

[How Hemmings House Pictures Became a Production Company with a Conscience](#)

Oct 16, 2017 by [Cherise Letson](#)



Greg Hemmings Image: Submitted

It all started in 2006 with a Wrestling TV show.

Hit Media, Greg Hemmings' first film company that he started with two friends, had recently folded. After working for a season on a TV show with his friend's new company, Hemmings decided to go out on his own.

"I started my own company in that same year because I got a wrestling show called Wrestling Reality and it's awesome. It's such an awesome show," says Hemmings. "I thought I might as well start my new thing. No partners, just me."



Greg Hemmings, celebrating Hemmings House's first birthday 10 years ago.
Image: Submitted

That's when he incorporated [Hemmings House Pictures](#).

This year the company is celebrating its 10-year anniversary, though it's technically been 11 years. That's forgivable since Hemmings House Pictures has undergone a huge evolution since it's wrestling show days.

Today, it's an award-winning media production company that's shot projects all around the world. A certified [B-Corporation](#), Hemmings House now has a specialized focus on projects, both commercial and not, that instigate and lead positive social change all over the world.

The switch to the focus on social change came in 2009 when Hemmings House worked on its film, [Sistema Revolution](#). Hemmings' says it was on that project that he first saw the

immense power of positive social change.

For the project, the film crew accompanied the New Brunswick Youth Orchestra leadership to Venezuela. The orchestra was looking at a free education program in the country called El Sistema, which taught orchestral music to all kids, regardless of family income.

At the time, the New Brunswick Youth Orchestra was looking to see if the program could work in New Brunswick too.

“As soon as we brought that footage back, it just started happening,” says Hemmings. “We started filming the movement as it was happening. So when a politician came and announced [funding for the program] we got that on camera. We honoured them as being part of the story. The CBC saw what we were doing and they said, ‘Why don’t you follow this for two years?’ ”

Today, Sistema New Brunswick operates eight orchestra centres in Moncton, Saint John, Richibucto, the Tobique First Nation, Edmundston, Miramichi, Hillsborough and Elsipogtog First Nation and works with more than 850 students on a daily basis.

“All this amazing positive change came in our community as a result. I was like, ‘man, how do we do that again?’ ”

Hemmings House did do it again, this time with their documentary Code Kids, which sparked the creation of New Brunswick-based [Brilliant Labs](#).

For Hemmings, these projects showed that his company had found its focus on projects – for-profit and not-for-profit – that inspire social change.

“It was at that point with Sistema and seeing that impact happen, I was like, ‘we can push that over to the commercial side too,’ ” he says.

“Patagonia does it all the time. They make awesome films that are making a positive change in the world. They’re not making commercials. They’re just putting out good stories and as a result, their brand loyalty is huge. So we’ve been really teaching that philosophy to our clients and it’s not exclusively the work we do by any means, but that’s stuff that gets us really excited.”



Stephen Foster.
Image: Submitted

Hemmings House president Stephen Foster has been around since the company’s beginnings. He was first brought on as an intern in 2006 to help out with Wrestling Reality. He says the company’s focus on positive social impact has given it a sense of direction.

“Where we’re at now has probably taken a decade for us to figure out. I think when we heard about this B-Corp community it was almost like a light went on. Like ‘wow, that is exactly what we want to be a part of and what perhaps we failed to articulate in our own mission in the past. We were taking every project and doing whatever

came our way and we didn't really have much of a plan," says Foster.

"With social-impact storytelling, with being a part of the B-Corporation community, it has given us a sense of fulfilment and a sense of placement. We know what we want to be and who we want to be. And doing good using the medium of film and storytelling is our weapon. It's how we tell our story."

Today, about 85 percent of Hemming's House revenues are from Atlantic Canadian companies, relationships Hemmings says they have nurtured over the years. The other 15 to 20 percent of their revenues come from outside the region.

Hemmings says they'd like to focus more the on the U.S. market and larger urban centres.

"I'd love to see it come to parity at some point soon where we're doing X amount of dollars in Atlantic Canada and the same amount in the U.S. The curve is going the right direction," says Hemmings. "We cut our teeth here in Atlantic Canada, made a portfolio that allowed us to win work in the U.S. We wouldn't win work in the U.S. even if we're a B-Corp if we didn't have anything to show."

Though based in Atlantic Canada, Hemmings says U.S. clients are happy to work with them.

"They don't care," he says. "They like the work. That's what they're buying into and they're buying into the value alignment."

That being said, in order to continue to grow the business, Hemmings House needs to have some sort of presence in bigger markets.



Image: Submitted

"Right now we are seriously talking to a potential partner to set up an office in Toronto. Really have a strong focus on New York and Boston.

"I see us expanding not for the sake of scale and growth. I want fewer projects but more really meaningful, well-paid projects. And to do that we need to be in denser markets. We have to be in Boston or New York, or Toronto, but always be based here."

This would allow Hemmings House to do more of the kinds of projects they want to do – the ones that could help make a difference in the world.

"That doesn't mean we're not working with companies and brands because they will help us fund it, they'll be the horsepower behind it," says Hemmings. "But instead of someone calling us saying, 'hey, can you do this 30 second commercial for us?' Instead, we'll be like, 'hey market, we're going to build this amazing campaign, this documentary for this particular issue or this feature film whatever, who wants in?' That's the shift I think we're all really looking for."

Hemmings House will be celebrating their anniversary on December 1 at the [Social Enterprise Hub](#) in Saint John.