

## Work Shift Episode 16

[ music ]

CHILD 1: When I grow up I want to be a contractor because I like building stuff.

CHILD 2: I -- when I grow up I want to be a stunt double.

CHILD 3: When I grow up I want to be an astronaut and travel to Mars.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Ray, what's the last in-person event you attended before the pandemic?

RAY HARRIPAUL: For me it was a family barbeque. I miss those. What about yourself?

SHAWNE McKEOWN: January 2020, Medieval Times. Weddings, conferences, festivals, parties. We're all missing them right now and the loss of these gatherings has been devastating for professionals in the event sector, from event planners to caterers to performers and more.

RAY HARRIPAUL: It's also been a year of innovation with event planners and event performers; coming up with new ways to continue moving forward remotely.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: In this episode, we find out what new technologies event professionals are using to get through the pandemic and what you can expect when you attend your first post-COVID event.

RAY HARRIPAUL: Welcome to Work Shift.

[ music ]

PAUL ARAUJO: I think I was pretty well aware of but didn't realize it until -- till everything went down and now we've lived through this, is the amount of resiliency in this industry. I knew we were resilient because it comes with the territory in this industry, but when you see it in action to this -- to this extent, it's pretty amazing.

[ music ]

RAY HARRIPAUL: Digital disruption.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: The gig economy.

RAY HARRIPAUL: Artificial Intelligence.

[ synthesized voice ] Robots.

RAY HARRIPAUL: There's a lot of talk about these things in the media and online but what do they mean for you?

SHAWNE McKEOWN: I'm Shawne McKeown.

RAY HARRIPAUL: And I'm Ray Harripaul.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: We're exploring the future of work and changes you can expect to see at your job.

RAY HARRIPAUL: We'll tell you how this massive digital shift could change your career and what you could do to adapt, evolve and thrive.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: 2020 was marked by a hospitality sector shut down but what's in store for the event sector when things start to open up? Paul Araujo, a professor and program coordinator at George Brown College's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management gives us an overview and tells us how he's preparing the next generation of events industry leaders.

RAY HARRIPAUL: And we're talking to one of Canada's best-known DJ's, Starting from Scratch. He's toured with Usher, Kanye West, and Russell Peters and you can hear him on weeknights on Virgin Radio. Before COVID, playing clubs, concerts and festivals was his bread and butter. He tells us about his big shift online and the new tools he's using to keep his career moving forward.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Did you have plans to attend a business conference in 2020? A 2018 study by Oxford Economics found the business event sector alone generated 33 billion dollars a year in Canada and employed almost 230,000 people. In 2020 of course, that all changed. George Brown's Paul Araujo gives us an overview of 2020 in the events and hospitality sector.

PAUL ARAUJO: It can be a little disheartening to hear -- to hear people sort of disparage this industry -- not disparage the industry but disparage the -- the fact that people in the restaurant, hotel, events, hospitality, tourism industries to sort of disparage those sectors as you know well it's not that important anyway. And you know if the restaurant has to close for everybody's well-being then that's -- that's how it has to be and it's like well it's easy to say when you're cashing cheques every other week and you have a stable job and you are in a good financial situation. But when you -- when you don't account for a lot of people that are reliant on this industry for their living you know it's tough. For people in the industry, we're very careful with the whatever short window of opening they had last summer and those -- from what we had gathered there weren't many cases that came out of restaurants, and yet they were shut down and so a lot of people in restaurants who were already in a tough situation invested in social distancing -- I don't know, equipment and PPE and outdoor patios and heaters only to be shut down again. The end of February there was already -- I vividly remember we were in the midst of -- with our program, were in the midst of producing our capstone events which are all offsite events, fundraisers with, you know, real venues and real food and real entertainment and real revenue and real costs. And so at the end of February, it was already percolating because we had some of our suppliers already approaching us saying, 'we don't know what the future is holding so we have to start making some arrangements now'. So late February, it was already beginning for us the talk and the cancellations or the potential postponements or what are we going to do if? And plan Bs and plan Cs. But essentially, the event industry has been shut down and it had been shut down and not really re-opened in the summer -- I think they allowed during the summer up to 50 people. And again, that's in this market -- in most western

markets, we know that in the southern U.S. there has been some action, you know, Texas and Florida have been hosting events since late summer and have continued. And I know that a lot of people would probably point the finger and want to cast blame and so on but you know, these are professionals who are producing these events who understand liability and understand health and safety. And how they're producing events is much different than before COVID and they're taking every precaution in order to keep people safe at these events. Again, we're not talking about big events. These are mostly social events that are happening, very little if any corporate because as we know you know corporations are risk-averse or liability averse I should say. So they're -- we probably won't see a corporate event until probably 2022. I've got a very good friend of mine, old friend of mine, who has worked at Hilton Hotels for many years in the sales and marketing role. He said, 'I've never lived through a time where half of my hotels, we've locked the front doors and we've locked them for eight months. You know, the doors are locked'.

RAY HARRIPAUL: While event planners are eager and ready for re-opening, Paul says the virtual element of events is likely here to stay in one form or another.

PAUL ARAUJO: You know, six months ago, I was saying the virtual component's going to be here for the shortened mid-term. Now that we're a year into this, my attitude is it's here for -- forever. I think that there's going to be a portion of this audience, this clients, this event attendee that won't want to gather in person ever again. How many of them, I don't know, I would venture a guess that, you know, maybe 20 to 30% of people around the world -- and that might vary, you know, region to region that won't be comfortable in crowded places ever again. And so we're going to have to adapt to that. The industry is going to have to find ways to provide some sort of experience to that group of people. And we've already got the infrastructure in place, we've already got the technology in place, we are learning as we go - - we're still learning as we go -- best practices and what people want from an online or virtual experience. So I think going forward, every face-to-face, every in-person event will have some sort of virtual, online component to it.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: And with new ways of doing things come added costs. Purpose-built online platforms that provide functionality for video conferencing, high-quality streaming, networking, and other interactive activities don't come cheap. Paul and his special events management students priced out options so they could run their capstone project events online.

PAUL ARAUJO: So we're talking about purpose-built platforms for meetings, for conferences, for trade shows that offer branding opportunities for sponsorship, that offer gamification, that offer networking rooms that are amazing unlike Zoom or Webex or -- or Teams and they're not cheap, right? They're very expensive. We started our search last year because we started producing virtual events within our program last fall and we started researching platforms. An inexpensive platform is about \$3,000 but this is for like a two-hour event. They range anywhere -- we saw quotes anywhere from say \$7,500 to \$15,000 for one time. Essentially you're looking at many more additional costs when you add the online version to your live event. You know, the live events always had a huge amount of spend from a technological, audio-visual, you know, sound, lighting, production component but now we're going to have to add that streaming broadcast component. And

it's not just equipment, it's professionals, right? It's people who -- who are trained in those areas to be able to provide, you know, a seamless clean broadcast. If you -- if you can charge \$150 for an in-person experience which will include so much more value and benefits, right? Like, from the food and beverage to the opportunity to network face to face to the ability to talk to a guest speaker after their session. All of those that you may not get sitting at home then we can charge somebody who wants to consume this at home possibly 40, \$50. You know \$50 for that same experience and what they're getting is content and exposure, education. As an event planner, you may not need all the space, the physical space, you may not need all of that sort of tangible consumables which would lower your costs. Sure, overall costs on a per person cost, it probably will increase because it seems like everything's become much more expensive and there's a lot of variables there. But -- and then that home opportunity where you could have 100 onsite and you could have 500 at home.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Performers are a huge part of the events industry and they've taken a big hit during the pandemic as well.

PAUL ARAUJO: DJ Starting from Scratch is one of Canada's best-known DJs. He lived up to his name when he tried to shift his sets online. In the early days of the pandemic, copyright issues forced him to shift from Instagram to a new streaming platform.

DJ STARTING FROM SCRATCH: So for -- what happened was I did it -- the first I did it, I was doing it on IG and like you said, you know, they were -- they were shutting me down every five minutes just like they were doing to everybody else. And just like I've kind of always done, I kind of cold-turkeyed it and went straight into Twitch and just abandoned Instagram totally. Yeah, I just had to make that choice of do I want to just sit on my hands and be idle or do it like once in a blue moon? And then I was like, no, you know what? I mean like, I have -- I worked way too hard to get to where I am now to let something like this kind of take me out of the game. This is just another challenge for me. It's just like when the influx of CDs came in and I was a vinyl guy. Or now the digital computers came in when we were vinyl and then CDs. You know, you gravitate to CDs, now they switch you to digital. You get to digital and something else will -- what happens now? Streaming, now I have to be in front of a camera, and playing the music and talking. So now I'm like doing kind of everything. Which as a DJ is a great thing, it's a great -- it's been a great learning tool. I mean, I've had to practice in front of everybody for a year but it's been amazing.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: If you've heard of Twitch but don't really know what it is, here's a quick breakdown. It's a popular live streaming platform dominated by gamers. Basically, anyone can use Twitch to live-stream their activities. Users can find streamers they like and follow them and leave comments in their chats.

RAY HARRIPAUL: And there's a monetization aspect of Twitch; users can buy Twitch subscriptions to view ad-free content and use channel emotes. Emotes are Twitch-specific emojis you can use in the chat.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: Users can donate directly to streamers, users can also give subscriptions or subs to other users and they can also send bits to streamers kind of like tipping. Bits are Twitch currency.

DJ STARTING FROM SCRATCH: There is a huge growth curve. I mean, I literally started with zero people in March and now I'm almost up 14,000 people in a year of followers and subscribers we're almost at 2,000 subscribers. So I mean, the money predominately will always come from anybody who directly tips you because that's just putting money in your hand. But, the bulk of our money comes from subscriptions and on Twitch, they have the bits and the -- and that stuff too. I mean it's just like anything though because of the bits and subs goes through Twitch, they take their share so you're only getting -- you know a bit of it. But the more -- the higher of a status that you reach on Twitch, you have more opportunities to monetize so there's ad revenue sharing and stuff which we haven't even explored yet. So I know for me right now, we've just been -- I mean it's been great. I mean reality is I'll make in one month what I probably would make in one live gig in real life. But it's still money, you know what I mean? And it's a tough thing because you don't want to seem telethony you know what I mean? Because it was never the purpose for doing it. You know, it's a tough line to deal with because I know the viewers themselves are in the same situation I am in. You know what I mean? And I know everybody is not making money -- some people are, some people aren't, some people have lost a ton of money, some people have made a ton of money in this time. Every bit someone puts up is a penny to the recipient in essence right? So if somebody puts up 100, you're giving me a dollar. You know what I mean? So appearances aren't what they seem, because if somebody puts up 1,000 everybody is like, 'oh my God it's 1,000 bits!'. But you're like yes, but it's \$10 right? So it's like appearances aren't what they seem but yes, it still is \$10. You know what I mean? So it's still great but there's -- there's a lot of things to learn with Twitch. But there are -- I think it's really cool that there are a lot of ways to make money because most platforms don't offer that.

RAY HARRIPAUL: Paul Araujo and his George Brown students are also fans of Twitch. He has special event management students that use the platform to produce online events in 2020 as part of their program.

PAUL ARAUJO: We have -- we can't afford these purpose-built platforms so we are using Zoom and Webex. Twitch -- we used Twitch last year for gaming streaming but key -- key there is that it is a purpose-built streaming platform. Yeah, it's for gamers but probably the cleanest production we had last year was on Twitch. So I doubted that group. I was like, 'are you guys sure you want to use Twitch?'. Because I don't know much about it and of the -- what did we have -- 22 virtual events it was the cleanest.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: So when the clouds clear and we start to shift back to gathering in person, what's that going to look like? Paul Araujo says event planners and event-goers can expect to pay more.

PAUL ARAUJO: It will be more expensive to attend and meet and gather in the future just because we're going to decrease capacities by half at best case scenario and probably three-quarters most case scenario.

RAY HARRIPAUL: Here's DJ Starting from Scratch.

DJ STARTING FROM SCRATCH: What I do think is going to happen in the future is kind of what we're doing now combined with public venues. So, I do think live streaming either

from the venue to the houses and vice versa from your house to different venues and so forth and doing -- doing one party in multiple places. I know it's been done before festivals and stuff like that but I do think that that will become more commonplace. I do think especially with musicians and so forth they are definitely going to be keeping that going because they can reach a worldwide audience with one show. I know I've been asked this so many times, am I going to stop streaming when things open? I was like, hell no, why would I do that? You know what I mean? I'm basically giving you a public mixtape, I'm putting out a public calling card every single time I go live. So why wouldn't I keep streaming to educate other people in different places so that when I go there, they're more educated with me? You know the older crowd, they're not going to want to go out anymore. Everybody is used to partying at home on a Saturday night now. The younger crowd, of course, they'll go out, you know what I mean? Why not? They should go out. But the older crowds, like I know for me, if I wasn't DJing and I'm at home -- I'm 48 now -- I'd be like, I'm not going to a club. I would go to a club once in a while but in general like, why wouldn't I -- I would rather have friends at my house and we just watch something on the screen and party at home. So -- and I think that is really going to be, you know, the way of the future.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: It's time to take a look at the future want ads.

[ cheers ]

RAY HARRIPAUL: Yes kids, listen up because these could be the jobs you'll be applying for when you grow up.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: In this segment we ask our guests to outline a job they think should exist in the future. Okay, Paul Araujo, what have you got for us?

PAUL ARAUJO: Event strategist and -- or event communications and strategy.

RAY HARRIPAUL: Okay, we'll call this person an event communications and strategy specialist. What will this person do?

PAUL ARAUJO: The role of event planner, event manager, event coordinator has always been sort of this like wide skill set right. You have to be a Jack or Jane of all trades. That's -- and that's always been the case. This future position I think is going to be that plus this whole element of -- of tech, of production. Now even marketing and promoting these events; the reliance we used to have on say posters or any sort of face-to-face promotions that are probably the most effective right you know aren't going to be available to us. So now we strictly are using these social channels or you know direct email or newsletters or whatever -- whatever sponsored ads we can get our hands on from a social media perspective.

SHAWNE McKEOWN: That's a wrap on this episode of Work Shift. What did you think?

RAY HARRIPAUL: Want to share your thoughts on this episode? Emails us at [workshift@georgebrown.ca](mailto:workshift@georgebrown.ca).

SHAWNE McKEOWN: This podcast is brought to you by the fine folks at George Brown College. We want to thank Paul Araujo and DJ Starting from Scratch for sharing their thoughts with us.

RAY HARRIPAUL: It's the end of your work shift. Thanks for listening.

DJ STARTING FROM SCRATCH: What's up everybody? This is DJ Starting from Scratch and you, yes you, only you, are listening to the Work Shift podcast.