



IIC Canada 2022 Conference

Keynote by Christa Dickenson, Executive Director and CEO

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(Check against delivery)

Introduction

Good afternoon.

It's a pleasure to be with you today to deliver the closing keynote on Day 1 of this conference.

And what a conference so far!

You can see the power of human, face-to-face connection at work, after being apart for so long.

We can accomplish so much when we come together – and now is truly the time to do just that.

At our last in-person conference, little did we know what awaited all of us.

In fact, four years ago, I was just stepping into the role of CEO & Executive Director at Telefilm Canada.

It was a pivotal time for an agency tasked with financing and promoting Canadian films.

The media landscape was already rapidly shifting.

I immediately understood the need for change, not just to modernize our funding approach and programs, but to transform it in response to larger, societal trends.

As the last two years have shown, we've had our fair share of challenges.

A global pandemic.

The rise of massive social change movements.

More and more Canadians turning to streaming platforms for their content.

These have presented their own challenges.

But they have also presented new opportunities for storytelling and reaching new audiences.

Purpose

Those of us in this room know well those opportunities.

We've been hearing about them throughout the day from the speakers and panellists.

For example, we heard about the work of Marcia Douglas and the Canadian Media Producers Association – what they're doing to ensure the full demographic spectrum of

our country is represented in our broadcasting system through Bill C-11, the Online Streaming Act.

We heard Sylvie Courtemanche, chair of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council talking about her own organization's cybersecurity crisis experience.

Or Jean La Rose's labour of love in expanding professional opportunities for Indigenous peoples in the media, arts, and broadcasting space.

In fact, all of the leaders who you have heard from today have one thing in common.

They have a sense of purpose – and there's a really good reason for that.

The truth is: Canadians now expect more of us, more of our governments, and more of our institutions.

They expect us to be purpose-driven.

Research shows nearly half of Canadians think organizations need to be doing more to address inequalities and environmental challenges.

Two-thirds of Canadians support employers taking a stand on protecting the environment, combating climate change, and addressing racism and diversity in the workplace.

In a world of bias and fake news, our shared principles and values as Canadians have never been more important.

Today, I want to talk about where we are now as an industry, what we've done at Telefilm to make purpose a rallying cry, and where we all need to take the industry going forward.

What We've Achieved

When I began in my role as CEO in 2018, it was clear to me the agency was in dire need of modernization.

Every inch of the organization needed to be examined.

If we failed to act swiftly, then our future success and the success of the talent we supported would be on the line.

We took the time to listen.

We launched the largest pan-Canadian consultation ever in our industry – 800 participants, six public forums, and over 500 survey responses from coast to coast to coast. What we had in mind... was to democratize Telefilm for greater access.

This valuable input allowed Telefilm to deliver and implement a new Success Measurement Model that will encourage stronger representation from ALL Canadians.

We've rebalanced production funding to increase funding amounts for fiction feature films and documentaries.

We've also supported more filmmakers and talent from underrepresented groups to create space for more diverse voices to come to the forefront of Canadian film and content.

Ultimately, our culture of change is what saved us when the global pandemic hit.

We were nimble.

We were able to keep Telefilm staff working – because we needed to keep the thousands of talented Canadians in front and behind the cameras working as well.

As hundreds of cinemas across the country closed and hundreds of productions were halted, we had to step up quickly – and we did... Big time!

We worked with the federal government to administer tens of millions of dollars through the Short-Term Compensation Fund.

This fund allowed us to insure productions affected by pandemic shutdowns. Yes, Telefilm now administers an industry wide insurance program.

And, that relief has been recently extended until March 31, 2023 to support the Canadian audiovisual industry's recovery.

Thanks to these efforts, we saved 814 camera-ready projects worth \$3 billion dollars and the livelihoods of 20,000 people

To date, Telefilm administers annually over half a billion dollars in total funding for the sector.

Leading with Courage

I couldn't be more proud of our team.

Since the pandemic, we have continued to enact meaningful change from the inside out.

If we want content that is more reflective of who we are as a country, then we need to lead by example, and lead with courage.

Through our Gender Parity Action Plan, we made a clear commitment to create a more inclusive and representative industry and we set ourselves measurable goals.

I am pleased to report that half of the projects we funded in 2020-21 achieved gender parity.

And, as an employer, Telefilm is also now gender parity certified.

We also developed and implemented our Equity and Representation Action Plan.

In 2021, Telefilm saw the appointment of its first Vice President of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Cathy Wong.

We've provided funding to support the creation of the Indigenous Screen Office, the Black Screen Office, and the Disability Screen Office.

We have gone on to set ourselves new hiring targets.

By 2023, at least half of our new hires and 30% of our new management hires will come from underrepresented identities – Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.

These changes have allowed us to pave the way for more diverse talent across our entire organization.

And ultimately, we are making room for a different kind of leader at Telefilm, a fresh face to continue to carry the torch forward.

Diversity should be our strength as Canadians.

We must be naturally inclusive. We must be purpose-driven.

When we talk about sustainability as an industry, we must also go beyond simple dollar figures.

We should learn from Indigenous peoples that story and land are fundamentally connected.

That is why Telefilm launched its Eco-Responsibility Action Plan this year.

We have partnered with the Rolling Green program and the Conseil québécois des événements écoresponsables to raise awareness in the audiovisual industry and promote the adoption of sustainable practices on Quebec's film sets.

We are looking at ways to make our pavilions greener at national and international festivals.

Through these actions and more, we will again lead the industry by example and ensure we achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

It's an ambitious set of goals, but our work is well underway.

We could not have made these pivotal decisions without full consultation with the industry.

We listened, and we did what we said we would do.

Future Ready

At the core of effecting change is not only making your industry *future proof*.

It's about making it future ready.

I am confident that I am leaving Telefilm in a position of strength.

Over the last three years, Telefilm has received an additional \$105 million to carry out its work in support of a \$1.1 billion dollar industry.

We have every reason to be optimistic – but we must not be afraid to ask ourselves the tough questions.

Questions like:

How can we best support the audiovisual industry– ALL OF IT, from film to television to news –for a new generation of Canadian storytellers?

How is it going to be reflected in Bill C-11, Bill C-18, and a new law against online hate?

What must policymakers do to ensure that ALL Canadians have the same opportunity to bring their story to the screen?

Are we investing enough in our success?

These are some of the questions I am considering as I start a new chapter in my career by joining CPAC this fall.

I am thrilled to be returning to my roots in news and public affairs.

It's an opportunity to stay in public service, while serving an organization with a different reach and impact.

The mission of championing the voice of Canadian democracy is at the heart of my decision to join the talented CPAC team.

And for me, it goes well beyond the mission. It is also about the vision and the values.

How do we protect and build on 30 years of unfiltered access to the people and events that shape our democracy?

In many ways, the work of institutions like Telefilm and CPAC lines up when it comes to supporting unvarnished, compelling storytelling and making room for more diverse and thoughtful voices.

The role CPAC plays today is even more critical in the age of misinformation, fake news, and polarization.

We need to make our political systems more accessible to Canadians.

Canadians need to continue to see their democracy in action.

And that's what CPAC delivers.

Put simply: CPAC has purpose.

And that excites me. And that should excite all Canadians.

Meaningful change

As is often said, the world needs more Canada.

And they need us now more than ever.

We have powerful stories to tell, stories that the world needs to hear right now, to drive meaningful change in our industry and beyond.

At Telefilm, we did not wait for the perfect conditions to implement change.

We embraced it and addressed issues head on.

I'm proud of what Telefilm has done to lead by example and set ourselves a benchmark for purpose-driven success.

But we cannot do it alone.

All of us in this room have to rise to the occasion – because that's what Canadians expect of us.

Here is what our rallying cry should be:

To be purpose-driven organizations, Canada must stabilize funding for screen-based industries.

We must level the playing field when it comes to taxing streaming users and ensuring all content receives a fair share of those dollars.

We must look at the ecosystem as a whole because the lines are now blurred.

The age of streaming has broken down the walls of how film, TV and other audiovisual content are consumed.

Most important of all, we must focus on delivering content with purpose, by building and normalizing a more representative, sustainable audiovisual industry...

THAT is dependent on the level of support and dollars that our governments, our broadcasters, and our industry invest to ensure we are truly future ready.

The change starts with us, ladies and gentlemen.

We should keep the momentum going even when it is not easy.

I remain relentlessly optimistic.

The future of Canadian content is promising.

And all of us have a role to play in shaping that future.

The stage is set.

The cameras are rolling.

Let's call ACTION on a bright future for Canadian storytelling.

Thank you.