

Survivor, Steers and the Supply Chain

Reality TV is impossible without a Supply Chain

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#1 Island Living

Last year I lived on a few different islands in the Philippines for 30 days.

I woke up when the sun rose and went to sleep when it set – I had no concept of time, no idea of what was happening back home with politics, with the economyin fact – I didn't even now if my family and friends were OK.

I was pretty dirty – only washing in the ocean with no toothpaste, no soap ...and NO toilet paper. NO pillows, no blankets – no real food...basically – no comforts to speak of.

My tribe mates and I fished for our dinner – and maybe ate a handful of rice here and then when we were lucky

Every now and then I competed in physically draining activities which would win me a slice of pizza if I were lucky – or immunity to keep me safe and allow me to continue living like a homeless person on an island.

#2 Thank you Supply Chain?

And the only way I was able to live this life of NO luxuries and NO connectivity...was thanks to an amazing and effective Supply Chain.

That's kind of an odd thing to say...I realise...Hey...thanks to a supply chain ...I lived on an island...with NOTHING!

#3 Effective logistics

But...lets face it...I didn't exactly just APPEAR on a deserted island in the middle of Palawan! Just like toothpaste doesn't simply APPEAR in the store....I was a commodity so to speak....on a reality show. And thanks to that reality shows incredible logistics – I – with many others –got to play the amazing game of SURVIVOR.

#4 What is Survivor?

For those of you who don't know. Survivor is a reality show that Started in the states in 2000 where they have now just finished filming their 39th season!

The concept has now been adapted by other countries making it an international phenomenon of reality shows!

It is a show that has stood the test of time and continues to have that "it" quality that keeps attracting viewers year after year.

#5 What is Survivor cont....

The show features a group of contestants who are marooned in an isolated location, where they must provide food, water, fire, and shelter for themselves.

These contestants compete in challenges for rewards and immunity from elimination.

The contestants are progressively eliminated from the game as they are voted out by their fellow contestants until only one remains and is awarded the grand prize and is named the "Sole Survivor."

#6 Ratings

And of course – everyone credits the shows good ratings and longevity to the likes of good marketing, great concepts, a good host, amazing characters, good editing etcbut....at the end of the day – this shows longevity and success could NEVER have been made possible without the backbone of an amazing and extensive logistics system.

#7 Logistics

People don't just appear on islands, cameras don't just fall out of the sky, props dont just materialise from coconut trees;....

I think it's safe to say that this show thrives and survives thanks to the logistics behind it all.

#8 Confidential information

The behind the scenes work of Survivor is quite a confidential process – crew and castaways all sign non disclosures to ensure that no trade secrets are leaked – so today I will share with you what I am privy to and allowed to share and some information that is not often commonly known.

Being someone who has been involved in the supply chain field for 15 year I can honestly say there were times I just stood back and was amazed by the logistics of it all while I was out there starving.

It really does open a persons mind to the importance of the supply chain in making a reality show such as survivor

#9 Location decisions

It all starts of course with location decisions. The producers fly to different island locations and scope out the area.

Season 6 was filmed in Philippines due to the current infrastructure and knowledge of the locals there who had worked on the US version at that location some years ago. And of course – the financial viability of the location made it appealing to. It was a cheaper option for flights, hotel accommodation, currency conversion etc.

The Filipino crew who worked with Survivor South Africa producers know the area very well, knows what can work and made the logistical side of the show relatively stress-free.

This – combined with the company that facilitated the production crew with handling shipping and deliveries really helped production go more smoothly.

#10 Water water water

Now – the thing about the Philippines is that there are loads of islands and the show was filmed on various islands which were generally all quite distance apart. Not only the islands that the different tribes lived on, but also the various islands where challenges took place.

This meant the only way you could get from one place to another was by boat!

For the filming of Survivor Season 6 a fleet of 8 speedboats and 2 bunker boats for equipment and materials were used. They calculated that they used 720 litres of fuel DAILY!

#11 Crew

Survivor Season 6 used about 120 South African crew and 160 Filipino crew to make the show come alive, this crew consisted not only of producers and directors but of:

Camera men and audio crew, a medical team who are on hand 24 hours a day, catering crew (for the crew...not us poor survivors). A marine department – consisting of skippers of boats, safety swimmers, lifeguards.

There was an art department to build tribal council and challenges and a challenge department who work with the art department designing and test running all challenges.

On the reality beaches (this is where we lived and they were filming us) - at any given time there would be about 5 teams following the castaways. This team consisted of 1 x cameraman, 1 x audio operator and 1 x content producer. At night though there was only 1 cameras man doing all the work.

#12 Crew

Format and a production of this nature goes hand in hand with a massive logistical plan. The crew were flown in various batches – production and art team arrived months before

Some of the crew had to fly with the contestants to endure there was absolute privacy and none of the castaways would meet on planes or airports etc. The only time we were EVER to meet one another was on the island – when the game began and the cameras were rolling.

The statistics shared are that there were in total

426 flights booked

61 rooms booked

600 cups of coffee a day

#13 Gear

Now of course – all the crew need gear! Most of cameras used were flown in from South Africa (mainly Cape Town and Johannesburg) to manila. From manila they are put into a container on a boat and shipped to el Nido – since the planes to the island are too small. From el Nido they are taken to the crew by car or speed boat.

#14 Gear cont...

All audio gear however was airfreighted in from the states.

The biggest challenge with this was that the gear had to arrive over Christmas and New Year's – and we all know how tricky that time of the year is in the world of logistics!

The planning that goes into making sure all logistics go hand in hand with the production schedule already plotted out is quite remarkable

#15 Tribal Council

When it comes to building the 'sets' on the different islands such as challenge sets or the rewards:

On average the actual construction on the challenge location took between two and three days, but the building of some of the set pieces happened weeks before on the main land, and from there it was transported to the challenge location and installed for the shoot day.

The biggest build was that of TRIBAL COUNCIL which took a little more than a month to complete.

For the sixth season of Survivor South Africa the production wanted to do something they've never done before – build the tribal council area on the water.

#16 Tribal Council cont....

Building this over water meant that raw materials had to be brought in by boat and the construction team had to work odd hours to work in low tide. Material was thus brought back and forth during this build.

There are no hardware stores 'down the road' so planning for these builds had to be meticulous so as to not delay the build which was already on a tight schedule.

Added to that – the location was hit by a number of cyclones and the extreme weather conditions delayed the process as it was considered too dangerous to work in these conditions at times.

It took the production a month to complete the build and to create the set pieces with a team of 30 people.

Material brought in for the build included things like:

1365 pieces of wood

200 pieces of bamboo

100 pieces of plywood

800m rope

150 pieces of polystyrene to make the tigers and dragons

#17 Balancing Act

A challenge such as this one also looks simple enough:

This particular challenge was filmed in a very popular tourist destination. The lagoon had to be closed off from tourists while productions brought in crew and material early to build and prepare the set for the challenge aiming for it to go as quickly and smoothly as possible.

They then had to move people and materials out again – without the tourists seeing us – as filming is a very confidential process – and the lagoon could then be re-opened for tourists.

Time here – is of the essence as promises are made to the Filipino authority that filming will not disrupt their tourist trade.

#18 Sticks

Video of Production designer VAL speaking about building the challenge "STICKS"

VAL says:

"I'm standing on the set of a game we call 'Sticks'. Generally an obstacle course like his can take about 10 people, we build for about 5 days.

Design happens back in South Africa where we make sure all the technical drawings are done. That's about a month overall for all the different game to be prepared. We order all the materials. Some pieces come from South Africa. Some come from the region we use –as there is a lot of bamboo here. We incorporate everything that is local as much as we can into the games. Then we come onto the game ourselves. We play the games ourselves. We check the timing to make sure everything I do-able and then we bring in the crew.

We get to play for a living!

What I really like about reality TV is that in this medium it's as close as we can ever come to LIVE – we are not working with actors – we can't ask them to fall again, or cry again – we have to capture the moments as they happen!"

19 FOOD!

Everyone always asks – 'Is it REAL?'. And I can honestly say – it is more real and more difficult than I ever expected it to be. I personally went without food for 4 days!

On my fifth day of no food – we had got to the final 10 players – which meant the tribes merged and became one. And for a merge celebration Steers flew in to feed us!

Their product manager Chef Mbaku Mothlanke flew into the Philippines and created a feast for us EXACTLY to Steers recipe specifications but also using locally sourced products.

Steers even shipped in their ice cream machine for us!

20 Steers

Everything in reality TV is reliant on timing and planning –All the puzzle pieces need to be at the right places at the right time. Having Steers come feed us on a specific day at a specific time was all planned months in advance.

The island chosen for the Steers feast was a remote cove only accessible by speedboats – so the journeys were planned specifically. 3 tribes on different islands to be coordinated accurately –as well as all the crew and steers being set up ion time.

And yet – on the day that they needed to go set up the feast – the coast guards called all boats off the water as the weather was too bad – a mini cyclone had hit. This threw a huge spanner in the works for everyone – meat was prepped, ice cream machines on boats ready to go. Hungry contestants waiting on islands!

Fortunately this only lasted a few hours – and filming was delayed by a few hours – which also meant our meals were cut short – but...we got to take TAKEWAYS! So we were happy.

#21 SSS

To film a show such as survivor involves converting raw materials into beautiful sets and challenges, it means transporting equipment, moving people globally and locally. The logistics starts months before filming starts and only ends months after the show wraps up and the supply chain strategy that goes with Survivor, and getting a South African food brand like Steers to a remote island to feed some hungry strangers is fascinating.

#22 After the filming

Clearing up after every challenge – and in fact – after the show has wrapped up – is another important aspect of the show.

Survivor central states that all Survivor shoots across the world are required to have ZERO impact on the location and environment where they are filming.

A clean-up crew ensures that the islands are left the way they are found. Some pieces of challenges and most of the tribal council set – were sent back to South Africa, some are stored on location.

But ALL shelters are removed from the islands and the uninhabited islands in the Philippines – that I called home for over a month – looks as though I was never there at all.

SPEAKER/S PROFILE/S + PHOTOGRAPH

#Body copy#

Contact details

Email address #
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References

Footnotes