

Science alumni in the world

No limits to innovator's Not Impossible career



Elliot Kotek

Course graduated from: BSc majoring in pharmacology and toxicology, LLB

Year of graduation: 1995

Job: Co-founder and Content Chief Not Impossible, and Editor-in-Chief Beyond Cinema Magazine.

Career: Writing, interviewing, innovating.

Reflection: "Science," to me? Well, it's been elemental. Especially flowchart representations. I've lived life along the arrows that read "If YES, then..."

"You help one, you help many, and if you tell these stories in a relatable and inspiring way you reach a lot of people."

It was a chance meeting that led Elliot Kotek to co-found Not Impossible Labs, a revolutionary website showcasing DIY technological solutions to health-care problems that's attracting attention globally.

Kotek was at a conference in Montreal when he met up again with Mick Ebeling, the man behind the EyeWriter, a celebrated device that allowed a young graffiti artist who'd become paralysed or "locked in" to create again using eye tracking and laser beams.

California dreaming

Kotek and Ebeling, who both live in Venice Beach, California, struck on the idea of crowd-sourcing to crowd solve previously insurmountable healthcare issues by developing and publicising low-cost DIY ideas and posting them on a website with instructions, free for anyone to follow. They believe in providing solutions on an open-source platform in order to change lives around the globe.

Not Impossible LLC was formed in mid-2013 with "Technology for the sake of humanity" as the organisation's motto.

It is now nurturing projects including: the BrainWriter,

which will allow completely paralysed people to communicate using EEG brainwave patterns; a 3D-printed prosthetic hand; mouth mouse; and laser cane.

Not Impossible sent a team to Sudan to provide communities with 3-D printers and the necessary training to produce prosthetic limbs for children.

"One of the kids fed himself for the first time in two years – it just melts you to see something like that," says Kotek.

The Not Impossible revolution

The idea behind Not Impossible – which is part of the DIY or "maker movement" – is catching on. Kotek is now hearing from people about technological devices they've created for their loved ones. An engineer, for example, built a "power chair" for his son, born with disabilities, so he could play video games like other children.

"You help one, you help many, and if you tell these stories in a relatable and inspiring way you reach a lot of people who can make the implements themselves and help people who previously would not have had help," says Kotek.

Kotek's career path since studying science at Monash in the early 90s has been almost as unconventional as his current preoccupation.

From here to creativity

He graduated with a double degree in science (pharmacology and toxicology) and law in 1995, practised biotech law (mergers and acquisitions) in Australia and the US and moved to New York in 2000, where he enrolled at the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute while still working as an attorney. After the 9/11 attacks in the US, he changed direction, turning full-time to more creative pursuits.

He studied at theatre school, won NYU/Tisch's Craft Award for Acting, picked up screenwriting at the University of California and began freelance writing.

Kotek, who is married to an American (Liz), has a one-year-old son named Sam. He is also writing a screenplay "with a social message regarding homelessness". He'd like to return to Australia at some stage, perhaps to start an office of Not Impossible.

Tell us your story and get involved

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