

# Brave new world: (Once the lockdown's over the shooting begins)

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As the country and the film and advertising industry gears up to confront the post lockdown new normal, a great deal of attention has rightly been focused on the fresh creative and communication challenges the industry will confront in the days ahead.



Photo by Jakob Owens on [Unsplash](#).

However, an aspect beyond creative content and fresh ideas is the question of health and safety in the creative execution of these same ideas.

A few brands were quick off the mark, as empty streets and deserted cities and squares became a poignant symbol of our time. Directors were briefed remotely and compact camera units sent out usually with a directorial telephonic brief. With few production challenges other than 'essential service' permitting, the iconic symbol of the world under lockdown in 2020 was harnessed in the service of diverse lockdown related ad campaigns.

Film shoots with their apparent glamour and extravagances have always been magnets that trigger public attention and intrigue. In the age of Covid 19, this places new responsibilities on those setting up and managing these shoots, particularly during this period of what *Daily Maverick* terms the 'below the radar tectonic levels' of growing anger at hunger fear and anxiety, as the economy grinds down to a halt.

In the same [article](#) DM profiles Prof Alex van den Heever's 'pathway forward, that matches the health prevention approach with the maintenance of a viable economy "

As lockdown terminates or is adjusted to new social distancing realities, clients, agencies and production companies will face a growing demand to develop creative executions to deliver the messages that brands need to deliver in order for the wheels of the economy to keep turning. The question is, can the traditional approaches to creative execution stoke the fires of the economy while maintaining matching health prevention approaches during the on the ground delivery of creative services.

## A safe place

The tradition in film and photography has always been that a film set is a safe place for actors and crew to work in. That tradition will need to persist more than ever, by adjusting to new health protocols, during the term of this pandemic.

Production houses and agencies moving towards shooting fresh post lockdown spots are already adapting in some areas, with casting now being driven by self-tapes and remote director written briefs to potential cast. Location searches are being driven by database research looking at archived searches from previous location recces. Location scouts are calling homeowners to photograph and film their own homes and upload the pictures to give directors and agencies a chance to view what's on offer. By staying up to date on Covid related data, production houses and agencies can be in a position to ensure that no shooting happens close to a Covid-19 hotspot.



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Meanwhile, department heads are being asked to think of the protocols they believe should be in place to satisfactorily deal with the possibility of infection on the shoot. Freelancers in the film industry are extremely vulnerable and have very little protection once they're sick or disabled, so these protocols are vital for them to follow. As they will doubtless be requested to sign forms releasing the shoots' principals from Indemnity in the case of contracting Covid -19 on set, the workers need to know that all possible efforts were made to protect themselves from such eventuality in the first place.

The question is, can vigorous and effective protocols be put in place and become a standard for work post lockdown, so that brands are properly protected from any possible claim that workers, including children, were ever sent into vulnerable/potentially unsafe areas in order to deliver the brands' creative positioning to its consumers.

Most of us will hopefully be emerging from lockdown knowing we're not infected. Ideally, we need to come away from our shoots with the same sense of security.

Preliminary discussions are in place on how to engage sanitation team to clean and sanitise each location and all surfaces before the shoot to protect crew, agency client and cast on arrival and after completion to protect the location owners themselves. Such sanitation teams are likely to become a must-have not only for shoots, but also for real estate agent businesses, venues for site rentals, event planning etc. This clearly will become part of the location negotiation so owners understand and buy into what is needed to sustain health protocols on set.



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As well as sanitising locations owners will need to be assured that props brought into the set have all been sanitised as well, and probably sanitised again before returning to the rental houses. Deliveries to set need to go through a consistent decontamination routine. Tools on set need to not be shared by different workers.

Shoot transport and arrangements will need to adhere to social distance protocols as well.

Catering and craft are always popular areas for gathering. New social distancing adjustments to regulate and discourage queuing, gathering in one space, contamination across surfaces et will need to be factored into thinking for future shoots. Packed single user lunches and staggered lunch hours will need to be put in place.

Crew and agency could be warned in advance that they will be expected to wear freshly laundered clothes plus face masks and gloves on set at all times.

Actors may wish to supply their own makeup.

Will medics on set be equipped with and have the right to conduct temperature checks at their discretion?

Wardrobe calls need to be much more efficiently managed in terms of cast arrivals and what wardrobe cast are asked to wear. Will particular outfits be laundered and kept in sanitary conditions until wearing? How do the wardrobe teams ensure this during the chaos of trying out outfits on the day?

On set wardrobe and makeup, areas need to be set up with social distancing protocols in mind. Probably there should be hand sanitation stations at makeup and wardrobe and at catering. Fully stocked hand sanitation stations on set should be used at the start of each session and should never become gathering points.

## **Community teamwork**

Holding crew and cast, agency and client and third party participation to an absolute minimum will be essential.

Maintaining the type of vigilance necessary to keep shoots as a safe space for creative work is going to need more preparation time to ensure protocols are up and running by shoot day. This means short lead-in times will need to be extended and become a thing of the past. There'll always be production companies who'll put their hands up for a short turnaround, its business after all and often the quick turnaround shows better profit levels, but agencies and clients have the same responsibility as the community at large, to place health and safety before schedule deadlines.

Of course, all of this costs money, and budgets being what they are as soon as budgets are tightened these protocols which are the most important safety concerns for the shoot will all face resistance from account managers looking at increasingly pressured bottom lines.

Some community teamwork from all the different stakeholders is going to become essential as we work out how to safely work together in the future until a major health breakthrough changes the current course of events.

## **ABOUT IAN GABRIEL**

Ian was the first director of colour in South Africa to open an independent film production company. A leading commercials director based in LA and South Africa, Ian heads Giant Films a commercial and feature film production company focusing on expanding the pool of diversity talent.  
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