats. Epitome Pictures has lined up a seventh season here in Canada.

Josh Raphaelson, a founding principal partner of Program Partners, said *Degrassi: The Next Generation* was an easy sell because most of the station decision-makers knew the show from its U.S. run on Nickelodeon's The N cable network.

Studies of the 50 million to 60 million U.S. households who receive The N showed that

Degrassi was the number one show in the 18-to-34 demographic, beating out even the big network shows.

"Half the buyers knew of the show because their children loved it," says Raphaelson, who took the series to a group meeting of station executives, as well as to individual stations in almost 40 of the 210 markets.

"The other half who weren't aware of it quickly saw what we saw: a unique program in the way it presents an authentic portal into the reality of young lifestyles."

Both Raphaelson and Shepard are confident *Degrassi* will match the market penetration their other series have enjoyed. *Da Vinci's Inquest* didn't reach the 60 per cent level that *Degrassi* currently enjoys until April.

Degrassi has already acquired the five largest territories (New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia and Boston), and has 18 of the top 25 territories locked up.

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