

tal-based film production and distribution company, Zakir Hussain is on a mission to ensure all aspiring filmmakers in the UAE have the help they need, writes Chris Newbould

Zakir Hussain hasn't exactly taken the traditional route into the world of filmmaking. The predictable path would have been to attend a film school and an apprenticeship touring short films and the global festival circuit – not for him.

In fact, Hussain, who moved to Dubai when he was 17 from his hometown of Mumbai, India, began his career in the glamorous aluminium industry, where he worked for three years, working his way up to upper management level in the process.

With a background in IT from college, in 2000 he jumped over to the technology industry and in 2003 started his own company, which he still runs.

As the web became an increasingly important part of day-to-day life, Hussain found himself catering more and more time to designing and building websites, which is where he first encountered the world of film production through clients who demanded content such as event coverage interviews and testimonials for their sites.

As he more slowly started making his own content, the more he liked making movies. "I've always been a movie fan and most of my friends are in the entertainment industry, so I'd always been connected to the industry without even realising it."

When he started editing, just simple editing for corporate films and eventually went to the Manhattan Film Academy, the first international film academy to open here, and my real venture started from there."

and it has been quite an adventure.



Zakir Hussain says his goal is to contribute to the growth of the UAE film industry. Lee Hoogland / The National

Icon Art Production, was launched in 2008 mainly to make corporate films and shoot events, as well as make Hussain's own films when time allowed. Since then, though, it has grown into one of Dubai's leading rental and production houses and is the go-to company for supplying equipment and crew to some of the leading Bollywood productions that film in the UAE – it has played a key role on 14 Bollywood shoots over the past couple of years, including *Happy New Year* and *Welcome Back*.

Having spent years learning his trade and the differences between filming corporate films, documentaries, movies and so on – and by his own admission making some costly mistakes in the process – Hussain is notable for his desire to ensure that other people don't make the same mistakes he made.

"I learnt in the field because there was nobody here to guide me," he says. "Now we lead the industry and direct the industry and I want

to help the industry. I want to take whatever I have learnt and make things easier for everybody."

With this in mind, Hussain has made training another key part of Icon's services to the local community. In the past, the business has offered free training courses on Icon's wide range of the latest cameras, but Hussain has now refocused these efforts on establishing a training institute, with token payments for courses, as he felt the free approach was counterproductive.

"We ran the free courses and people came in and learnt how to use the cameras, but then I didn't really see anyone go on to use them in the field," he says. "I think when people get something free, they almost don't really value it, so we've rethought that."

Hussain also runs an organisation called Universal Film Makers through Icon, which asks aspiring moviemakers to submit script ideas and Icon then supplies free crew and equipment to help the

successful applicants make their movie.

"I think this industry should have the same spirit as sports," he says. "We're a big family of filmmakers and it's not all about competition. Of course, if I win I'm happy, but if my friends win I'm happy for them, too, and I want to help them to win, because ultimately the whole industry wins."

"We have a lot of equipment and there are people out there with very good content but no equipment. We don't use our equipment 365 days a year, so we can probably support maybe five short films or documentaries. I meet thousands of people and they all have stories they can share, but the costs are prohibitive, so I want to help with that."

"If I meet a filmmaker with a great story, but they're making it on a cheap camera, I'll give them a better camera. We've built up a great network like that and we're watching the industry slowly grow. "All I ask in return is that if you

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Zakir Hussain
founder of Icon Art Production

want to use my lights and use my cameras and use my knowledge, you have to be serious. If we can help the community, we won't hesitate."

"From the day I started this business, my goal has been not just to grow the business, but the whole community. The people we support simply have to deserve it."

Hussain seems to be a budding Dubai film philanthropist of the highest order and with his rental and production-house businesses now rolling along nicely, he is hoping to get back to making his own films, which have taken a back seat while he built his empire.

● Find out more about Icon, training opportunities and the Universal Film Makers project at www.iconartproduction.com

● Trendsetters is Arts&Life's eight-part summer series profiling UAE innovators excelling in their fields

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The Spider-Man star James Franco will be presented with the Jaeger-LeCoultre Glory to the Filmmaker Prize at the 71st Venice International Film Festival that begins on August 27. **The award is given to 'a personality who has made an original contribution to innovation in contemporary cinema'.** The Sound and the Fury, a film Franco wrote, directed and stars in, will premiere at the festival

*** trendsetters**

Silver screen's Good Samaritan

Not content with the success of his Dubai-based film production and rental company, Zakir Hussain is on a mission to ensure all serious filmmakers in the UAE have the help they need, writes Chris Newbould

Zakir Hussain hasn't exactly taken a traditional route into the world of filmmaking. The predictable tale of a teenage dream, a stint at a well-known film school and an apprenticeship touring short films around the global festival circuit were not for him.

In fact, Hussain, who moved to Dubai when he was 17 from his native India, began his career in the far-from-glamorous aluminium industry, where he worked for three years, working his way up to upper-



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