

Kathryn: Podcasting from Dallas Texas, you're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent women about finding work and getting paid. I'm your host Kathryn Hunter and you're listening to episode 7 with Alana zivanovic, events director . Today we're talking about finding work that fulfills you, splitting your schedule, and keeping up with tech and tools. Amy , welcome to the show.

Alana: Thank you very much. Kathryn. I'm pleased to be here.

Kathryn: So I like to start with your early life to see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five years old?

Alana: I've always wanted to be a performer, so I was very much into singing, dancing, acting, you name it. At five years old, that was pretty much all I could think about.

Kathryn: And had that changed by the time you left high school?

Alana: Not particularly, to be honest. I guess I delved a lot more into the music space, so I took singing a lot more seriously and I was looking at a career in music predominantly. And at the time my singing teacher, she suggested that I consider continuing education at university, so that I could couple business and music. So I did actually end up studying for a commerce degree in marketing, which is somewhat different to what I do now. But essentially it was worthwhile in the end to, to take that step. Now these days, I don't know if I would have made the same choice, but I do think it was useful, in the end. So yeah.

Kathryn: Are there any things you use from your degree now?

Alana: Not particularly. This is where I guess, like I said right now, if I had the choice again, I don't know that I would choose to do a degree. I think that there's a lot of practical knowledge these days that you can find in short courses or by other means. I think, depending on the industry, people are a lot more open to learning on the job, which is great. Because that's a real barrier to entry. You know, if you were say very entrepreneurial minded but maybe couldn't complete something in high school, it sort of left you a bit left out. So yeah, I think that it was definitely worth while for me in terms of where it led me, more than the content, if that makes sense. Because at the time that I was studying, it was sort of a bit of a turning period. It was right around the depression. And there was not a lot of job prospects. A lot of what was being taught those days was a, I guess pretty redundant today. You know, it was all about big corporations and it wasn't very practical. So for me I guess it was more along the lines of analytical thinking and those sorts of skills that I still apply today, not so much the practical knowledge.

Kathryn: That makes sense. What was your first foray into being location independent?

Alana: So... Man, it's been a little while. The very first location independent role I had was a part time gig with a company, called Music Hype, which no longer exists and that was just outside of uni. I think it was 2010 that I started with that company and it was all

about music and you know, helping artists to generate a larger fan base and all that type of thing. And so I was helping with the... marketing manager with the dashboard. And it wasn't social media, but I guess it was sort of social media-esque in that I was dealing with the artists and the liaising with the record labels and those sorts of things. So yeah, it was a very short stint though. It was about, I think, three to six months, but it gave me a taste of what it meant to be location independent. And I guess from there the bug just caught on. Yup. Ever does.

Kathryn: So, when people are being polite and they ask you about your job, what do you tell them now?

Alana: I say that I'm in events and I usually only go as far as to say I plan conferences and functions and that's sort of, yeah, the top line. And then if they're interested I'll delve further from there.

Kathryn: Okay. And when they are interested?

Alana: I guess I talk a lot more about the parts of the industry that I'm involved in. So you know, that I manage talent, that I help to execute exhibitions that I do a lot around sponsorship outreach and that type of thing. So I go more into what that means in terms of the day to day and also where I do my job because that's, that actually takes longer to explain than the job itself. They're like, so hang on, what, you do very like location based job, but you do it location independent? How does that work? So yeah, I spent quite a bit more time explaining that side of things.

Kathryn: So how does that work?

Alana: It works really well actually. And funnily enough, it was never what I thought I would be doing at this point in time. But it's just bizarre how you put certain things out there and you think about the lifestyle you want to create. Right? So I was like, I really would like to remain location independent. I really love my career as a singer. It's not very stable though. Like, what else can I do that I can couple with this that I guess, utilizes my business background at the same time? And so I just ended up falling into these opportunities. Which started to snowball, you know? So I ended up doing, going from doing one event to doing a range of events and then doing a range of different things within the industry itself. So how do I actually do it? I guess for me personally, the way that I work is I look at the end goal. So I look at what the actual event is and then I work back through all of the different phases and I look at what I need to do by that date to make everything a client needs happen. So with events, a lot of it actually can take place, not in the place the event is taking place. Right. I guess the key thing to keep in mind as the time zones, so for me it might mean if I'm like I'm currently in New Zealand at the moment, if I'm down here, a lot of my clients up north, so it means I'm working evenings predominantly. So for me, I guess that's one consideration is about where the client is. But in terms of the work itself, until it comes time to execute the event, I'm not usually needed on site. So my site time is around one to two weeks depending on the brief.

Kathryn: How did you get your first break, as far as finding a new client?

Alana: So I started in events, it would have been around 2010 I was working as a speed dating hostess. So that's sort of how I entered the market, but it wasn't my full time job at the time. It was sort of something fun to do and something I thought would be a neat add to the CV, which by the way, I don't really have a CV anymore. I found, I don't know about you, but I found that something that's actually become quite redundant, for me at least. So anyway, that's sort of how I got into it. I guess where things really got exciting is I was in China about, when was it, 2015 now and I was singing, so I was actually on a full time singing gig. I was supposed to be there for three months, but they told me that I was too short and fat. So they cut that contract short and I ended up sort of swinging about Vietnam and it was from there that I got brought into a job in Thailand. And that's where I got a real sense that hey, hang on a minute. These are the skills that I've always used and now there's actually a market, you know, for it like a proper, this could be a proper gig. So that's sort of where it all began and it's just gone from strength to strength really. It's, predominantly word of mouth and people hear about what I do and then they say, look, I've got this project, can you jump on here? And then, I guess over time as well, like the types of roles that I've, I do has shifted. So I started off doing things like stage managing. So I would, you know, manage the speakers at a conference and I would look after all the logistics and production. And then I moved from there into sort of hitting production. And managing exhibitions and then different clients, you know, heard that I did sponsorship really well and so they were saying, can you come and help me with my sponsorship for x events? So yeah, it's sort of just grown over the last I guess three, three and a half years.

Kathryn: What was your first major struggle?

Alana: I guess getting into the lifestyle, the time zones. It's a small one but it can impact you if you're not used to dealing with working with a range of clients across time zones. So I've gotten really good now, at knowing what time it is in certain parts of the world at any given moment, depending on where I am. And I guess juggling that if you've, you know, events is very much a career unless you work for one company whereby you do have a lot of clients. It's kind of like an agency in a way where you are, you've got to manage the expectations and make sure that you don't over commit yourself. And the time zone thing becomes really important because I feel it's the right thing to do to very much keep in touch with the client on a regular basis. So I'll schedule call at least once a week and then I'll update them during the week and just let them know how the project is going. So yeah, I guess time zones can be a struggle when you initially start out in this particular industry, nomadically anyway.

Kathryn: What would you say your first major success was?

Alana: First major success, to be honest with you, I think just realizing that I could do this as a career, that it was finally something... I'd spent a lot of time in various roles, like I worked everything from like making sandwiches through to social media management, which I really didn't enjoy. And I worked in advertising for a few years and so I had all these various things which never gave me the fulfillment that music did. So when I

found that wow, events was actually something that I could do really well and could do it from anywhere, I think that in itself was a huge success for me.

Kathryn: That, that really makes sense. So you probably don't really have a typical day. Do you want to give us just a sample day?

Alana: Sure. I really, really don't have a typical day. That's the other thing. You've got to be very focused because the tasks can change at any given moment and they vary from client to client. So I try not to take on more than two or three projects at one time and it's very dependent as well on what stage they're at. So obviously I'm not going to take on a large conference and another large conference if they both execute at the same time. So they've either got to be in, you know, one will be in preplanning and then one might be close to executing and then, you know, I try and make sure that it's a very separate time scale. So I could be dealing with helping to get sponsors on board for one client while I'm helping to program a schedule for another, you know, in a plenary session or something like that. So every day is very different depending on where each client is in their timeline or the critical path to the event.

Kathryn: How does your day, well, I guess you said you work a lot in the evening hours. If it's, I guess a northern hemisphere client...

Alana: Yes. So right about now most of the northern hemisphere clients that are online for me around my, my 10 pm. So that's generally when I try and stay open, especially for sponsorships so that I can speak with, with the clients. So between 10 pm and midnight, it's usually where I get most of my goals done. And then the emailing will usually be during the day. So there are, there's quite a bit of email with this role. And then also during the day I can do a lot of the logistics and production stuff. Anything that doesn't need that interaction with the client or with delegates attending the event. So I usually split my day, like right now it's my morning. So I will spend I guess the first half of my shift so to speak in the morning, getting the logistics and anything that doesn't require the client itself done. And then in the evenings at the moment while I'm here, that's when it sort of face time so to speak without it being face time. So yeah, it does take a bit of getting used to when you start to make sure that you plan your days so that you are very focused. Otherwise it's very easy to, to go off track. You know, I've got a lot of family down here, now. I'm actually just visiting New Zealand but they are still getting their head around what I do and they're like, can you come and have this barbecue or do this or let's go here. And it's like, ah, I really need to just stay tucked away right now and get this done. So it's been interesting to, you know, tell them a bit more about what I'm doing. And, yeah, I guess because even you know, five years ago or so, it wasn't as easy to do this type of work now or in this industry anyway. So yeah, but that's sort of how it splits at the moment. That's the long winded version. I'll be back up in the northern hemisphere in a few weeks so then it will flip again. So it will be more of a bunny ears, "regular" time of day. Yeah.

Kathryn: Okay. Do you keep up with any kind of continuing education?

Alana: Not anything in terms of like courses so to speak, but I do like to continue educating just in general. So I like to just keep up with the trends. I like to, I guess, learn new

applications and things cause that's something that's constantly changing, right? Like there's a tool you might use to help program, like a show and then that'll change because technology is just changing so rapidly. And then CRMs you know, I might have one CRM with one client and then I'm dealing with another one with another. So I guess there's a bit of learning in terms of the apps and the ways that people like to file their admin and do more of the, yeah, the administration side of the work. So that I keep up with, and in terms of the industry itself, I do like to go to events for event planners and see what's happening. So I went to one in New York last, it was in, when was it now? It was October, I think it was. And it's really useful, you know, and it's great from a networking standpoint and that's what I would say to anybody looking to get into this industry and to do it nomadically as well is networking is key. So if you can get along to some of these events for event planners and network and get your foot in the door that way, I would say that's a really good way.

Kathryn: And now it's time to get into the numbers. What would you say your salary range is and how long have you been doing this now?

Alana: So the salary range in this industry is varied. It depends on your experience and it also depends on the way you actually work. So it's a little different to, I guess being in a salaried role. If you were in a salaried role and you were just starting out, at least in New Zealand, I think that you would start around 40,000 New Zealand dollars, which is about 30,000 USD. And that works its way up. I mean, you can go to, you know, a hundred, 120 grand a year on a salaried role. In events depending on, you know, where you're at, when it gets sort of higher, higher up and more experienced. So the way that I work is very different, I would imagine to a standard event planner as such. So I don't work on a base salary anymore. I did when I initially started, uh, the way that I usually work is I will set day rates depending on the client. So if I'm only needed onsite for a few days, then that's how I'll split my fees or project based, so I don't usually charge, I don't have one set salary I guess because I'm, I am my own business. So I sort of charge dependent on the project or what the client's asking for and what value I'm able to give them.

Kathryn: So how do you decide what you're going to charge per project?

Alana: I look at the amount of time that's needed first and foremost. So if it is a full scale conference and I'm being brought in right at the beginning, then I would work my time out based on how many hours and how much work is required to make that happen. Versus if it's say a small function and I'm only needed say for two weeks and of that, you know, it's very part time, then I would charge very differently again. So it's very complex; there's not one size fits all with this. And then you can get into the stage where actually the client thought they had everything covered but then they needed something extra done or they needed something more from you. So you do have to keep it flexible as well in case there is actually additional work involved.

Kathryn: Okay. So it's a, it's a combination of the time that's required, the intensity, you're going to have to focus on it during that time and how much you value your time.

Alana: Yes, it is. It's really a combination of all of those things and depending on what you're doing as well, I would say that commission can come into it too. So if you're doing

sponsorship outreach or anything to that effect, then usually the client will have a commission as well, on top.

Kathryn: What are your next steps for your business?

Alana: The 2019 there's a lot going on. I'm looking to do a or test out a few of my event ideas, which I would say will take between 15-20% of my time. But I've been inundated with requests for various events. So it's getting pretty chocka now. I'm almost at the point where I will probably not take on much more, at least in the first two quarters of the year. So they're predominantly across blockchain, digital marketing, health care, entertainment there's a few different industries in the mix already for this year, so I'm really excited to see where I can take these events for these clients. And at the same time sort of peter away at my own bits and pieces on the other side. Yeah. Just to test out a few different formats and ideas that I've got in mind.

Kathryn: How much do you need to know about a client's business? Like you mentioned the blockchain, which is still relatively new...

Alana: Yeah. So I guess actually in this case I am constantly learning. I'm just not learning in, I guess the most traditional way. Blockchain, for me, was a very foreign idea until about two years ago. And then I got asked to jump on my first blockchain event and it was a steeper learning curve for me, I guess, because I'm very much not in that industry at all, or at least I wasn't up until that point. So, you do need to know, I would say... It's difficult. It depends on the industry. With blockchain, I think it's important to have a really good understanding of it, not just for the events, but I do think it's something that is already changing the way we work and will continue to change a lot of the way that we do things in general. So, yeah, for me, it was important to get my head around what blockchain was when I started. I understood that it was, you know, a cryptocurrency and bitcoin and ethereum and then I realized that actually distributed ledger technology is, it goes a lot deeper than that, and it actually impacts so many different industries. You know, if I'm the creative head of arts even, so right down to, you know, my passion with music, it definitely plays a part in there, although a very small part at the minute, it's definitely going to increase. So, I do think it's important. You know, I am on another project that's coming up in February called Longevity Leaders, which is a really wonderful project. And again, it was a learning curve for me because, you know, I understood the basics of longevity, but I didn't realize how much of an impact that this idea is having on the world, you know, that the population is getting a lot bigger and that there are a lot of, um, societal impacts and a lot of, industry (unintelligible) you know, across medtech and biotech and insurance and retirement planning. There's just so many industries that touch on it. And so, yeah, that's been a project for me that's been interesting to really learn a lot more about. So yeah, that's a long answer. But, in short, I think it's important to have a really clear understanding of what the client is about and what they're looking to achieve. Because not only is it great because you learn a lot, but you can really help them a lot more if you understand the crux of their business and what they're looking to do, to help people and to create a really great business.

Kathryn: And where can listeners find you?

Alana: So I'm generally floating about Instagram and I'm also on Skype. So I've got a Skype ID. I'm really should get a website. I'm at the point now where I should have something like that up. I've got a music website, which is just my name, alanazivanovic.com. But at the moment I would say Instagram, Skype, I'm also on LinkedIn. Actually, LinkedIn is a really great way to connect with me. So you can find me on there under Alana Zivanovic as well.

Kathryn: Alana, thank you so much for joining us. This has been fun.

Alana: It's been really fun. Thank you for having me.

Kathryn: Thank you for listening to Compass. You'll find today's show notes at compasspod.com/007. If you enjoyed this show, please share it with a friend, by visiting compasspod.com/007 and clicking the share buttons at the top of the page. Next week we'll be talking to ikiah McGowan , Community fundraising manager.