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## The Rebel Fleet takes a proactive approach to a COVID-19 affected film industry

**Production partners:** Metro Film Ltd, Ariel, FAT Lighting, Carwyns Catering, Craft Services, Wireless Warehouse, Stabilise NZ, Toaki Okano Studios, NZ Film Lighting.

With the New Zealand film industry amongst many other New Zealand industries coming to a screaming halt over the lockdown with no clear future in sight, there was either the option to shelter in place and stop development or to use the time as an opportunity to make change. The latter was definitely on the minds of Michael Urban and Pete Harrow, co-owners of the digital imaging company The Rebel Fleet. The company provides all the services that involve on-set and near-set technology, monitoring, video playback, technical appraisal as well as backing up, colour grading and distributing the moving images that come off set each day. As digital cinema has grown, so have the challenges of keeping that data safe and of a high quality at lightning speed. The company specialises in these workflows.

*"It's a relatively new department in film and as such, not many people know about what we do. So there often is a lack of skilled Digital Imaging Technicians, Dailies Managers and Video Operators here in New Zealand. With all the work potentially coming up and the borders closed to many we had to look at ways to be proactive in training the people we have here in Aotearoa to meet the future needs of the industry. So we have just started training them".*

*Michael Urban - General Manager*

Throughout lockdown the team created a module based online learning curriculum specific to Dailies, DIT, Video and Colour roles which aim to structure skills and responsibilities and provide research, learning material and practical training to participants.

*“The idea is that each of our almost 20 trainees feel empowered to teach as well as learn, so each trainee is assigned a research topic and made a Subject Matter Expert in one small thing. They are then able to be that “go to” person in our area of the industry. The follow on from that is having them present their research at one of our weekly “Senate” meetings after work and really own the topic they have been researching .”*

*Isaac Spedding - Head of Training and Development*

Understanding the industry is heavily reliant on practical learning and networking, The Rebel Fleet have been (and will hopefully continue) running weekly “Senates” where interested people, specialists and trainees meet in the evening to learn about one aspect of the digital imaging and film industry. Senates have included topics such as creating a base colour grade, advanced QTake operations and guest speakers talking about modern post-production workflows.

Having finally come out of lockdown the challenge of getting trainees practical on-set experience was overcome by creating unique production days where trainees were given the reins to the whole process in their department and mentored by specialists. The Rebel Fleet and Metro Film have run 3 practical production shoots so far with 3 themes. The first being camera testing. The second training shoot called ‘Bracken Road’ included 35 crew and trainees with Director Harriett Maire. It took place at The Rebel Fleet and Metro Film offices and was a short film with 3 setups, an aerial unit and a full crew aimed at replicating feature film quality workflows.

*“The On set environment is an ever evolving beast, with many different moving parts that all need to work symbiotically. The equipment is just one of those beasts, with new & improving camera’s & rig’s, plus different workflows & pipelines on a shoot by shoot basis. With our training, we are emulating this in the most realistic way possible, with the best cameras available at present & some complex pipelines. We are also deliberately throwing in some technical issues & real world problems that we have faced before, to make the training days simulate some of the worst days on set”.*

*Pete Harrow - Senior Colorist*

Bracken Road had a list of intentional technical issues that were replicated during the day by various departments to try catch out the trainees and also provide future training material examples of common issues seen in a digital imaging environment. This included using many different cameras, having the wrong white balance, dead pixels, sound rolling late and actors staring into the camera. With all of the footage on feature films requiring a high level of privacy and often hidden behind an NDA it created quite a challenge when it came to teaching people about high level production issues. The solution has been filming content specifically for in-house training that anyone can watch and upskill with.



*"I think that TRF is trying to take another approach and train everybody up equally so that our industry as a whole is more competitive in the international market for film production technicians."*

Quote from a Trainee

The third shoot called 'Lockdown', gave trainees the responsibility of delivering a rich and beautiful short film. With a crew of over 40, including 15 trainees it replicated a very high end production pipeline with an estimated rental value of \$22,000 on the floor. 2 DIT carts and 2 QTake rigs were set up in parallel to allow as many people as possible time on the carts. The shoot was supported heavily by Metro Film who provided 2 fully kitted out Alexa Mini packages, staff, and all things camera. FAT lighting provided a truck with RGBW LED lighting including Skypanels. Importantly the crew was fully catered by Carwyns Catering and Craft Services. Support from industry veterans and their time was the most valuable by far. The aim was to create an environment where value was seen not only by trainees but by industry representatives and department heads, and so the quality and expectation was held to a high level. New trainees and people who were interested in what the digital imaging department did were invited to come and fill roles after lunchtime and ask questions as well as meet the crew.

*"As one of those department Heads, the training exercise had value at two levels: I crewed the camera & lighting departments with experienced people but in more senior roles than they usually occupy. For example Bayley, our B Camera operator, usually works as a focus puller and her focus puller was stepping up from her usual role as 2AC."*

*"I can really see the advantages in this training programme and think the visual quality that we delivered as a team bears that out."*

Alex Campbell - DoP

With productions starting up in September the practical shoots like Lockdown will not be easily continued without support from more private departments and sponsors. There is now a proven example and structure around effective ways for the private sector to train people into jobs that deviates from traditional models. The idea is to include guilds such as DEGNZ and The Screen Guild as well as SWAG and WIFT to crew up future shoots. This allows a testing ground for AD's, Camera, Directors, Actors, Editors, Post Production, and even starts to generate an independent film industry for New Zealand by making film funding multiple use for both training and development.

*"When I was first approached by Isaac, I couldn't quite believe the opportunity I was being offered. To be given a chance to create a piece of work with access to such a huge amount of expertise and resources? That's the absolute dream. I've learnt a lot about digital workflows on set that I didn't have a true understanding of beforehand. Being a part of this process has helped my holistic knowledge and appreciation of what it takes to run a smooth set. That's a really valuable understanding to have as a director."*



*“Everyone across the creative, the teaching and the learning sides of the workshop all benefited from this. Even the performers that I involved got something important out of it - they were able to build on their own craft, and spend the day creating something that everyone had a true passion for.*

[Harriett Maire - Director](#)

It is the hope that with industry support The Rebel Fleet and Metro Film can continue to orchestrate community inclusive high level training to people who have a drive to learn and show a burning desire to produce beautiful content. The gap between low end and high end in this small industry is huge and making the transition onto an international feature is a big leap with almost no stepping stone productions here in New Zealand. That is where this training aims to offer the stepping stones required to get more people into more higher paying roles and allow the industry to accept more locally crewed high end projects.

*“I believe for effective training to continue in a commercial industry that is busy all the time, we must value our training at the same if not a higher level than the industry rate to attract veteran people who are our best mentors. People have said that what we are doing is great and I say yeah, you can do it too. There is nothing stopping you from taking the reins and upskilling people so that we can be better prepared to take on more and more large productions in this new era of film making. The support from vendors and industry businesses has been amazing. Everyone is keen to continue supporting this type of initiative.”*

[Michael Urban](#)



**Image:** Gimbal operator Archer Roelants loads in the Alexa Mini with B Camera IAC Lydia Stoit



**Image:** Trainee Dailies Manager Thomas Weddell delivers the footage at the end of the day so that producers can see how the finished film will look.



**Image:** Isaac Spedding (center) takes the Dailies Trainees through creating a look based on the Director of Photography's requests.



**Image:** (From left) Bayley Broome-Peake, Jared Jones, Phoebe Jeurissen, Lydia Stoit.





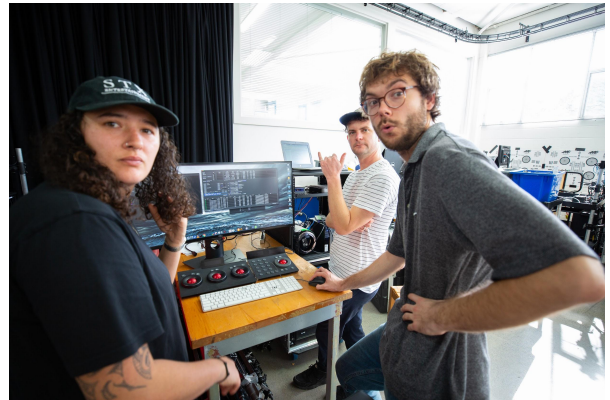
**Image:** Crew enjoying lunch. (From left) Ben Moxham, Richard Litt, Jay Weston, Connor Ayliffe, Michael Urban



**Image:** Finn Roelants takes trainees through QTake on prep day.



**Image:** Alex Bradford preparing his DIT cart for shoot day. Campbell Gray and Jason Duncan preparing DIT cart 2.



**Image:** Data trainees prepping their dailies suite. (From left) Nelly Scott, Tristan Brooks, Thomas Weddell



**Image:** DIT Trainee Alex Bradford operating on DIT cart 1.



**Image:** Jacqui Ennis the Video Operator takes trainees through live operation using 2 Ovide Smart Assists.



**Image:** (From left) Lydia Stoit, Bayley Broome-Peake



**Image:** (From left) Director Harriett Maire, 1st AD Tarita Baquie, Script Supervisor Ananda Kientz

