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Behind the Scenes with Steve Hankin

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When you think of rock concerts, television shows, movies, sports, and corporate events, you tend to think of the performers; the artists, actors, athletes and speakers. But, behind the talent there is a team of people and millions of dollars of equipment responsible for pulling off a one of a kind experience for the audience. It is the audio, video, lighting, LED, cameras, rigging, media servers, and the talent operating them, that bring each show to life. There's one company that stands out as a leader in providing such equipment and talent. The firm is [VER](#) and their equipment is used in more than 50 productions per day, on six continents, every day throughout the year. They've been behind the scenes on countless television and movie productions including Survivor, The US Open, Wimbledon, The Jungle Book, NCIS, Gravity, Deadpool, Monday Night Football, The French Open, as well as hundreds of concerts including the recent Taylor Swift and Justin Bieber tours, and Coachella. In business for 35 years, renting out their gear to productions

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around the globe, they've become the go-to company for equipment and expertise for movie, television, corporate events and concert productions of all sizes.

I recently spent some time chatting with Steve Hankin, CEO of [VER](#), on what it takes to bring one of a kind experiences to life, what it takes to grow and manage a firm with 1600 employees and 33 offices around the world, and how they successfully float more than 50,000 pieces of equipment around the globe each day. Here are Steve Hankin's three simple rules for delivering quality and scaling big behind the scenes:

Margin of Error is Zero: Steve says that a great deal of the success they have had in scaling a business from a storefront AV equipment rental shop in California to a global brand on six continents has a lot to do with their commitment to perfection. Hankin says that most of their business is repeat customers who come back for every production they work on, and the reason they keep coming back is because [VER](#) is very good at staying behind the scenes and ensuring an error-free show. He says equipment failure in his business can be brutal. For example, he pointed to the power outage during the 2013 Super Bowl halftime show. He says production companies are naturally behind the scenes until an equipment failure like that lands a company on the front page of the NY Times, and that's not where you want to be when you are in the business of bringing shows to life. Hankin says that they've never had a major equipment failure, and they don't intend to. He says VER's culture has always been about having the best equipment supported by the deepest engineering talent possible. The combination is remarkable. They embrace the challenge and importance of the role they play, making sure every individual is committed to a level of perfection. He says that there are lots of people who want to be in their business, but not everyone wants to do what's required to reach the minimum standard of perfection set by [VER](#).

Let People Shine: Most of the team members hired by [VER](#) are absolutely passionate about sound, lighting, and AV. He says they are engineers and product specialists who live for delivering quality. Hankin says that as a firm, VER goes out and finds the best talent and then once they join, it's their job to let them thrive. Hankin says that VER fosters an *"Always Find a Solution"* environment where their employees have authority to try new things and have the confidence and resources to solve even the toughest challenges. Hankin

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says that he doesn't like to set boundaries or try to control



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thing he's learned in 25 years of running businesses, it is to hire talent and then set them free to do great things. People have an amazing capacity to do a lot more than most companies allow them to do. He says that VER is a place where people aren't constrained and that it's amazing to see what they can do in such an environment.

Focus on what matters: Hankin says that as businesses get bigger and bigger, they lose focus on what matters. It's easy for big companies to add layers and process and "stuff" that doesn't in the end make a difference to winning in the market place. Winning requires an absolute focus on just a few things; going after business more aggressively, putting in place the resources to perform, and making it happen every day. All else can go away. He says that at [VER](#) they are lucky to have a founder who understood this completely from day one. Steve's challenge is to continue that focus as they get bigger. He says that right now at VER, they are doing jobs at levels they didn't do twelve months ago because they are growing at such a rapid pace. The growth is powered by clients who see that they are focused on only one thing – the success of the show that the client is trying to deliver. VER continues to add resources that others don't have. Steve says that there are many things to spend money on, but there are only a few things that really matter. Steve keeps a list of his top twelve clients on his desktop so that they are front and center to him each day. He says that he goes through each client and asks himself, *"What am I doing today to build our business with each of these clients?"* He says it's this absolute focus on clients that drives the entire business, and that whenever they feel like they are drifting away from focusing on their client list, they reset and get back to focusing on the relationships with the clients.

They are a titan of the movie and production industry, yet their job is incredibly simple, deliver a one of a kind experience while staying discreetly behind the scenes. Hankin says that [VER](#) continues to grow at a rapid pace of 20% per year, but they are having no problem keeping up with the pace by sticking to a few simple rules including; zero margin for error, let your people shine, and focus on what matters. He's Steve Hankin CEO of [VER](#), building a production empire behind the scenes.

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