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TOM TORGVE | SPECIAL TO THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

From left, Image Brew founder Benjamin Jones, producer and account manager Justin Springer, and creative director Evan Nix. Image Brew provides full-service video production, from scripting to distribution, to nonprofits, businesses and ad agencies.

Video work for TV show keeps Image Brew hopping

BY HEATHER DRAPER
DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Image Brew founder Benjamin Jones rolled open the garage door/windows in his firm's new space in the funky Taxi campus in north Denver, despite the fact that it was a cold, gray January morning.

He couldn't help himself. "Isn't this cool?" Jones said, over the low rumble of passing trains below his fourth-floor office designed by father-and-son developers Mickey and Kyle Zeppelin.

For Jones, who is from Rochester, N.Y., the 1,200-square-foot space filled with expensive video equipment and large computer monitors is exactly what he was hoping for when he launched his video production company in Denver in early 2008.

Image Brew provides full-service video production, from scripting to distribution, to nonprofits, businesses and ad agencies.

This is the company's fourth office in as many years, and the windows offer an unobstructed view of the mountains, which was "a must," the outdoor enthusiast said. "I plan to stay here awhile."

Jones, 31, started Image Brew in Rochester in 2007 after leaving a job at a film production company in Manhattan. But he decided to move the company to Denver almost immediately.

"The key for me is thinking far down the road about how I want to grow the business," Jones said. "A big part of that was being somewhere I'd rather live, and Colorado's always been on my radar. I came out here on ski trips as a kid and I thought Colorado was the coolest place ever."

Launching Image Brew as the U.S. economy started to tank didn't scare Jones, he said, because he was only 26, single and working out of his home. "I think if you're a 40-year-old with a wife and kids, it's riskier for them," he said. "Your desire to be experimental is a little bit hindered, the older you get."

Jones started the company with a \$15,000 loan from his parents, and he is turning a healthy profit, he said. He has grown the company's revenue 20 percent annually for the last three years, he said.

"The challenges I faced at the start were finding customers who saw the value in the services we offer," Jones said. "Web video is relatively new, and professional video content has always been a luxury for companies, not a necessity, like it's becoming. Those first couple slow years created a handful of months where I didn't have many projects to bill. It was a stressful time, but the excitement of being self-employed carried me through it."

Jones secured a line of credit through Chase bank, a unit of New York-based JPMorgan Chase (NYSE: JPM), and was able to increase that line last year. "The new line is higher than the original, and they gave it to me with no problems, but only after seeing our annual growth and future projections," Jones said. "It's



IMAGE BREW

Image Brew founder Benjamin Jones on location in Rwanda, producing a series of videos for Denver-based nonprofit Water for People.

It happened like this...

Benjamin Jones used to speak in plural pronouns at networking events when first promoting his company — "We just produced a video for so-and-so" — even though it was just him producing videos at his house.

amazing how supportive banks will be when they see that you've been out of the red and growing year after year, even if you're small."

He has two full-time employees and a third who will start in February. He also employs many freelancers for big projects — from graphic artists to actors — and prides himself on hiring locally.

"We sometimes hire 30 freelancers a month on a big shoot," he said.

On a computer next to the garage door/windows, is editing the video from the firm's last big shoot — a sitcom pilot for online retail giant Amazon.com.

Amazon Studios, the original film and series production arm of Amazon.com, last year put out a call for scripts for original "television" programming that will be streamed over Amazon Instant Video.

Image Brew is producing the pilot for Denver comedy team The Grawlix, comprised of Adam Cayton-Holland, Andrew Ovredahl and Ben Roy, which was one of six finalists chosen for the project. The finalists include "Doonesbury" comic-strip creator Garry Trudeau and writers for "The Daily Show" and "The Onion."

Image Brew filmed the pilot, a comedy about three juvenile, misfit teachers who are just as immature as the students they teach, in Denver using local actors and contractors. They shot some scenes at Manual High School with high school drama students.

"It's our first foray into original content," Jones said. "It's a full 22-minute TV pilot. They [Amazon] chose six groups to

give a chunk of change to, \$50,000 each, to make a pilot, and they're hoping to pick up two or three of them."

The Amazon project is just one of eight on the company's white board.

In another room, documentary filmmaker Justin Springer, Image Brew producer and account manager, edits a video for a cracker company that will be used in an upcoming trade show. Seneca, Jones' golden retriever, is nearby, chomping loudly on a gigantic rawhide.

The firm also is working on projects with Boulder-based Pearl Izumi USA, an athletic apparel maker, and Osaka, Japan-based Shimano, which manufactures cycling and fishing equipment.

This is an editing day for the trio, so they're all in the office. But video shoots take them all over the world.

Nix takes a break from editing to get some footage of the Denver skyline for the Amazon project. A window down the hall provides an expansive view of downtown, so he sets up his camera there.

"Gotta represent Denver so they'll want to film the series here," said Nix, an independent filmmaker and former editor in the Boulder office of Crispin Porter + Bogusky, the international advertising and design agency.

Two years ago, after Nix joined Image Brew, he and Jones did a marketing push to position the firm as a video partner for advertising agencies. As part of those efforts, the two decided they should give gifts to the agencies to help them remember the firm.

"We thought, 'Let's play off the name. What if we made them beer?'" Jones said. Thus, Image Brewskis were born.

The three now make a five-gallon batch of their own beer every month to give to clients.

"They absolutely love it," Jones said. "The cost is so low, and now we're good at brewing the beer. It's become quite a part of the business."

And about the company's name?

"Another one of the core beliefs I have if you want to have a successful company — and these were just no-brainers to me — you need a website, you need business cards, you need good design, you need to have a unique name," Jones said. "So many companies, I feel all have the same name."

"The process of video production is taking moving pictures, taking audio, taking graphics, taking sound effects, taking interviews and putting all these things together and mixing it in a sequence," he said. "I busted out the thesaurus for weird words for mixing things. Brew came up. Even though the first definition was about brewing beer, the second one was combining ingredients to make a stronger whole. I thought, 'Oh, that's kinda cool.'"

IMAGE BREW

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IMAGE BREW

Image Brew staff, actors and student extras wait while the crew adds finishing touches to the Manual High School cafeteria for a lunch scene for a TV pilot Image Brew is producing for Amazon.com.