

Serious Professional Development

Cyber Group Studios' CEO and chairman Pierre Sissmann outlines his three-pronged strategy for growing the creative and commercial scope of the Paris-based company.

By Tom McLean.

Many companies aspire to become global animation studios, producing work with a variety of techniques for diverse audiences on multiple platforms. But few have been as steadily successful in building such a business from scratch as Paris-based Cyber Group Studios, which 12 years from its founding has opened an office in Hollywood and implemented carefully weighed plans to grow in every way it can.

And with at least eight shows in production – among them *Zou*, *Mirette Investigates*, *The Pirates Next Door*, *Gigantosaurus*, *Sadie Sparks*, *Taffy*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Mini-Ninjas* and a handful of shows in development – Cyber Group's plan is so far, so good.

Speaking recently from Paris, co-founder,

chairman and CEO Pierre Sissmann outlined his three-pronged strategy for growing the company: International expansion, artistic development and increasing production capacity.

International Expansion

Sissmann says the company has spent the last five to seven years solidifying its international distribution capacities and developing properties that would appeal to all continents.

The next step comes with establishing subsidiaries that are on the ground in major markets. Cyber Group's first subsidiary opened at the start of 2017 in Los Angeles, headed up by Richard Goldsmith, formerly a high-ranking executive at The Jim Henson Co. and Warner Bros. Entertainment.

Sissmann sees an important advantage in

having a permanent presence in a market over constant travel or telecommunications from a single base.

"It was obvious for us that we had to be in the U.S.," he says. "When you look at what we intend to do the next couple of years, I would say we need to be establishing strong bases on other continents, to go from a French player to an international player to becoming a global player to becoming a regional player as well."

That kind of presence does several things, Sissmann says: It enables the company to better understand its clients, as well as global and regional markets. It also will help the company locate the creative talent needed to serve those markets.

He cites as an example a co-production Cy-



Gigantosaurus



ber Group is doing with a Brazilian company. "It would be much easier if we were on the ground somewhere in Latin America than just going over Skype like people mostly do with co-productions," he says.

Goldsmith, for example, is charged with developing Cyber Group's business in China and Asia.

"I would like this company in five years from now to be on all continents with its own imprint so that we could work locally, regionally and globally with the best talents on all continents," Sissmann says.

Artistic Development

The second part of Sissmann's plans for Cyber Group is artistic development, which he defines as growing the company's ability to execute any kind of material it wants to as well as it can.

For example, he says, when Cyber Group started, it began by making CG preschool shows, which were unusual then. Having found success in that arena, the company set its sights on kids' shows, and in the process added 2D animation capabilities to its palette. Now, it's got hybrid and stop-motion projects

in the pipeline to develop the company's artistic abilities in those techniques.

"To create and execute in any kind of shape or form is an absolute objective," says Sissmann. "I don't want us to be stopped by looking at a great idea and saying we don't know how to do it."

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Growing Production Capacity

And that leads into the third prong of the strategy, which is to increase production capabilities so the studio can make the shows it wants to make when it wants to make them.

With eight or nine series in production right now, Cyber Group's production capabilities are very strong and held to a high standard. "We are control freaks," says Sissmann, a fact reflected by the studios' in-house production ethos.

"The only way to grow is to never be satisfied with what you do or, if you are satisfied, you want to do even better than that on the next step," says Sissmann.

While Cyber Group is large for an independent company, it has to carefully manage its budgets to ensure all its parts are working correctly.

"It's a question of pace — not going too fast and also anticipating market trends," Sissmann says. "Planning is critical because if you develop, let's say, 25 to 30 series and you produce only two, it makes no sense. And if you produce seven series and you can't sell them to anyone except to the commis-

sioning broadcasters, you're dead."

That's why careful management and benchmarking everything the company does is important to Sissmann, who says it minimizes the number of mistakes. "Something I say to my staff all the time is we are bound to make mistakes," he says. "And the one thing you should do when you make mistakes is to remember the mistakes. They should be on the board as big as your successes so you always remember where you came from." ▬