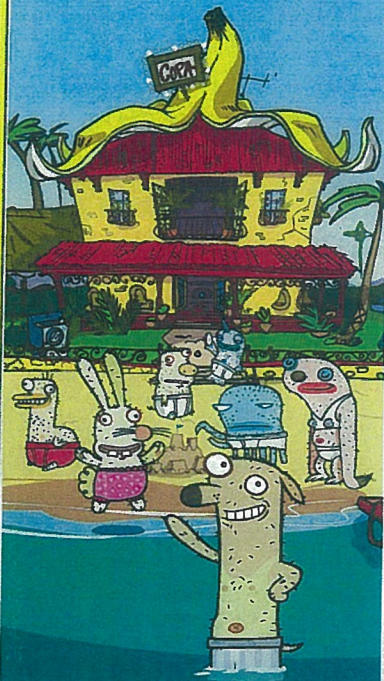


# ALMOST NAKED ANIMALS

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Kids at work: The Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) is heading to MIPCOM with a variety of live-action series, including the new offering *My Place*.

comedy—is the quality of scripting and acting,” says DECODE’s Scherba. “Getting the chemistry right starts with writing, but the casting is all important. If you can get a group working together in an ensemble, hopefully a bit of magic will emerge to enhance the comedy.”

Chemistry played a big part in the success of *Life with Derek*, Family Channel’s Daphne Ballon-scripted Canadian comedy in which Casey has to relocate from Toronto to live with stepbrother Derek following the marriage of their divorcee parents.

Shane Kinnear, the VP of sales, marketing and digital media for Toronto-based Shaftesbury Films, which distributes the show, stresses the chemistry in the series is unusually good because of the way it was shot on location in Newfoundland. “All the kids and families moved to the same townhouse complex in the same building as a way of bringing the show in on budget. They had dinner together often and lived as a family and got to know each other really well, which you can see in the show.” Shaftesbury is following up *Life with Derek* with the original movie *Vacation with Derek*.

If children’s live action is a successful genre, it has also been somewhat limited in its almost exclusive focus on appealing to girls. One area ripe for development is the

boy-centric live-action genre, E1’s Saperstein maintains. “Right now it’s no secret that the cry is out for more boy-centric properties after years of girl-centric shows. Kids’ live action has been dominated by female-skewing shows because originally it was thought to be girls that were principally trending away from animation earlier than boys.”

## OUT WITH THE BOYS

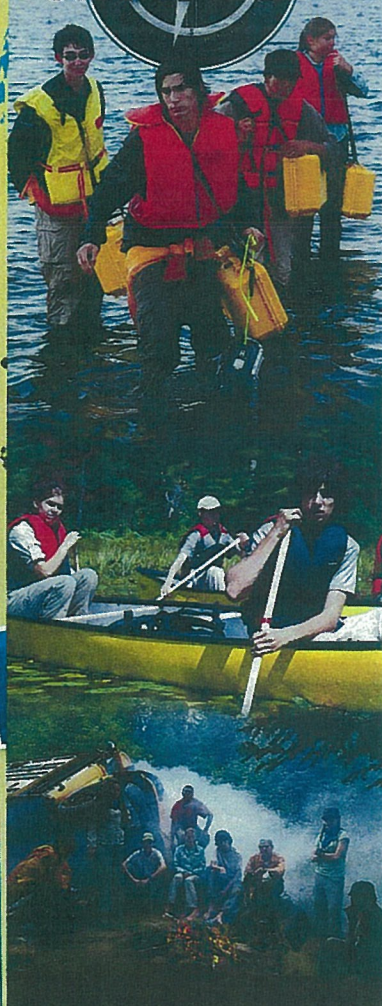
Now broadcasters are finding that too much girl-skewing live action could be turning boys off TV. That’s one reason that February saw the launch of Disney XD, a new channel aimed specifically at 6- to 14-year-old boys. The channel launched with the original live-action offering *Aaron Stone*, which has since been renewed for a second season after a strong debut.

As Nickelodeon’s MacDonald points out, “boys are a difficult audience to reach. They are interested in live-action comedy when they are 7 or 8 but once they reach the age of 9 or 10 they are gone. It’s not cool anymore, and they are off to the PlayStation, the Internet and shows such as *Futurama*, *The Simpsons* and, in the U.K. at least, *Top Gear*.”

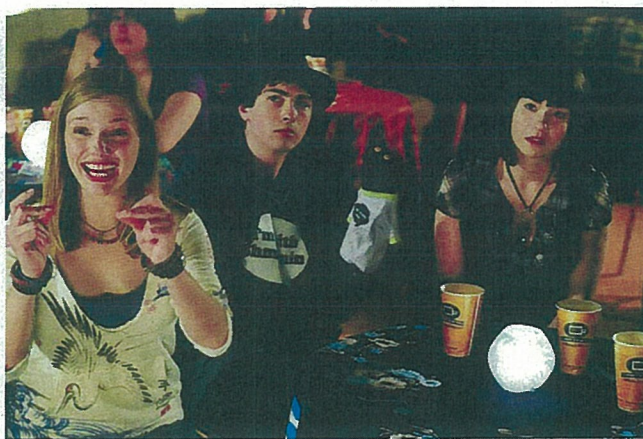
One answer may be to lure them back with fantasy-based live-action concepts—shows such



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Getting snappy: One of the top kids' series from E1 this MIPCOM is *Majority Rules*, a tween show for TELETOON in Canada.

per episode to qualify for a handout from the Canadian Television Fund, which could put in as much as double that amount. Similar tax breaks and subsidies exist in sections of Australia and France, making both of those countries popular destinations for producing live-action children's shows as well.

"Australian producers are able to access a tax offset and they are also able to apply to Screen Australia for investment in their production," explains ACTF's Buckland. "The combination of tax offset and subsidy, together with local license fee, means that they can access well over 50 percent of the production budget in Australia. Productions that are official co-productions with other countries, under a co-production treaty—we have co-production treaties with Canada, France, the U.K. and many other places—are treated as Australian productions for the purposes of the Screen Australia subsidy and tax offset."

Because of intricate co-production treaty requirements, live-action drama is more difficult to co-produce than animation. "More often live-action drama is made as an 'unofficial co-production' or straight presale," continues Buckland, "where an international broadcaster and/or distributor or production company is involved and has a level of creative input commensurate with their financial contribution."

## OUT OF THE BOX

With Disney Channel and Nickelodeon airing so many live-action hits, they have naturally shaped the genre to their own tastes and needs. "We found it hard to push a series called *Radio Free Roscoe*—about a group of kids who set up a pirate radio station at their school—because it was more drama than

comedy and didn't fit easily into the Nick or the Disney box," recalls DECODE's Scherba.

One show that appears to be stepping successfully out of the box is *Majority Rules*, a new live-action/animation series from E1 for TELETOON that is looking for a U.S. home.

"*Majority Rules* tries to spin the aspirational idea that you can do anything if you put your mind to it in a more socially responsible way," explains Saperstein. "Instead of becoming a rock star or the most glamorous girl in school, our lead character, Becky Richards, is elected town mayor at the age of 15 and goes about tackling adult problems from a teen perspective."

Shaftesbury's Kinnear notes that another developing trend in kids' live action is the need to capitalize on the digital potential of content. "We have to remember that we are increasingly dealing with a very technologically savvy audience, so a 30-minute live-action sitcom needs to deliver in online, mobile and in print media. It's not just about a 30-minute show and that's the end of it. These days you have to figure out how to take the characters and stories and repurpose them."

Taking digital seriously provides its own rewards, says Kinnear. "We established a much more direct relationship with our audience on *Life with Derek*. Viewers provided us with 6,000 entirely reedited episodes we didn't ask for. They reedited their favorite episodes with their own music, mixing the stories up and telling it from their point of view."

It helped Shaftesbury find out more about what the audience liked and disliked, which fed into the show's development. "On *Life with Derek*, it has already informed how we create material for online. We discovered that our viewers' favorite character was the youngest, who provides the show with a lot of light relief. We decided to use her more in the online world." ■