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ONE-STOP SHOPPING

With its unique business model, Bay Area-based Be Prods. creates locally produced sitcoms that star its young clients

JUST BE. That's the philosophy Erik DeSando had in mind when he set up, in Berkeley, Calif., children's talent agency and film studio Be Prods., which produces original shows that air locally on the CW Network and star his young clients.

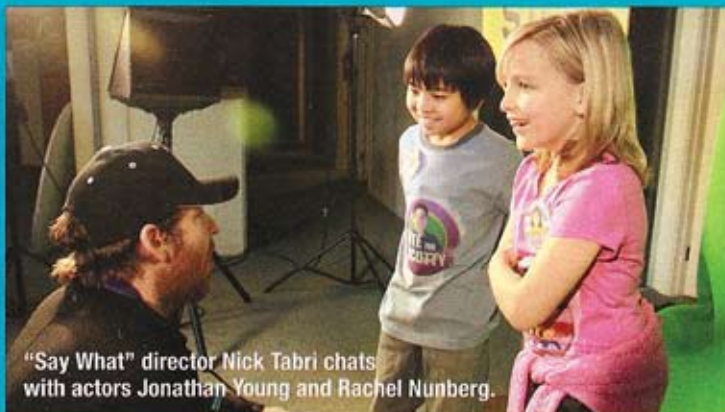
"Every single member of Be works on our shows and gains experience that can benefit them in their future endeavors," says DeSando, who ran Identity Talent Agency in Los Angeles before creating Be. "I had been on the other side, where we shopped kids around and tried to get them work. It was disheartening all around."

Be produces the kid-friendly shows "Say What" and "Kids Unlimited," which air at 6:00 a.m. and 6:30 a.m. Saturdays in the Bay Area. By the end of 2008, Be is expected to expand to include three more California markets (San Diego, Newport Beach and Sacramento), as well as Phoenix and Las Vegas.

While DeSando loves what he does, he's not shy when he says that Be can only be because it's a moneymaking business. Each of the 3,000 Bay Area members pays about \$100 a month.

Thanks to the volume of its membership and the contacts DeSando has culled over the years, Be is able to provide industry discounts for its members (e.g., \$20 for an acting class that ordinarily runs between \$100 and \$200).

Since opening its doors in March 2006, Be has let the kids have a hands-on approach to creating the content. Twelve-year-old Elizabeth Machabell, who has trained with dancer Edyta Sliwinska of ABC's "Dancing With the Stars" fame, says that the environment at Be is laid-back and friendly.



"Say What" director Nick Tabri chats with actors Jonathan Young and Rachel Nunberg.

"I'm hoping to become a great actress one day," says the eighth grader. "But another consideration for me is to get experience behind the camera as a director. It's nice because all the producers and directors that we work with are so open about sharing their knowledge with us. They don't just treat us like little kids."

Jonathan Young, 13, was the first child to audition for Be. It took about six months before he heard he was accepted, but now Young — an actor with a knack for comedic timing — is one of Be's rising stars.

"Before I got into acting, I was kind of shy," he says. "I can interact with people a lot easier now than before because I'm meeting and working with so many people every day. Although I'd like to act when I'm grown up, I don't have unrealistic expectations about fame or anything like that. I'm just an average kid who'd like to grow up to be someone who was important to the world, like Shakespeare or Einstein or Washington."

Or maybe even Will Ferrell.

— Jae-Ha Kim