

Leora Kornfeld ([00:09](#)):

Welcome to Now and Next. It's a podcast about innovation and emerging trends in the media and entertainment industries. I'm Leora Kornfeld. So, say you're a kid growing up in a town of a few thousand people in the middle of the prairies doing the usual kid things that kids do, like going to school and watching cartoons and movies, all that stuff, and the images that you see of your culture are things like people dancing around a drum or a man on horseback in the 1800s and that's all you see of your culture on TV and in movies. Well, that's what Jacob Pratt was confronted with as a kid growing up on the George Gordon first nation in Southern Saskatchewan.

Jacob Pratt ([00:52](#)):

I remember watching TV and not seeing somebody like me, and then it was years and years and years later that I came to the realization that all the stereotypes that exist out there about indigenous people have been generally created or reinforced by the entertainment industry. Then I started thinking to myself, "Well, how do we make a big impact at reversing or eliminating those stereotypes?" Number one answer for me was, well using the same medium that created and reinforced those stereotypes would be a really good way of doing that.

Leora Kornfeld ([01:30](#)):

That's exactly what Jacob Pratt is up to these days. He's now based in Los Angeles, where he recently finished his master's at USC. Before that, he had what you could call a diverse portfolio in the entertainment industry. He had been a powwow dancer, an actor, a TV host, a voice actor, and he also started his own company called Skoden Entertainment and managed to land Disney as his first client. That came out of the internship he was doing as part of his master's. This is no story of overnight success and most aren't once you scratch the surface. In Jacob's case, he hosted, produced and directed several shows for APTN, including doing 21 episodes of Wild Archeology, a show about the archeological record of the indigenous peoples of North America.

Leora Kornfeld ([02:20](#)):

According to Jacob, these experiences have been absolutely key in opening other doors for him. He says it's really important to remember that it takes years of developing relationships. First with smaller broadcasters and smaller development deals and then you build bit by bit. We'll hear more from Jacob Pratt on what he's doing to break down Hollywood stereotypes on the ground in LA in just a moment.

Jacob Pratt ([02:46](#)):

Hi, my name is Jacob Pratt. I'm a Dakota and Ojibway from Cote First Nations in Saskatchewan. I'm a producer, director, and business owner in Los Angeles, California. I recently launched Skoden Entertainment, which is an indigenous, story focused entertainment production company. I grew up most of my life in Saskatchewan on the George Gordon First Nation. I went to the George Gordon residential school and I'm really just a little Res kid for anybody out there. You know, who am I? I'm just a little Res kid that's out there trying to make a change in my industry. I'm just a Res kid, that's all.

Leora Kornfeld ([03:29](#)):

When you were growing up, what were some of the first images of indigenous people that you encountered in the entertainment industry?

Jacob Pratt ([03:36](#)):

That's a good question. Growing up as just a little indigenous kid on the reserve, my images of my people on television was like Peter Pan. What makes the red man red, that kind of thing, or the little stereotypical cartoons. Then doing the dancing around a drum and very, very stereotypical. Then in actual movies, the best I saw was a native man in the 1800s on horseback, which is cool. I'm like, "Yeah, that's my people back in the day," but there was never anybody like me. There's never just some kid running around a town or a city or we weren't on Home Alone. We weren't on any movies that were representative of an indigenous kid in a modern setting. That's something that's missing. That's why as a kid everything that I saw on TV, that was just TV stuff. Things that weren't possible to me. So when you don't see yourself represented, it's hard for you to see those things as possibilities for yourself.

Leora Kornfeld ([04:59](#)):

So you said, why am I not Macaulay Culkin? Why am I not home alone? Were you actually thinking those thoughts?

Jacob Pratt ([05:05](#)):

As a little kid, you're not thinking, why am I not on TV? You do notice it. As a little kid when you don't see yourself represented in any kind of way, it's really hard to just identify with any characters on a very real way because they're nothing like you.

Leora Kornfeld ([05:26](#)):

That can make you say, "Okay, this industry is obviously not for me." Or you can go the other way and say, I'm going to change this. It sounds like obviously you did the latter. When did you say I'm going to take this on, I'm going to do something about this? When did that happen and what sparked that?

Jacob Pratt ([05:41](#)):

That decision didn't happen until much, much later. I remember as early as first grade, remember watching TV and not seeing somebody like me, but remember sitting there and watching actors do different things. For me, it wasn't just like seeing a character. I knew they were acting. I was like, "I bet I can do this. I think I could do that." Then it was years and years and years later while I was doing my undergrad in Regina that I came to the realization that all the stereotypes that exist out there about indigenous people have been generally created or reinforced by the entertainment industry in the past. So all these stereotypes about indigenous people, they have an origin or been reinforced by the entertainment industry. Then I started thinking to myself, "Well, how do we make a big impact at reversing or eliminating those stereotypes?" The number one answer for me was, well using the same medium. So using the entertainment industry, both live entertainment and film and television is a great way to start reeducating people while entertaining them.

Leora Kornfeld ([07:00](#)):

Your website for Skoden Entertainment, your company, talks about how your objective is to bring indigenous stories created by indigenous filmmakers to as wide an audience as possible. What are the biggest challenges that you've come up against in doing this?

Jacob Pratt ([07:17](#)):

Historically, the entertainment industry has been run by older white men and these older white men don't like to change things. The industry has just been closed off for decades and decades producing the same kind of content over and over and over again. So it's really a matter of breaking those norms. Luckily we're in a stage within the development of the entertainment industry where it's being more socially aware that these stories are starting to be told. There's also movies out there that are breaking those misconceptions that stories about people of color by people of color don't do well. That was what people said is like, "Oh, a story about black people doesn't do well." Then the Black Panther just destroys at the box office and then Asian American stories don't do well. Then Crazy Rich Asians becomes a global phenomenon. So there's demonstrations now within the industry that show that these stories are not only relevant, but they're very financially successful. Unfortunately, the indigenous content is still lagging a little behind. So we want to get in there and start to push indigenous stories by indigenous people to get to that level as well.

Leora Kornfeld ([08:42](#)):

What would you say is lost when indigenous stories are told through the lens of people from outside of the culture?

Jacob Pratt ([08:48](#)):

Well, I'm not saying that all stories that are told by non-indigenous people are bad. I've never said that and I would never say that, but sometimes best intentions are only best intentions. Sometimes things are missed. If I went and told a Mongolian story, I'm an outsider and I might have the best intentions, but if I'm telling a Mongolian story, I have a very limited understanding of that culture. I can try and do all my research and do my best, but unless somebody is with me that is Mongolian telling that story with me, then it's never going to be truly authentic.

Leora Kornfeld ([09:29](#)):

Having been in Los Angeles for a few years now, can you recount how you got the deal with Disney? Here you are, you show up there, you did your masters at USC, you had this vision that is like, "I'm going to go up there and I'm going to change things." Then you got the deal with Disney within a few months of starting the company. Can you just explain how that happened?

Jacob Pratt ([09:48](#)):

Yeah, sure. So I actually got the deal with Disney after I was actually not even completely done starting my company. I was in the startup process. Once they offered me a deal, I was really quick to get everything done as fast as possible because there's certain things that a business has to have to be a business. So I would get all that done to submit. We needed a tax number and all these kinds of things, but getting that deal started two, two and a half years ago actually, I actually interned with Disney while I was doing my master's degree and that's where I guess I started working towards it because I started trying to make the proper connections and start networking with the right kind of people that I know I wanted to stay connected with over the years.

Jacob Pratt ([10:46](#)):

Then at the same time, I was also trying to produce work that demonstrated my abilities. So things like on APTN right now I have a series, well I have multiple series. So I host a TV show and I'm a voice actor for animated character on APTN, but I also just recently in July had a mini series that I produced and directed start airing on APTM, Lumi. that specifically was a business card saying here's what I could do

with \$30,000. Hire me for something bigger and showing, "Hey, I just finished this. You want to take a look?" Making sure I maintain those connections and that those people knew about the content that I was creating. So when Disney recently in September was starting to develop some concepts for November, which down here in the United States is Native American heritage month, they wanted to feature indigenous people in some kind of way, specifically indigenous youth on the Disney Channel.

Jacob Pratt ([11:57](#)):

They knew that they needed an indigenous production company to start producing that content. In the meetings while Disney is thinking about, well, we need to try and find somebody who can connect us with people or produce this for us, two primary names came up. There was myself and my close, close friend named Timothy, both came up in two different meetings. When they contacted us, they found out that if they hire me, I'm hiring him. If they hire him, he's going to hire me. Together, me and him are running a company called Skoden Entertainment. It just became, we were the top recommendations because I was strategically networking and producing content. So it was years and years of development to finally be the top recommendation by Disney professionals to start producing content for them.

Leora Kornfeld ([12:57](#)):

I'm glad to hear that honest answer, because I think a lot of people seize the story. There was a CBC story, Saskatchewan man working on project for Disney, stuff like that. They think, "Oh, overnight success." As is always the case, it's never an overnight success, right? As you say, it took years and years and years.

Jacob Pratt ([13:16](#)):

Yes, exactly. Anything great takes a lot of hard work. Right? My story is not an overnight success. I'm not immediately a leading producer within the industry. I'm still very, very new and very, very small within the industry. Even my small successes are not something that happened overnight. It's taken a lot of hard work and a lot of strategic moves to get to this point. So it's not just something that just happens. You got to prove yourself. You got to pay your dues just to get these small successes. So anybody out there, you need to understand you got to work harder and better than the next person to be the one that when they need something, they're like, "Okay, I know who to go to for this."

Jacob Pratt ([14:13](#)):

It's not just going to happen. You have to work your butt off for it. My business has kept me really, really busy lately because we finished production on Disney and took off on another project. I'm in pre-production and going into production on another project. Another thing that we're just on the verge of launching is we have Skoden Entertainment, which is of course my company. It's a for-profit company, but we're also within the month going to be launching Skoden Foundation, which is our nonprofit end. We're going to be able to impact the community more directly with it and get grant money to start developing programs. Our goal is to start creating youth programs so that we can start developing more talent within the entertainment industry.

Leora Kornfeld ([15:08](#)):

The plan is to do this from the base in Los Angeles?

Jacob Pratt ([15:11](#)):

As indigenous people, like my tribe exists on both sides of the border. So I want our programs to be accessible to indigenous people in Canada and the US and maybe even indigenous people from other parts of the world to just support indigenous people in general.

Leora Kornfeld ([15:30](#)):

I'm in Toronto where we get a lot of snow. So if you miss the snow and you need somebody to send you a box of snow at some point this winter, you know where to come. You just hit me up.

Jacob Pratt ([15:40](#)):

For sure. I would love to see some snow right now, especially getting to the holidays.

Leora Kornfeld ([15:46](#)):

Okay. Thanks a lot, Jacob.

Jacob Pratt ([15:48](#)):

No problem. Thank you very much. I appreciate the interview and having an opportunity to talk.

Leora Kornfeld ([15:56](#)):

That would be it for this episode of Now and Next, thanks to today's guest, Jacob Pratt. Remember you can find a transcript of this episode along with show notes and links related to some of the things I talked about with Jacob on the CMF Trends website. Specifically you'll find a link with more information about the show Jacob recently completed for Disney. Also remember you can give us some ratings love on your podcast app by rating or reviewing the show, which goes a long way in helping people find out about it. So thank you for that. In the meantime, thanks for listening. I'm Leora Kornfeld and I'll see you next time for another episode of Now and Next.