

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

Welcome to Now and Next. It's a podcast about innovation in the media and entertainment industries. I'm Leora Kornfeld. I think a lot of us have been asking ourselves what part of the pandemic are we now in? Yes, from a public health perspective, of course, but also from the learning to adapt to a new reality perspective. And this new reality means the world doesn't stop. It just moves in different ways. So on this episode, we're going to look at what some of those new ways are, specifically for the game industry, because it's an industry that historically has relied on big, I mean, really big industry events for meeting people, for exchanging new ideas and for seeing what the latest and greatest is.

Leora Kornfeld ([00:55](#)):

At events like GDC, the Game Developer's Conference, or E3. Every year, tens of thousands of game developers, publishers, and distributors, head to California and meet and greet each other, make deals, go for dinners, make more deals, then go to some parties, then meet more people. And then wake up and do it all over again the next day. Oh, and somewhere in there, they go to some conference events too, but not this year.

Angela Mejia ([01:23](#)):

It was a massive cancellation of physical events. Events are a big deal for the industry because that's really when developers get in contact with the players. And these events are like huge parties and people that go there is so much fun. It's great to go there, the energy level is crazy, good. And it's a huge part.

Leora Kornfeld ([01:46](#)):

That's Angela Mejia, the co-founder of Clever Place Studio in Montreal. Remembering the good old days like last year, when you could just go to the big, fun game events in person. Things are different now, of course, online events are replacing in person ones. And that's just one example.

Angela Mejia ([02:05](#)):

All the companies are adapting to the new reality. So there has been a lot of digital events, but the media is struggling to keep up. We had a problem of discoverability because only the big ones get the most exposure. But the small one, like us, for example, we struggle with that. And the physical events were a way to get in contact with people and get in contact with the media. I don't know, I think we're in transition, it's difficult to know what's going to happen, but we're all adapting. And I think people have shown a lot of compassion.

Leora Kornfeld ([02:39](#)):

And what about the transition to working from home? What has that been like for game developers?

Angela Mejia ([02:45](#)):

When we left the office, it was very quick. So I think from the technological point of view, we have already a lot of tools in place to work from home. It has been harder from the point of view of isolation. And also I think people that have kids obviously have suffered more. There was all the logistics for parents to learn how to do homeschooling. And that was actually very tough. Some of our team members felt isolated and they were hit by the fact that you always had to be in the same place. So

when you wake up, then you have breakfast, then you go to work. But now it's like, no, you don't go anywhere, you just work from home.

Angela Mejia ([03:28](#)):

But with the time the team members have been able to overcome that and adapt. And naturally people are very happy to work from home now and they appreciate the advantages. And the main advantage really is time.

Tony Walsh ([03:48](#)):

My name is Tony Walsh. I am the founder and CEO of Phantom Compass. What was fortunate for us as a team was that we were already well acquainted with working in this fashion. And from that standpoint, there was very little impact. We carried on the same type of distributed and remote work that we have always done.

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

So sorting out things on the working from home front, not that big a deal for the crew at Phantom Compass, a Toronto area game studio, but some of the other stuff, like being able to get seen and heard when you can't work the room at the big industry events in the same way, that's hard in an ultra competitive industry.

Tony Walsh ([04:32](#)):

Discovery remains a very, very tough challenge for content producers, especially in video games. It's the same story in other industries. It actually, I suppose, it's most similar to the music industry where everybody's looking for a breakout hit. The same goes for video games, it's quite hit-driven. You just can't put a game out and expect to get an audience unless you're incredibly lucky.

Leora Kornfeld ([04:58](#)):

But there's at least one upside to all of this. Rob Segal, one of the co-founders of Get Set Games, tells us more.

Rob Segal ([05:07](#)):

One of the great things about all of these conferences being online is a lot of them have shifted to free. So there's kind of no reason not to attend them, really, even if it's just in a minor capacity, because you never know kind of what opportunity is going to come out of that, and you don't have to spend any money for travel.

Leora Kornfeld ([05:29](#)):

And what about the situation with Tony Walsh and Phantom Compass?

Rob Segal ([05:31](#)):

We aren't going to any physical conferences. I'm not aware of any that are actually occurring in what internet people call, meet space. And we have attended now two different events. We went to Def Con, which is normally in Cologne, Germany. There was a Canada Games event that was, I believe co-sponsored sponsored by CMF. That happened relatively recently, both online and those were very easy to attend. Normally it's quite an effort to go, especially to overseas in-person events. It's much, much

easier to sign up for virtual events. It's a totally different experience for attendees, for exhibitors, for potential market channel partners. And we don't know how they compare financially. It seems like in a certain sense, we might get more bang for the buck, but what you're not ever going to get at these virtual events is running into the right person in an elevator at the right time and coming out with a verbal agreement for a high level deal.

Leora Kornfeld ([06:35](#)):

Yeah. That whole right place at the right time thing, isn't going to happen at the elevator or by the coffee machine. But there are new ways that this business is getting done now. At these virtual events that bring game developers together with publishers and investors and other partners that have the potential to help game studios reach new audiences and new markets. This fall, for example, there've been a number of such online events, specifically geared to Canadian video game developers like the online version of MEGAMIGS, an annual event usually held in Montreal. And Canada games online, which is new this year, and is a collaboration between the provincial game industry associations across the country. So let's hear more about them. Here's my conversation with Nadine Gelly of Quebec's Video Game Industry association, La Guilde. Nadine is the person who put Canada games online together. So Nadine, how did Canada Games Online come to be? How did it start?

Nadine Gelly ([07:40](#)):

At the 16th of March, we were supposed to go to GDC. It's the largest event in the world. And it's really important for all the studios to be there because they need to be in contact with all the investors. So they said to La Guilde, "Oh my God, what we will do and everything of that." So after that, we made this program in Quebec with almost a hundred studios. So when I spoke with the other manager of the Canadian association, they said, "Wow, we need to do that for our industry." So we made the Canada Games Online programs together. It's almost the first time that we do something with all the provinces. So we had almost 90 publisher and investors and 140 studios around Canada. So it was really, really nice. And I hope we will be able to do the same thing, but in person.

Leora Kornfeld ([08:55](#)):

In a way, Canada Games online has been kind of a national rollout of a game industry event that's been taking place in Quebec for a number of years, it's called The Caravan. And the concept for The Caravan is this, it helps gain studios, learn about international markets to open up new business opportunities abroad for them, and it brings game publishers and investors together with studios and developers so that new partnerships can be formed. And this year, the formerly in-person event went 100% online. From the first Canada Games Online event that you just held, do you have any early success stories to report?

Nadine Gelly ([09:37](#)):

I know lots of studios are really happy on that. The publishers are really happy because they discover lots of new studios that usually they don't see. So I know all the people appreciate the events, but I don't know if they signed contract or something at this moment. And usually it takes more time than two weeks to get them to sign. Of course.

Leora Kornfeld ([10:05](#)):

Some things are easier. Some things take longer than others. I think we're all learning this as we go through all of these new ways of working during COVID. What would you say are the biggest business problems for the smaller game studios right now?

Nadine Gelly ([10:21](#)):

I think it's the personal contact right now. It's really that. A little studio, it's really a family. I saw a lot of studios, they organized a movie session and a barbecue sessions altogether with Zoom. And it was really nice to see.

Leora Kornfeld ([10:43](#)):

And because the industry is a true ecosystem, meaning that the health of one part affects the health of the whole, we find the bigger companies helping out the smaller ones. A little company called Google, decided they'd pick up the tab for the renewal fees for the industry association membership.

Nadine Gelly ([11:00](#)):

When the COVID start, I spoke with one of the manager of Google and he said, "You know what Nadine, don't bother the studios with that, let me know what it will cost and I will pay for these studios." He said that to me and I was, "Oh my God, it's so incredible to have that." So we have a lots of those examples here in Montreal, in Quebec, we are a major industry. So I think that we have to help the other provinces. I think we have to do that.

Leora Kornfeld ([11:38](#)):

And we tend to think of the challenges that the studios face, certainly that's what we've been talking about mostly today, but there's also challenges now for distributors, for publishers. Everybody has to find new ways of working.

Nadine Gelly ([11:55](#)):

Yes. But I spoke with some publishers and they say, "We have time right now to discover new studios, " because they don't have to travel. Probably it will change how we will do some businesses for the next years. We will need to connect with people, sure, but I think that the virtual way will probably stay. And it's my personal theory.

Leora Kornfeld ([12:25](#)):

Yes. Well, we're hearing that a lot in the interviews with the people that we're talking to on the podcast, that virtual used to be just one way out of many that people could work. And now all of a sudden everybody's been thrown into the deep end of the pool and people are swimming. And do you see Canadian game companies as having any particular advantages in this new landscape?

Nadine Gelly ([12:54](#)):

We have the creativity, everyone in the world say that we are really on top of that. The publishers love the Canadian industry. I think it's helped us because they want to see what will we do because we are really great on R and D, we create new stuff and we are recognized for that. But we have to accelerate all those products. We need to help the studios to grow, to go market. We are really nice to create, but we are a less seller that we are creators. So I think if we need to do something for next years, we have to help the studios to learn how to go and market and to sell the product at the great price.

Leora Kornfeld ([13:54](#)):

Yes. And statistics have shown that one of the things that people have been doing a lot more of is playing games during the shutdown. Now, what about you? Have you been playing more games during shutdown?

Nadine Gelly ([14:09](#)):

No. I didn't have time to do that. At the association, we work really hard for the industry, we didn't stop. The immigration was a really, really huge issue for the studios. We don't have enough people to work on the studios.

Leora Kornfeld ([14:32](#)):

Ah, and what countries do the new workers come from, generally?

Nadine Gelly ([14:36](#)):

They come from France, of course, US, but with COVID, it closed the border so it's hard for us to hire international people. So we asked the government to do something to do it faster. Please help us. It's an issue for us. So we work on that a lot. So no, I don't play games. I don't have time.

Leora Kornfeld ([15:04](#)):

You're playing the video game of life right now.

Nadine Gelly ([15:09](#)):

With multiplayer.

Leora Kornfeld ([15:12](#)):

Definitely with multiplayer. Thank you so much, Nadine. Thank you.

Nadine Gelly ([15:15](#)):

You're welcome.

Leora Kornfeld ([15:19](#)):

And that would be it for another episode of Now And Next. This podcast is produced by the Canada Media Fund. Thanks to our guests, Angela Mejia, Tony Walsh, Rob Segal and Nadine Gelly. And remember if you'd like a transcript of this episode and or some show notes with additional information and links on topics we covered, just head to the CMF trends website. Also, don't forget to rate and review this show wherever you get your podcasts. As the saying goes, and that is it for now. I'm Leora Kornfeld and I'll see you next time.