

PRODUCING RESULTS

Digital Studio met up with Zakir Hussain, founder of Icon Art Production, to find out more about the company's role supporting the region's film production industry.

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Zakir Hussain



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▲ IAP's staff has an intimate understanding of the latest technology.

KIT BAG

Icon Art Production (IAP) invested about AED10 million in 2013 to upgrade its equipment. Among the cameras that the company has recently invested in are: Arriflex Extreme 435, Arri Alexa XT Plus, Arri Alex Plus, Red Epic M, SI2K Silicon Imaging, and Sony PMW F3. IAP has also invested in other equipment including lighting kit such as Arri Studio T24 and Arri True Blue T5. The company has a range of equipment suitable for most projects and plans to continue expanding its collection.

The final leg of the drive to Icon Art Production's (IAP) base in Al Quoz, a dusty industrial area of Dubai, feels a million miles away from the glamour usually associated with the world of film making. But once inside IAP's hub, it is clear to see why the company is making a name for itself in the Middle East's film production industry.

IAP, which was founded by its director Zakir Hussain in 2010, now owns an impressive list of film making equipment, from the latest 2K digital cinema standard cameras, to specialist dollies and lights.

The company, which describes itself as a film and TV production house, invested AED10 million (US\$2.7m) in 2013 to upgrade its equipment following an increase in demand for projects including local and

international feature films, short films, TV programmes, music videos, TV commercials and event productions in the UAE.

The company invested in equipment last year to support up to seven feature films, 30 TV commercials, 10 music video and several corporate films.

When Digital Studio caught up with Hussain at the company's base last month, he said that 2014 was shaping up to be the firm's busiest year yet.

While the IAP works on all types of films, Zakir says the company's main focus is Indian cinema. "We have a lot of Bollywood and regional movies coming from India. Last year we did almost 13 movies. This year we are expecting at least 20-plus. Some productions could just be for a song, although we have a few movies that want to

do a full production in Dubai."

Hussain says that the volume of work is definitely growing, in part due to Dubai's rising stature as a location for film production. "A lot of movies and big brand companies are coming to Dubai and the industry is watching. Dubai is already known for events, every week or second week there is an international artist from India or Europe or Hollywood coming here and performing. But movie making is a specialised business so people are becoming aware that they can do the whole movie here. Before they thought they could only do songs, so now the trend and the thinking is changing and they want to do the whole movie here.

"It is a very good positive sign for the industry. When production comes for 30



▲ Lights for all types of production.

days to 90 days it brings revenue to the industry," he adds.

IAP recently worked on three films including Bollywood production Welcome Back in December. IAP provided all the equipment and local crew to support the lights, transportation and technical part in Dubai. It also recently worked on a Pakistani movie called Sultanate and an Emirati movie in India.

IAP has worked on some famous projects in its relatively short history, including Heartless, a Bollywood film directed by Shekhar Suman that was released last month. "It's a Bollywood movie, a very interesting family drama which shot for about 30 days in Dubai. Four or five songs were shot in Dubai and it looks beautiful," Hussain says.

One of the films IAP worked on in 2013 was Zaalim Dilli. The film was mainly shot in India but some parts were shot in Dubai, and IAP worked on two songs.

The company was also working on three films in February when Digital Studio met Hussain, who says he can reveal more about the films when they are finished.

While Hussain is clearly excited about the growing volume of films and documentaries being shots in the UAE with IAP's involvement, the bread and butter for the company remains commercial work. "We do a lot of medium and small commercials. We are always working with some production. Most of our work is commercial because there are a lot of local production houses who work with us.

"They take their equipment from us for the TV commercials, and some short films and documentaries. We are available to every individual who comes, we are not restricted to anybody, we try our best to support every production we can. It is about working together."

Indeed, Hussain lauds the amount of collaboration between production companies in the UAE's film industry. While IAP does not own its own studios, it works closely with companies that do and in this way can offer a service that goes far beyond simply renting out equipment.

"The most important thing is to see that

► One of the team: Hussain is quick to recognise the skills of his team.



"THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO SEE THAT IN DUBAI THERE ARE A LOT OF COMPANIES WHO CAN HANDLE PRODUCTION. THERE IS ALSO DUBAI FILM COMMISSION TO SUPPORT GOOD PROJECTS WHICH WORK."

DIRECTOR'S CUT

Zakir Hussain may be busy running a business at present, but he also aims to spend more time writing and directing. He is particularly keen to work on documentaries that show local heroes in Dubai – people who are working to make a difference in their own communities. "I want to be in the film industry, working, living and growing, this is something I love. If you're a business person you think about money first, if you're a creative person you think about passion first," he says.



in Dubai there are a lot of companies who can handle production. There is also Dubai Film Commission to support good projects which work within the cultural guidelines of the country. They are really supportive and they want foreign producers to come in and do productions here.

"What we want to tell the community is that guys, whether you want to do action movie or drama, thriller, we can work with your budgets, we are open for dialogue to understand your production requirements. What we have we can facilitate, what we don't have we can arrange for you as we have the entire industry around us," Zakir says.

Furthermore, there is also an advisory

aspect to what IAP does. The company has about 20 staff who understand the specialised equipment and how to use it. The company also has several years of experience with making films in the Middle East, which means it also understands the cultural nuances and how this effects film production. "If I understand the story and the production, what the client wants to do, I can right away say whether it is applicable in Dubai or not," Hussain says. "We understand the local culture so we know what to recommend to guide international or local productions.

"We have to educate people that Dubai has this technical expertise and facilities for film production or movies." ◉