



## **Guest Column: It's Not When We Can Shoot Again, It's How**

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We at Bark Bark find ourselves in an interesting position as a business with a large office in Atlanta. On April 24, Georgia began reopening the state's economy, and, yes, we're also unclear as to why bowling was one of the first "essential services" allowed back.

While the legal restrictions on staying home have begun to be lifted, the real threat has not. Until more benchmarks are met, including a downward trajectory of COVID-19 cases over 14 days, we will continue to work remotely and press forward like the majority of the world (and our state) from the confines of our homes. Yet from this quasi-quarantine, we've been given the opportunity - and responsibility - to lead the charge in answering how to return safely to live-action production and provide real-world learning as it becomes possible.

We don't take this role lightly - we've always been sticklers for safety on set - however this time, perhaps, the actual fate of the world is at stake. And we certainly aren't advocating for widespread production right now. The "when" will be hotly debated, but whether next week or months from now, we will all need clear directives in place on how to structure our sets for the safety and health of our communities until an effective vaccine is readily available.

We've been inspired by the way our industry has joined together, and our findings are the result of numerous conversations and collaborations between our team and many fellow production companies, clients, crews, the AICP, and medical experts. We also acknowledge the great articles from Deadline and Variety, which deal primarily with long-form movie and series production. The path for the marketing and advertising industry is closely related but with its own set of requirements.

Here's how we envision the industry moving forward:

There will be a written plan. And a backup plan.

This new production safety guide is not one size fits all and will be custom for each project. All parties should be consulted - clients, vendors, and department heads of crews - to ensure the solutions are robust and well-informed. You'll hear what corporate mandates need to be complied with, who really needs to travel, and why art directors won't deal in cash. Wardrobe budgets will change to accommodate disappearing return policies, and glam squads will need to purchase tools specific to each actor and have face shields to protect themselves.

There will be personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing.

Don't worry about whether crews will wear masks and gloves-they will. If you're running a production - out-of-house or in-house - you should be exploring supply chains to provide these items for the near future. They are meant to keep us safe, and they're meant to establish the communal responsibility we have to keep each other safe. Expect a pre-call an hour or two earlier than your normal call to check-in, sign forms, get your temperature taken, wash your hands, and receive your PPE for the day. Key decision makers and contributors should have a replacement already decided to fill in if needed.

Time and money will be allocated differently.

Crew sizes, crafty, catering, and "nice-to-haves" will reduce, but more days may be needed to stagger smaller groups of crew to pre-dress, pre-light, and sanitize. Large crews together in one place will not be a part of the early return to production, and each setup will be slower and more methodical to ensure safety. However, this may also mean the actual time for filming on a shoot day increases with more prep being completed beforehand. Make sure your partners use their expertise to find smart solutions in the budget and schedule versus just flatly charging more.

There will be a remote video village.

We've already gone through rigorous testing and are implementing livestreams on every set. You should participate in a demo, give a demo to your clients, and make sure everyone feels comfortable with the process as corporate travel

remains banned or lowered. Adam Goodwin, creative director, partnership marketing and creative for Disney Channels Worldwide said, "Discretionary travel - travel that could be done through a live feed - all of it will be on the table to reduce if it's not completely necessary."

On the other hand, more clients will have the opportunity to "attend" a shoot as long as the chains of communication are clear and the feedback is funneled through one voice, and junior team members can be given the chance to gain experience they wouldn't have had otherwise.

There will be a heavy emphasis on safety, and social distancing will continue.

This means minimizing contact, no matter how tempting it is to hug another human being. We've all unofficially agreed to not be offended.

It also means the minimizing of sharing of high-touch items, including gear. Sorry, apple boxes.

Use of a dolly on set means far fewer crew handling the camera than an easy rig or Movi to coordinate for the DP. Every department and person will need their own set of tools and isolated zones within which to operate. Since we won't be shooting in people's homes for many months, stages, vacant homes, and outdoor spaces will become the primary locations, offering ample space to spread out.

In addition, everything on set will be individually wrapped-grab and go. PPE. Meals. Beverages. Walkies. Equipment. This also means individual dietary restrictions will be easier to gratify.

All prepro books will be digital. We've been trying for years to make this happen. Now necessity can lead the movement to reduce waste.

On-camera talent will, unfortunately, have a new level of accepted risk. Most roles will require talent to work partially without the recommended PPE and, in some instances, social distancing will not be able to be maintained. Every attempt should be made to lock casting no later than two weeks before the shoot so the health of talent can be confirmed. Creatives should consider new blocking, camera angles and lensing to create proximity only as needed.

There also will be a new safety supervisor position on set. His or her job will be to make sure these policies are followed appropriately by everyone throughout the shoot.

### Getting Back To It

We've already dipped our pinkies into production, with a single director/DP safely capturing content we'll turn into videos to help a Georgia-based construction company that shifted its commercial operations into essential

services, repurposing shipping containers into mobile ICUs to give hospitals around the country more life-saving capacity. We're currently planning a larger shoot towards the end of May with a major cable network that will be much more indicative of our path forward and how we safely coordinate a small set build on a stage with casted talent and multiple crew departments working in unison.

We recognize that many brands, networks, and content creators have shifted to only what they can self-produce, embracing home setups, user-generated-content-style filming, clip spots, animation, and motion graphics. Pivoting is crucial.

Messaging is especially sensitive right now and doesn't have the shelf life it once did. Being tone deaf is avoidable but it takes an open dialogue and a willingness to change. Meg Sudlik, vice president of creative production at Viacom Velocity explained that they have been focused on quickly pivoting the content of their spots and offering their services to clients to keep them in-market with relevant ad creative ranging from COVID-related messaging to PSAs. Clients have been open to quick changes.

We also know that every situation is different. Some networks will be more conservative than others about returning due to a variety of factors like geography, corporate mandates, and the type of live-action production in which they most often engage. For those creating content with children and minors, putting them at any risk is not an option.

"We have to be able to ensure a prescriptive level of safety with children and their parents before we even think about being on set," said Rasheda Donner, senior manager, creative for Disney Channels Worldwide.

Sony's branded content team, led by Jason Rumminger and Ashley Pierce added, "We are not only considering state-by-state, but country-by-country restrictions and policies depending on where our movies are shooting before we can get back to work."

First and foremost, however, they are concerned about when people can and will feel safe to go back to movie theaters.

We can't rush into this, but we hope that in responsibly implementing these new safety measures and documenting what we have learned, we can provide much needed insight from the field to support our entire industry in returning. We still live by a simple truth though: we want our industry - and every industry - to be healthy, but first, we need our people to be.

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