

TRANSCRIPT – NOW & NEXT PODCAST SEASON 3 EPISODE 1

Leora Kornfeld ([00:09](#)):

Welcome to Now and Next. It's a podcast about innovation in the entertainment and media industries. It's brought to you by the Canada Media Fund in collaboration with our new partner, Content Canada. I'm Leora Kornfeld. For our third season of the podcast, we, like many of you, are working from home, but that's not an option for everyone. Like pretty much all businesses, TV and film were abruptly shut down when COVID-19 started spreading in the spring. But as of late summer 2020, work is starting back up in the major production centers in Canada, and while there have always been health and safety consultants on set, now, their job has gotten a lot more specific to the time we're living in. So, for example, sneeze etiquette. Yeah, that's a thing. So are workers in hazmat suits taking crew members temperatures, and there are new guidelines around bathrooms and food. Well, just about everything actually.

Alex Kolodkin ([01:11](#)):

"I think the moment there's a second wave and the industry has to shut down again, you're going to lose a lot of innovation over something that could have been easily mitigated by just explaining to people what the proper protocols are to be on set."

Leora Kornfeld ([01:24](#)):

That's Alex Kolodkin. He's a serial entrepreneur who, at the beginning of the pandemic, was already running another company called Set Scouter. They match producers with locations. Back in March, Alex started thinking, what can I do to help the industry? So he started another company called Safe Sets International. Yes, Safe Sets. We're all thinking the same thing, And so were they apparently. What they're doing is providing COVID-19 health and safety information that's vetted by a team of medical professionals, and all they're asking for in return is a cup of coffee, which you can buy for them on their website. In reality, though, it costs them thousands every month to ensure that the information is accurate and up-to-date because, as we know, things related to COVID-19, they're changing all the time.

Alex Kolodkin ([02:22](#)):

"A great example of that is gloves. The standard requirement was that everybody should be wearing gloves on set. The doctors came out and said, you know what? Gloves are a crutch. People are not washing their hands correctly. There's actually more contamination spread. We actually recommend that people don't wear gloves and just sanitize their hands more often. We were able to dynamically change all that content and provide that to the community."

Leora Kornfeld ([02:45](#)):

The rest of that conversation is coming right up. But first we wanted to hear from some people who are actually on sets right now to find out what it's been like going back to work.

Andrew Bee ([02:58](#)):

"When March hit, the business just stopped. It's like it hit a wall."

Leora Kornfeld ([03:03](#)):

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That's Andrew Bee. He's a Toronto based actor who's been working in the industry for 11 years, and he's been in whole bunch of film and TV shows like *Kim's Convenience* and *Suicide Squad*.

Andrew Bee ([03:14](#)):

"The whole new COVID thing has brought in an entire new layer of regulation that has to be followed, and for a lot of productions, it's just cost-prohibitive. It really has become expensive to have to follow the protocols. I had two more features lined up. They were both canceled. They've not yet picked new dates for them. We're probably looking at 2021. It's kind of like everybody's got to figure out the business again and how to do it and adhere to all the protocols. One of the big companies was considering pulling out of BC because, these are big, huge unions too, it's because they could not really shoot with all the testing that had to be done, all the guidelines that had to be followed. Some of the big production houses were asking for writers to write much fewer extras into their scripts."

Andrew Bee ([04:12](#)):

"So to write scenes that did not involve as many extras. The way I look at it is when I go, I've been on a few sets and everybody was careful. We took our time and there was no rushing. There was nothing going on out of the ordinary. But the main thing is people weren't afraid. That's what I enjoyed the most. Just being around people who understood this is what we have to do now, but let's not make a big deal about it, and let's do what we love to do, because it's more important for me to work and do what I love than it is to make noise about something that I have no control over."

Leora Kornfeld ([04:49](#)):

But what happens when the worst case scenario happens and someone actually tests positive for COVID-19 on set. Here's actor Ethan Berkeley Garcia.

Ethan Berkeley-Garcia ([04:59](#)):

*"I'm going to be real honest with you. There is going to be real talk right here. We were filming for a movie that I'm in called *Watched*, and one of our primary actors actually contracted COVID-19 during filming, so it was not a fun time to say the least. Everybody got tested and everybody came back negative. We ended up pushing production weeks on weeks on weeks, just so that our actor could get better. Once he finally tested negative again, then we actually could bring him back to set and we started going back to normal. Again, social distancing, wearing our masks, and then we always had hand sanitizer on set as well. However, I must give a huge prop to the whole team that I was working with because we did really try our best where the areas that we could. The actors did their own makeup if possible. We had a lot of closed sets, but, again, this is our job. We have to be close to each other. We can't film things where we're so far apart. How far can you really be when you're on such a small set?"*

Leora Kornfeld ([06:00](#)):

Could you walk us through what the basic drill is for arriving and working on set now?

Alex Kolodkin ([06:04](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. I think the basic things that people have to remember are wear a mask, wash your filthy paws, and stay away from people. Now, there are nuances with that. People should be checking their health before they show up on set. They should limit the amount of people on set. We have to

understand that being on set is a risky activity and we can never eliminate the risk of COVID-19. The only thing we can do is manage the transmission risk, and that's where we have to kind of reposition our thinking.

Alex Kolodkin (06:41):

If you're going to have 50 people on set and you're going to be in a small house, know that your risk of transmission increases drastically. But if you're able to limit that down to maybe five people, have social distancing measures in place, provide PPE for everybody, have them checked before they show up on set through a health questionnaire, these are all things we can do to mitigate that risk. That's what producing is now going to be focused on. It used to be you focused on getting the creative and you get the best work for your client, and now you're going to be focused on the creative while also having the most safe environment so that you don't infect anybody on your crew or your team.

Leora Kornfeld (07:23):

What have turned out to be the most high risk situations on set, because there's so many touch points, like a set or locations like this little city where you get all of these people who come from their own worlds together for very long hours, usually in a pretty tight space. So you've got porta-potties, you've got food, you've got hair, you got makeup. I'm sure there's a lot of others, too, but what have turned out to be the really high risk areas on set?

Alex Kolodkin (07:47):

Just people. I mean, it sounds ridiculous, but in tech we always say people are break points. You have people and you have to ensure compliance and you have to ensure listening. Seeing how people wear masks out in public reaffirms why contraceptives have a 99% success rate, and that 1% is a failure. Because you could just see it out there when you get out there.

Leora Kornfeld (08:14):

What the people think they're necklaces basically.

Alex Kolodkin (08:16):

Yeah. People think they're necklaces or the protocol is, and I see this happen all the time, and I see it even when I pass by restaurants, I see this happen. But if before and after you touch your mask, you should be sanitizing your hands. The amount of people that I've seen take off their mask, cough, put their mask back on, or walk around in a mall with just a face shield. These are all things that just show that people don't really understand what they need to do to protect themselves. I think that's where having educational resources helps in all industries.

Leora Kornfeld (08:52):

Now you talk about the masks and the gloves and the face shields and all that kind of stuff. But these are things that actors can't do unless they're doing some kind of hazmat dystopian type of movie. So what are actors doing? What are the things that they can do?

Alex Kolodkin (09:06):

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This is probably the hardest question, because actors are the most at risk. We have to accept that, and we have to understand that. If we function from the idea that actors, and then hair and makeup professionals, are the most at risk, we can build risk mitigation into it. But there are significant challenges with that, like how do you get someone to quarantine for two weeks before their production? Or do you get them to quarantine with their co-leads or their other actors? How do you build that into place? How do you deal with hugging? How do you deal with kissing? I think that's where it becomes very interesting, and that's where we'll follow the lead of what the big studios are doing and how they're setting that up in place, because gone are the days where you can have five people sitting in a crowded bar, because that's a lot of background talent. There's just so much risk there.

Leora Kornfeld ([10:11](#)):

What are the bigger studios doing? For example, I was reading something about, there was a romantic scene and they couldn't have the two actors do it, so they brought in the wife of the male actor and they lived together so they were in their own bubble, and they put a wig on her and they shot it from the reverse angle to make it look like she was the actor. Things like that. What else are you seeing?

Alex Kolodkin ([10:37](#)):

That's amazing. I haven't heard that story, but that's incredibly clever. For the most part what I've heard is actors are basically quarantining with each other. They're getting tested. They're kind of creating their own bubbles and they're using those bubbles as production departments, and so you'll have like all the talent will be bubbled together. That functions as one team. One, two actors who are probably in the same bubble, or having different scenes, or far apart, or if you can, they're wearing masks. So they're wearing masks on scene. This is worked into the creative now. So it's fascinating to see how really the most creative industry is coming up with imaginative solutions to keep everybody safe and still put out the right stories and content for their clients and their customers and their audiences.

Leora Kornfeld ([11:26](#)):

I think we all have friends, colleagues, people that we see when we go out grocery shopping, when we come out of our own bubbles, and we see that there are people who just don't want to comply. They have their beliefs and those beliefs are indicated. Are there any issues around that? Any anti masker factions or people that are just resistant to it?

Alex Kolodkin ([11:48](#)):

There are some wild conspiracy theories about me. Primarily that I'm a secret agent for Homeland Security, who is databasing all actors to deny them entry into the U.S. when COVID is lifted.

Leora Kornfeld ([12:04](#)):

You're not kidding, are you?

Alex Kolodkin ([12:06](#)):

Oh, I'm absolutely not kidding.

Leora Kornfeld ([12:07](#)):

So QAnon are onto you is what you're telling me/

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Alex Kolodkin ([12:11](#)):

I don't know if it's QAnon, or if someone else, but I've had very reputable institutions and associations reach out to me to verify whether the claims are correct or not, and I'm in Toronto. My dog's name is Maple. I guess if I was a secret agent, that would be a perfect cover story.

Leora Kornfeld ([12:34](#)):

That is wild and holy....

Alex Kolodkin ([12:38](#)):

Yeah, it is wild.

Leora Kornfeld ([12:39](#)):

The other thing is the reason it doesn't make sense is because there are people who say that, I'm sure you know, that George Soros and Fauci are going to become even more... Soros is already a billionaire, but they're saying that Fauci is going to get rich off the vaccine. What are you going to get rich off? Coffee?

Alex Kolodkin ([12:56](#)):

I don't know. I'm waiting to find out.

Leora Kornfeld ([12:58](#)):

It doesn't even make sense, right? What's in it for you?

Alex Kolodkin ([13:03](#)):

That is the issue. People always say, what's in it for you? Why did you start Safe Sets when there's no significant monetary gain from this? That's the most common question I get asked. I felt useless sitting at home while COVID ravaged the industry. There was no production. The only thing I could do was manage my product team, and upgrade our customer success flow for Set Scouter. But we had no customers, none of the agencies that we worked with were working, and I was sitting on my couch. I just bought a PS4 for this exact reason. I didn't have anything to do, beyond dealing with the finances and organizing that. There were times where I was just twiddling my thumbs and thinking, I wish I could do something, and the only thing I can do is sit at home.

Alex Kolodkin ([13:54](#)):

That is the only way I can help here, is physically distancing myself from everything. I'm a founder, I'm an entrepreneur, I'm an operator, and when I see that there's a challenge, my instinct is, how can I help? How can I build something to help this industry? That's where Safe Sets came from. My way of helping support is just to get education out there for everybody, and that's it. I think it's the simplest thing I could have done. I wish I had factories set in place that can create PPE. There's an amazing company in Toronto. They're called Inkbox. They completely retooled their entire factory to create face shields and face masks, and they donated all of that stuff to sick kids. That's an incredible feat, and like Tyler and Brayden that started that company, they're heroes in my eyes for doing that.

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Alex Kolodkin ([14:48](#)):

I didn't have a factory. I had a computer and I had an incredible team. That's it, s.o this is my way of doing it. At the end of the day, I know all the other production companies that are in this space. I know all the companies, I know all the agencies, I know all the service providers that are similar to Set Scouter, and I don't think we can survive a second wave. I think the moment there's a second wave and the industry has to shut down again, you're going to lose a lot of innovation over something that could have been easily mitigated by just explaining to people what the proper protocols are to be on set. I think once people understand that, then this idea of what's in it for you changes to, oh, I see. This is the way that you're trying to help.

Leora Kornfeld ([15:32](#)):

Last season on the podcast, we talked to a company that specializes in more of an eco sensibility and waste reduction strategies on sets. So that meant moving away from single serving containers and things like that, which resulted in huge savings, like \$50,000 just by not using bottled water, for example. Now I'm guessing with COVID safety, that stuff has fallen by the way. Is that fair to assume?

Alex Kolodkin ([16:03](#)):

That is fair to assume, and it's heartbreaking. It's absolutely heartbreaking. So at Set Scouter, we actually do offer catering solutions for production sets booked through our platform. That's what we were working towards. We were working towards family style, eco-friendly, sustainable food options for productions. Unfortunately, the flip side of COVID-19 and risk mitigation is that family style, buffet style foods is no longer the option. In fact, we have so much more waste because of disposable cutlery and single serving meals, And then all the PPE we have to provide as well. I don't know when our industry's going to go back to focus on sustainability, but I sure hope someone who's innovating around this will come up with a solution around it because it's absolutely heartbreaking to see how much more plastic we're now dumping into our environment.

Leora Kornfeld ([17:00](#)):

We've gone back to the seventies, sadly.

Alex Kolodkin ([17:03](#)):

Yeah, definitely. Except we don't have lead in everything.

Leora Kornfeld ([17:06](#)):

Yeah. Good point. See, there's always a bright side. I like that about you.

Alex Kolodkin ([17:12](#)):

Love that. Honestly, there are amazing companies out there that focus on production sustainability. We're partnered with them to help find ways. I don't have the answer off the top of my head, but I think that would be an incredible podcast episode to get them involved, to see how we can mitigate waste going forward, because sustainability and this planet, and keeping this planet safe as well, that should be a priority for us.

Leora Kornfeld ([17:36](#)):

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We have been talking about some heavy stuff. I want to leave on a lighter note, if I may. You work in an industry that's got a lot of trendsetters. Can you report on any sort of COVID chic trends to us? Are you seeing any particularly interesting mask or gowns or face shields or anything like that, that are being used?

Alex Kolodkin ([17:55](#)):

I think the coolest thing that I've ever seen is the masks that had the plastic insert so that people can read lips. I think that's such an ingenious way to help those that are hard of hearing, or to add a little bit of your face back into your life. It's hard to read emotion when you're just looking at eyes through glasses or goggles, and then a mask where half your face is obscured. I think that's the coolest thing I've ever seen. On the flip side of that, I just want to make it very clear to everybody out there. The plastic face shields that just cover the mouth, that does not actually close or enclose your mouth and nose, are completely useless. So please do not use those on set or anywhere.

Leora Kornfeld ([18:42](#)):

Those things that look like what welders wear? Those things?

Alex Kolodkin ([18:46](#)):

Not the ones that cover your eyes, but the ones that actually sit... They're trying to replace masks. They have this clear plastic and it just sits on top of your mouth. But anything that doesn't enclose your nose or mouth tightly with a tight seal is not an inappropriate mask. So please do not use those.

Leora Kornfeld ([19:08](#)):

I think that's a great point to leave this at. Alex, thank you so much.

Alex Kolodkin ([19:14](#)):

My absolute pleasure. Thank you so much for taking the time to just chat with me and to share the message and anything I can do in the future, or now please tell me. I'm happy to help.

Leora Kornfeld ([19:28](#)):

That's it for this episode of Now and Next. This podcast is produced by the Canada Media Fund in collaboration with Content Canada, and thanks to our guest, Alex Kolodkin of Safe Sets International and Set Scouter. If you're interested in some production notes and a transcript of this episode, you can just head to the CMF trends website. And if you like what you heard, please feel free to tell your friends, tell your colleagues. I don't even care if you tell your enemies, and even better, subscribe, and if you have a few seconds, please rate us on the platform wherever you get your podcasts. And that is it for now. I'm Leora Kornfeld. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.