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Colin Kroll, 34, HQ Trivia and Vine Co-Founder, Is Found Dead

By **Luis Ferré-Sadurní** and **Sapna Maheshwari**

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Colin Kroll, the co-founder and chief executive of the popular app HQ Trivia, was found dead on Sunday, apparently of a drug overdose, at his home in Lower Manhattan. He was 34.

The police said they found his body facedown on his bed after a woman called 911 and asked the police to check on him in his SoHo apartment, on Spring Street. The woman's relationship to Mr. Kroll was unclear, but the police said she had grown worried about his well-being. The police said they found what appeared to be cocaine and heroin in the apartment.

The medical examiner was to determine the cause of death, the police said.

Before creating HQ Trivia, which live-streams 15-minute trivia shows typically twice a day to tens of thousands of mobile users, Mr. Kroll was among those who founded the six-second video app Vine, which was sold to Twitter in 2012 and closed last year.

Mr. Kroll was a fan of e-sports and live-streaming gaming platforms like Twitch, which inspired the development of HQ Trivia.

HQ Trivia quickly became a viral sensation when it debuted in August 2017, drawing hordes for a live-streaming, interactive game, and it inspired a range of copycat apps.

The app, which is based in New York, has experienced a drop-off in audience, but it continues to attract thousands of people to play in hopes of winning money by answering a dozen trivia questions on their phones.

The show is typically hosted by an energetic comedian who cracks jokes as he or she asks multiple-choice questions of increasing difficulty. Players use their touch screens to respond in less than 10 seconds, and the app shows how many people are eliminated after each round.

Mr. Kroll founded HQ Trivia with Rus Yusupov, who was also a founder of Vine. The two men had been working together since then, with a special interest in video apps on smartphones.

“I will forever remember him for his kind soul and big heart,” Mr. Yusupov wrote on Twitter.

Mr. Kroll said in an interview with The New York Times last year that the company preferred to be based in New York, rather than San Francisco, because “our inspiration is more from media and TV than it is from technology.”



Mr. Kroll, right, and his business partner, Rus Yusupov, left, accepting a Variety Breakthrough of the Year Award in emerging technology in Las Vegas in 2014. With them was the rapper Lil Jon. Jeff Bottari/Getty Images for Variety

Mr. Kroll previously worked as an engineering manager for Yahoo from 2007 to 2009 and as the chief technology officer at Jetsetter from 2009 to 2013.

Mr. Kroll went on to work briefly for Twitter, and later acknowledged being fired for “poor management” amid allegations of inappropriate workplace behavior toward women.

This year, when HQ Trivia raised \$15 million in venture capital funding, Recode reported that some investors decided not to participate because of Mr. Kroll’s workplace history at Twitter. Mr. Kroll denied that he had ever sexually harassed employees.

“It was a painful experience, but an eye-opening one that served as a catalyst for professional development and greater awareness in the office,” he told Axios in a statement. “I now realize that there are things I said and did that made some feel unappreciated or uncomfortable. I apologize to those people. Today, I’m committed to building HQ Trivia into a culture-defining product and supporting the dedicated team that makes it all possible.”

His father, Alan Kroll, said in a telephone interview that the Recode article had troubled and hurt his son, whom he described as a “tough boss” and a hard worker who routinely worked 100 hours a week.

“He had this hard Midwest drive about him,” said the elder Mr. Kroll, who lives in a Detroit suburb, where he raised his three sons. “He couldn’t understand people that couldn’t keep up. I tried to explain to him that not everyone could do that.”

The elder Mr. Kroll said his son had recently stopped drinking and did not have a drug problem, although he was aware that his son took drugs recreationally.

“He worked too many hours and too hard,” he said. “I think New York City got to him a little bit.” He added: “All of that leads to getting too much drugs or bad drugs and overdosing.”

Mr. Kroll was scheduled to visit his father in Michigan next week for a 10-day Christmas vacation, and the two had talked about his moving away from New York.

He said his son had “accomplished so much at such a young age.”

“It truly is a waste,” he said. “At 34, imagine the things he’d done and the skills he had. It would have been really fun to watch him at 50.”

Follow Luis Ferré-Sadurní and Sapna Maheshwari on Twitter: @luisferre and @sapna

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