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TYEE PRODUCTIONS

Introduction

"John Ripper and Tim O'Leary have never been satisfied producing infomercials that just *sell* products . . . You won't see slicing and dicing in Tyee films, or audiences cheering on inventors who torch luxury cars. What you will see are high-end products by companies who want to promote a strong, lasting image . . .

"Boring is anathema to Tyee."

Response TV, May 1993

They're not the biggest or the most prolific or even the best-known.

But they are widely regarded by their peers as the pioneers of what many consider the future of the infomercial industry -- the high-end, high-quality long-form direct response television format.

Since 1988, with the debut of their 30-minute direct response show for Soloflex -- the award-winning *Heroes* -- Tyee Productions has indisputably done more to change the way the public views infomercials than any other industry player.

They've also been at the forefront in establishing the standards for excellence and innovation that is leading the industry away from its traditional approach of making infomercials as fast and as cheap as possible.

Why was Tyee able to be different?

For one thing, Tyee Productions was not created to capitalize on the infomercial explosion like so many of their competitors who appeared after the Federal Trade Commission lifted the restraints in 1984 that had limited advertising to 12 minutes per hour.

Secondly, Tyee's founding partners had already established an enviable track record in the advertising, film and television fields -- providing the infomercial industry with over 20 years of experience each as award-winning producers, directors and creative directors.

As a result, Tyee would quickly become the force behind a succession of revolutionary break-throughs that would change forever the direction of the industry and the way that infomercials are perceived -- by both the viewing public and Fortune 500 and 1000 companies.

Before Tyee's entrance into the industry which had its roots in hard-sell, late-night 30- and 60-second direct response spots, no one was producing infomercials that:

- Promoted a corporate image while selling product;
- Were shot on film as well as video tape for a high-quality look;
- Presented information within an entertaining format;
- Offered a two-step sales approach inviting consumers to call first for a brochure or video;
- Were divided into three or more self-contained modules; (Coined by Tyee as the *pod* formula);
- That used highly-skilled directors, cinematographers, editors, art directors, set designers, and scriptwriters;
- Or attempted to incorporate a three-act story narrative and stand-up comedy.

Furthermore, Tyee's productions have garnered some of the infomercial industry's top accolades -- including Adweek/The Infomercial Marketing Report's PLAY (Program Length Advertising of the Year) and Best Written Show Awards, a Telly Award, and The National Infomercial Marketing Association's Best Production and Best Director Awards.

But has Tyee's commitment to produce compelling, entertaining and effective long-form advertising worked? Definitely. Because not only have its productions been among the most successful ever, its shows have routinely been in the top ten. And its infomercial division is now the largest and fastest-growing of its three corporate sectors.

From The Beginning...

When Tyee Productions produced the revolutionary infomercial called *Heroes* for Soloflex in 1988, no one had yet coined the term 'infomercials'. No one had gone beyond shows that were made on shoe string budgets and shot in a studio on video tape with stationary multi-cameras.

In fact, the only shows remotely similar to *Heroes* were the three infomercials that founding partners John Ripper and Roger Thompson had produced for Soloflex in the mid-1980's while working for another production company.

The association between Soloflex and Tyee began primarily because of Thompson's previous sports-oriented production experience as a founding member of Nike's renown in-house film unit.

Soloflex had been advertising their state-of-the-art strength-building machine through full-page ads in such publications as TIME magazine, which featured an 800 number for readers to call for a brochure and a 15-minute video tape. "The video tape was the selling piece," says Ripper. "The video tapes became so popular that they thought, 'Hey, let's put the video tape on the air.'"

The concept of long-form direct response programming was so new and unexplored at the time, that the Tyee partners found themselves relying on their years' of experience in commercials and corporate videos and what Ripper calls "plain common sense."

"Because nobody had tried to break the hard-sell mold before, nobody really knew what to do, other than 'Let's just put a program up there and make sure people have three opportunities to call the 800 number.'" In the process, Tyee ended up with an entirely new look and concept that would wake up a complacent industry.

"There were a lot of firsts with Soloflex," says Ripper. "It was the first to offer a high priced item. The first to sell image without the hard sell in terms of its success. The first to be shot with film and probably the first with a more entertaining concept."

By the time the duo produced "Heroes" under their newly-formed Tyee banner, the industry had mushroomed into dozens of specialized production and media-buying houses, along with a much-needed watchdog advocacy group, The National Infomercial Marketing Association (NIMA).

Not surprisingly, *Heroes* would become the first hero of the genre and received the first of NIMA's annual awards for "Best Production" and "Best Director".

In 1991, while attempting to balance their rising reputation in infomercials with a busy commercial and corporate video schedule, Tyee hired Tim O'Leary to spearhead the new division.

"It was right when the word infomercial was just starting to be used," says Ripper. "After taking a very serious look at the industry, we concluded that 'This is a business and we can become a niche player in the market, but we need to focus and do what we do and only what we do and really be experts at it.'"

Soon after O'Leary's arrival, Tyee had the opportunity to work with NordicTrack which would result in three more trend-setting shows.

"NordicTrack had never done an infomercial before," O'Leary says of the company that had established its one-of-a-kind cross country ski machines solely through print ads in magazines in which consumers could write in for more information.

Tyee's *Nordic Flex Gold* show stunned the industry with its seamless combination of glossy production values and soft-sell approach -- and as a result garnered ADWEEK/The Infomercial Marketing Report's highest honor (the Play Award for Program Length Advertising of the Year) and its award for "Best Written Show."

Their third show for NordicTrack, *12 Weeks to Success*, went a step further by introducing time-lapse photography to show the actual results of the strength-building program over the course of three months.

In 1992, Tyee challenged the hard-sell approach further by debuting an infomercial called *Crosswalker* for ProForm Fitness that contained a continuing story -- about the development of the machine -- within a full-length sales program.

Then in 1993, they led again by giving viewers a reason to stay tuned throughout a show with stand-up comedy interspersed throughout their infomercial for Voice Powered Technology's *VCR Voice*, a voice activated universal remote control.

And this summer, Tyee's first-ever infomercial built entirely around a three-act story narrative will premiere for Ginsu's *Professional Series* knives.

Building An Image, While Selling a Product

Review the agendas of most infomercial conferences and workshops today and invariably one topic will be at the top of the list: image-building.

Why? Because the soaring costs of media buys is driving out the single-product entrepreneurs, while the Fortune 500 and 1000 companies are waking up to the many advantages of 30-minute advertising.

But O'Leary and Ripper don't need to attend lectures on the necessity of building a corporate client's image while pushing direct response and retail sales. In fact, they're usually featured as the keynote speakers or members of a panel at such sessions. And for one simple reason -- Tyee has always designed its shows around the concept that a corporations's name and reputation are as important as the product featured.

It has always been Tyee's objective to construct an entertaining environment that would not only result in blockbuster sales -- but enhance

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and build a corporate image and brand-name identity, while engendering consumer confidence for the back-end follow-up sales.

It doesn't sound like such a radical notion and it isn't for a company that has been perfecting the laws of advertising for as long as Tyee. It's just one of the most popular tenets of the industry at the moment because it's an approach that will appeal to the blue-chip clientele who are beginning to incorporate infomercials into their marketing budgets in a big way.

"Traditionally, the industry has been focused on how fast they could get a product sold, rather than creating images," says Ripper. "And it's usually been the one-product shows that have given the medium the sleazy reputation that the industry is fighting today.

"But Fortune 500 and 1000 companies are interested in selling image because it drives retail. They're looking for positioning as well as selling the product. In fact, some are pleased if their infomercial merely breaks even. Because they'll make their money on that back-end, with retailing. They not only reach retail consumers, but the infomercial completely paid for their advertising."

Adds O'Leary: "It's always been our philosophy to maximize the odds of success for a corporate client, rather than make a fast buck. We have no desire to do one-time shows. We've always done our best work for clients who view infomercials with a long term perspective.

"Obviously, we want to sell product. But that's not everything that a corporate client is looking for. To give you a recent example, Ginsu came to us to produce their first full-length infomercial for their new upscale knives -- because they knew they had to reposition their brand image at the same time. Ginsu has been manufacturing knives for some of the world's most prestigious labels for years -- but nobody knew it. And the only way they were going to shed their old late-night chopping and dicing image was with a state-of-the-art show that would change consumer perceptions. "And that's the challenge that Tyee understands and does best."

Shows That Are Worth Watching

"It's always our goal to create programming that people will talk about the next day. And a half-hour gives you that potential," says O'Leary about Tyee's on-going efforts to create entertaining shows.

Adds Ripper: "Let's be frank about it. Right now, infomercials -- even if they're airing late at night -- are competing with four networks and a zillion cable options. That situation will only get worse in the future.

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"So if you don't want the channel-changers to keep on clicking past you, you've got to give them something more engrossing than a high level sales pitch that will grate on their nerves after five minutes. Besides, that kind of appeal will work with a lower-priced item.

"You're never going to sell a product that, say, costs a thousand dollars or more in that kind of way. The landscape of direct response consuming has changed dramatically."

Depending on the quality of the sales presentation and the corporate name behind the product, people are becoming less and less resistant to buying a big-ticket product from an infomercial says O'Leary.

"So many people don't want to go to the mall anymore," he says. "It's time-consuming. Retailing has changed so that the average minimum-wage clerk can't explain the complex features of anything but the simplest of products. And they plain and simple find shopping stressful.

"But if you're going to get the upscale buyer who will spend several hundred dollars to several thousand or more, then you've got to give them a lot of pertinent information, but you've got to shroud it in an absorbing environment. Which is what we did in particular with the Proform *Crosswalker* show. We took them 'along' with us, as we learned about how the product was developed, what makes it unique, and why they should trust in the company."

In the future, Tyee hopes to concentrate solely on infomercials "where the characters are not talking directly to you, saying 'Buy this product.' We're finding that it's far more effective to tell a story about the product," says Ripper.

Tyee's Unique Pod Formula

"Our infomercials follow a pod format, which means that the show is divided into viewing segments that each contain enough product information and product pitch to give viewers plenty of chances to order," says Ripper.

"Our philosophy is that most people don't watch an infomercial for an entire half hour. Instead, they tend to stumble onto an infomercial, whether it's in the first minute, the 12th minute or the 26th minute. And they usually don't watch the entire program.

"So a typical Tyee half-hour show might have three pods, each with a nine-minute nugget of information, and finishing with a call to action, which is our label for the moment the viewer picks up the phone."

While the usual life span of an infomercial is between six to twelve months, many of Tyee's shows, including its Soloflex productions, are still running several years later.

Adding to their long broadcast-life is the fact that Tyee develops their programs around the modular approach, which allows new shows to be created from a compilation of existing footage.

"We try to design our shows so that if the format is working for a client, they can take pods out of other shows and mix and match them, and come up with a completely new show, just by re-editing. In a lot of cases, we actually do construct commercials that go within each pod that are separate from the call to action. And that commercial can be about the company itself, it can be an image piece, it can be a variety of things," adds O'Leary.

"A client can also cut one-minute or two-minute spots out of the show, which makes it extremely cost effective for them."

The Two-Step, Soft Sales Approach

Tyee was the first to do a 'two-step' show "where you don't just call in and order. You get an image of a product and you call up and get more information," says Ripper.

Adds O'Leary: "The philosophy is -- and we proved it with both the Soloflex and Proform *Crosswalker* shows in particular -- if the show's good enough and you convince somebody that there's a company behind it and that it's a great product, and the show's compelling -- they will just call up and order, even if the item is expensive. Proform has proven that. It has a two-step component to it, but most people just call up and order it."

A Class Above The Rest In Production Values

Watch a Tyee infomercial -- without knowing the name of the production company -- and chances are, you'll know immediately who produced it. From day one, their work has belied their continuous quest for merging state-of-the-art technology with acumen and vision to provide a presentation that would put any company and its product in the major leagues of sales performance.

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Ask them why and they're quick to tell you: "One of the big differences is that we use real directors, producers, editors, and set designers, and a lot of our competitors do not," says O'Leary. "Plus we script our shows, which most don't. We always strive to sell with a certain degree of elegance and style, and you can't do that without hiring the best."

Adds Ripper: "We try to hold viewers with an exciting visual presentation instead of wild claims, which means that you've got to work with skilled crews or all the vision in the world won't get you a polished show.

"We try to produce our shows with the quality of a network program. So we basically do everything they do in constructing sets, paying special attention to lighting, incorporating lots of editing and so on. "And if it didn't make a difference, I'd have to guess we wouldn't be in the business today with a roster of major corporate clients."

Tyee also creates sophisticated computer graphics and commission original music.

"You simply can't promote an expensive product without giving it a more subtle and stylish approach," says O'Leary, referring particularly to the success of their Proform infomercial for *Crosswalker*, which has been at the top of the sales chart since its debut.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of a Tyee production is the fact that the company "shoots like a movie," says Ripper. "We use film as often as we can, because it has a higher-perceived quality level. There's a feeling about film that's different from video. There are certain aspects of a show that if you don't shoot on film, it starts to look like a soap opera or a game show."

While film can drive up the cost of an infomercial budget, O'Leary says that Tyee usually saves money for a client in other ways. "Although Tyee films look expensive, we put more money into the production budget than many of our competitors," he explains. "For instance, we rarely use celebrities, which saves the client some pretty hefty up-front fees and possible royalties down the line.

"We always look at it as a challenge to find the most entertaining format so that the success of the sales pitch is not dependent on a celebrity who may or may not appeal to every potential consumer."



TIM O'LEARY

Vice President and Co-Creative Director

In only two short years, Tim O'Leary has reached a pinnacle of success in the direct response marketing world that is phenomenal by any standard.

He has not only helped Tyee Productions establish its impeccable reputation for high-quality long-form programming, but he is widely recognized in the direct response industry as a leading authority and creative force, as well as an important trendsetter.

Furthermore, since his arrival, infomercials have become the award-winning company's fastest-growing division. O'Leary has also contributed significantly to Tyee's pioneering break-throughs for the industry.

Despite his brief tenure in the industry, O'Leary has quickly become a popular speaker at a succession of national conferences and workshops. Most recently, he addressed the prestigious Cosmetic Executive Women's Newsmaker Event on Infomercials in New York. He's also been an invited guest at three Infomercial Marketing Report events and at special seminars for both UCLA and the Learning Annex in New York.

During the second half of 1993, he has been invited to address the National Infomercial Marketing Association in New York; the Direct Marketing Association in Toronto; and to represent the industry (with John Ripper) at the American Advertising Federation's National POWER SUMMIT in June.

O'Leary's meteoric rise within the infomercial industry is not surprising in light of the fact that the Billings, Montana native had created and sold several hugely-successful businesses (all involving sales) by the age of 30.

In fact, it was only two years ago after taking a year off to contemplate his next career step, that he connected with Tyee. In many ways, O'Leary was destined to work in the relatively-new field of long-form direct response programming.

While studying for a business degree at the University of Montana in 1979, he inadvertently discovered the world of late-night direct response spots while working as film critic for a local television station in Missoula.

"I was in the control booth one day and I saw some direct response spots. I asked someone at the station why we ran these all the time," O'Leary

recalls. "He said we run these for free on a PI basis (*per inquiry*). I said, 'If we produced a television commercial, the station would run it for free?' And he said yes.

"It's still very common in the industry. When stations have unused inventories of time, they need to fill it with something. So if you make them an offer that they'll receive so much per sale, they'll do it. Some infomercials and a lot of spots are still run on a PI basis."

So O'Leary approached a friend of his father's, a local fishing guide who had invented the Tak Pak chest-mounted tackle box, but had never had much success selling it.

Fortunately, the inventor had shot some footage of people using it while fishing in Wyoming, which O'Leary edited together into a 60-second direct-sell spot.

"We put them on TV for \$14.95, and gave the stations \$4.00 for every one that sold," he recalls. Before long, O'Leary had convinced stations across the country to run it as well. During the next year and a half, O'Leary continued producing successful direct response spots.

After graduating from college in 1981, he moved to Los Angeles with the goal of eventually attending film school. (He would later spend a year studying film and screenwriting at Stanford University's Mass Media Institute.) In the meantime, he wrote ad copy for a small agency, but soon realized that Southern California was not for him. So he picked up and moved to San Francisco, which he assumed would be a more creative community.

Before getting a chance to settle in, he was called back to Montana for personal reasons. Broke and unable to pay for graduate school, O'Leary was persuaded to spend a few months working in his father's business, which factory repped gasoline pumps.

Reluctantly, he began selling gas pumps. About that time, a new credit card machine was introduced for gas stations. "So I thought, this is the wave of the future. Rather than sell gas pumps, I'll sell these."

The problem was no one had created a computer system to process the invoices for the machines, which made selling them nearly impossible. So O'Leary recruited a few programmer friends and together they created the software for an Apple (the most popular personal computer at the time). The

system was offered as an incentive to boost sales of the card machine. Before long, he was the top salesman in the country, which caught the attention of the manufacturer who suggested that he market the program nationally.

So, O'Leary formed a software company with his friends (while still running his gas pump business), which began creating business applications programs for such clients as fleet management companies, retail industries and Walt Disney World. Before long, the company had 30 employees and a second office in Portland, Oregon, where O'Leary began spending a lot of time.

By the mid-1980's, he decided to sell out his share of the business and try a new challenge -- starting up the first national catalogue business for the automotive service industry. Offering everything from pump nozzles to automotive lifts, the catalogue grew to a circulation of 50,000.

One of the innovative features of his direct mail marketing program was the fact that a gas station operator could lease major equipment at a fraction of the cost of purchasing it. "For \$500 a month, you could open an automotive shop with everything you needed," he says. "And the credit requirements were minimal."

Not one to kick back on his success for long, O'Leary then began thinking about how American-made automotive lifts could be improved. So he sent an employee to Europe to find a better design. Upon his return, O'Leary took the information, hired an engineering firm, and entered into a joint venture with a manufacturing company to produce it.

Meanwhile, the federal government began imposing stringent environmental regulations on the petroleum industry, so O'Leary branched out into providing leak detection equipment and environmental monitoring systems.

In 1990, O'Leary sold his businesses and settled in Portland. For the next year, while deliberately doing nothing but building a deck onto his Portland home and tackling a few other remodeling projects, he began to realize that being a successful entrepreneur was simply not enough.

"The things I'd enjoyed doing the most were the creative things I had done, like putting the mail-order catalogue together," he laughs. "And I thought, 'If I get excited about writing copy to sell an automotive lift, there's something wrong with my life!'"

After beating out 75 applicants for a job with Tye Productions, O'Leary

joined the production company in 1991. And within a short period of time, he became Tyee's vice president and a member of the creative team that designed and executed phenomenally-successful infomercials. He has spearheaded the direct response division, expanding it into the company's largest division, and establishing Tyee as one of the infomercial industry's most respected producers. He also serves as a consultant to companies entering the direct response industry.

O'Leary shares such accolades as the PLAY Award (Program Length Advertising of the Year) and the Best Written Show Award from AdWeek/The Infomercial Marketing Report among others.

For the young man in his early 30's who seems to thrive on pushing the edge of the envelope in whatever he does, one thing is certain -- Tim O'Leary has found his niche.



JOHN RIPPER

President and Founding Partner

One of the Northwest's most talented production executives, John Ripper, has spent the last 20 years working as a producer, director and creative director in both the television and advertising industries.

As one of the creative forces behind Tyee Productions, Ripper has shared some of the advertising industry's most prestigious awards, including: top honors from the Cannes Film Festival and the New York International Film and Video Festival.

His invaluable contributions to Tyee's distinctive infomercials has brought the company such outstanding recognition as AdWeek/The Infomercial Marketing Report's PLAY Award (Program Length Advertising of the Year) and "Best Written Show"; The National Infomercial Marketing Association's "Best Product" and "Best Director" Awards; and the Telly Award.

A native Oregonian, Ripper grew up in the coastal town of Coos Bay. Exposed to music from a young age, he learned piano and saxophone and played in a rock and roll band in high school. "I guess my creative background really comes from music," he says. "It has certainly given me an edge in terms of guiding composers in creating original music for our productions."

After receiving his undergraduate degree in social sciences from the University of Oregon in 1966, Ripper was drafted into the military, trained as an image interpreter to decipher aerial intelligence photos and stationed in Da Nang.

Before long, he was reassigned and spent the rest of his tour flying one to two missions a day all over North Vietnam, shooting aerial photos, which he developed, analyzed and wrote up into intelligence reports. "I would be sent out by any one of the branches -- the Special Forces, the Air Force, the Army, the Marines or whomever -- to fly these reconnaissance missions before the troops were sent into a certain area." "Sometimes, he recalls, "we'd be just barely skimming the tree tops."

After returning from Vietnam in 1970, Ripper attended the University of Oregon and received a master of fine arts degree in filmmaking in 1972. During that time he was awarded a two year teaching fellowship working with undergraduate art students.

One of Ripper's professors at the University of Oregon had a significant influence on his artistry as a filmmaker. "Instead of having us imitate mainstream filmmaking, he had us learn how to take risks, which I feel is the best possible way of understanding the process," Ripper says.

Right after school, Ripper landed a job at Oregon Public Broadcasting in 1973, where he would spend three years as a producer and director on a variety of projects.

AT OPB, Ripper also produced a series of Oregon Bicentennial history programs. For one year, OPB assigned him to work simultaneously on a cooperative project with Chicago Public Broadcasting (WTTW) for PBS' national 26-week one-hour series, "As We See It." Serving as a regional producer and writer, Ripper met daily for two hours with a group of seven high school students, guiding their efforts in writing up stories for broadcast about their views on interracial issues. "It was an absolutely incredible series, because at the time there was a lot of busing and forced integration going on."

He spent the next two years in Baltimore, working as a producer and director for Maryland Public Broadcasting, one of the country's premiere public television production facility that is responsible for much of PBS' programming, including "Wall Street Week."

Anxious to return to the Northwest, Ripper moved back to Portland, where he was hired by a leading production house which was known for employing talented young filmmakers. His several-year stint there gave him the opportunity to work on some of the hottest commercials at the time.

When the company changed hands, Ripper opted to freelance as a producer and director. During the next four years, he worked on a number of projects, including a television special which he directed called "Cycling Through China." It featured such celebrities as Kate Jackson, Ben Vereen, and Loren Greene on a 25-day bicycle tour of that country.

In 1984, he was hired as one of the four field producers on Metromedia's "On Stage America," which took him to Los Angeles. For "On Stage America," which aired on Saturday nights for two hours, Ripper produced many of the behind-the-scenes segments that would precede each celebrity's appearance.

Sometimes the pieces would introduce new talent -- such as then lessor known PeeWee Herman, Howie Mandel or Tiffany. Other times, the focus would be on a little known aspect of an established star's life, as with Dean Martin and Diahann Carroll. Or it might spotlight a career change, as with Lisa Hartman's entrance into country/western music.

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By the mid-1980's, Ripper was back in Portland and working for a major production company, where he would not only expand his experience and knowledge of the commercial and corporate video field, but meet his future Tyee partners -- director/cinematographer Roger Thompson (who had previously spent five years as a founding member of Nike's renown in-house film unit), editor Steve Scott, and Mike McLeod, a former independent filmmaker.

When the company sold in 1987, it took the four only seven days to decide that it was time to strike out on their own and they formed Tyee Productions. Within a week four others joined them as their employees.

Possibly the key factor that led to their enduring success was the fact that the four sat down and wrote up a 60-page document that incorporated every detail of their vision. "Everything we're doing right now is part of that five-year business plan," Ripper proudly shares.

As they designed it, Tyee would become a full-service production house involved in commercials, corporate videos, post-production and even an area they called "long-form proprietary programming," which today is called infomercials. "There was not a label available at the time, but we knew it we would be related to marketing and sales. We just didn't know if it would mean producing videos to sell products, or producing videos that would be the product."

The venture was an immediate success. Even so, until the money actually rolled in, they chose to forego an office so they could pay their employees. "For the first month, we were meeting at restaurants for breakfast and lunch, then splitting up to our jobs the rest of the day," Ripper remembers fondly.

It didn't take long, however, before they signed up Hewlett-Packard and U.S. Bank among others, and moved into a one-room office until they were able to gut and refurbish a warehouse, where the company has its studio today.

In addition to the recognition they receive for their award-winning commercials and corporate videos, Tyee is fast becoming one of the most respected direct response producers in the country.



ROGER THOMPSON

Director and Founding Partner

Award-winning director Roger Thompson has more than 20 years of experience in the television and advertising fields as a director, cinematographer, producer and editor.

His remarkable creative talents have helped Tye Productions establish an impeccable trademark look and style that's produced a trophy case full of honors for the Portland, Oregon-based company.

Most importantly, Thompson has been the recipient of numerous awards from the National Press Photographers Association -- the highest honor that can be bestowed on a broadcast cameraman -- and a half dozen regional Emmys.

The native Oregonian began studying still photography in high school in Salem, which he translated to a successful business as a wedding and portrait photographer before graduating in 1971.

A year later, at the age of 19, he was hired as police and fire reporter and cameraman at Eugene's NBC affiliate, KVAL-TV.

Two years later, he broke into the Portland market with a job as a cameraman, editor and co-producer for Portland's CBS affiliate KOIN-TV. And between 1974 and 1976 -- which marked a high-point in broadcast photojournalism -- he covered the region for the station, doing personality profiles for news shows and specials. The results of his efforts brought him the first of many National Press Photographers' Associations' (NPPA) awards -- competing against the networks.

Though still in his early 20's, Thompson was already developing a regional reputation and fielding job offers from the networks. He opted to stay in the Pacific Northwest, however, "because I didn't want to leave Portland which is required when you go on staff for a national show."

In 1976, Thompson moved to the local NBC affiliate, KGW-TV. He served as the co-producer and cameraman for KGW's newly created magazine show called *Evening*. "It was a format that had never been tried in television, so it was extremely innovative and extremely successful," Thompson recalls. In fact, its success would eventually spawn clones in other cities.

Evening produced additional national NPPA awards for Thompson despite the fact he was sometimes competing against such giants as "60 Minutes."

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At the same time, he shot and edited half-hour documentaries for KGW until 1980. It was a time when one could be creative and innovative with the format, as documentaries were then a programming staple, unlike today, where syndicated shows fill most of the available time periods.

He also field produced and shot stories for the networks, such as the Mount St. Helens eruption and the West Coast campaign tours of presidential candidates Nixon, Ford and Carter.

And when he was available, Thompson freelanced as producer, cameraman and editor on such NBC shows as *Real People* and *That's Incredible*.

In 1980, he moved to Nike as founding member of their five-person film and video unit, where he worked as a photographer and editor. The unit would become renown for its state-of-the-art profiles on Nike's star athletes, capturing their record-breaking achievements, their hopes and disappointments, and even their visits home with Mom and Dad.

Often featured at Nike's grand-size celebratory events, the completed pieces would also appear on the USA Network and on national magazine shows. The raw footage would often end up in the hands of the networks who had an insatiable need for sports-related material.

During that time, Thompson also worked on four major Nike campaigns: Carl Lewis, Michael Jordan ("Air Jordan"), John McEnroe and the "I Love LA" film that aired the last night of the Olympics. "It was an incredible and extremely high energy experience. It was unique because we were the only ones doing that sort of work," he says.

Thompson says he loved shooting sports, "Because you can capture so much emotion on film -- the competition and the excitement of winning -- the thrill of a triumph. For a filmmaker, it presents great opportunities to play with photojournalism, music and sound. You do a highlight film for Nike and you have incredible material to work with," he enthuses.

Ready for a change after five years, Thompson accepted a position as a director for Portland's leading production house in the advertising business, where he would meet his future Tyee partners. He worked on industrial and image films as well as retail sports -- which gave him the critical opportunity to begin working with lighting, sets and performers, from which he would create his own unique style and look.

When the company changed hands in 1987, he joined John Ripper and two other associates in forming Tyee Productions. Even though they landed several large accounts immediately, they decided to go without an office the first month. "I had a Volvo station wagon and a portable phone that was our office," he laughs.

But it was a risk that paid off. "What's exciting is that there are people out there asking us to do 'different.' They're not saying copy so-and-so because they were successful. They want to push the envelope and that's always a creative challenge," he relates happily.

