

digital studio

TV & FILM PRODUCTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

TECHNOLOGY

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CASE STUDY

Universal Film Makers ends equipment headaches

PRODUCTION

On location in the Hindu Kush with RMSI and its camera crew



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IN THE UNION

The Arab Producers' Union's
Mustafa Salamat in his own words



TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

"Bridging talent and making films" – so goes the motto of Universal Film Makers. But doing it for free? With no commercial agenda? This we had to hear more about.



There are many funds, grants and programmes in place to help the region's budding film makers realise their dreams. As a rule, if not purely commercial concerns, they tend to be quasi-governmental funds managed by film commissions or cultural bodies. So when we heard about a programme launching in Dubai that supplies equipment, studio time and advice to film makers for free, with no greater motivation than the generosity of the founder, we were intrigued to say the least.

Universal Film Makers (UFM) "supports by offering state-of-the-art cameras and artistic supervision without any rental charges to the filmmakers in UAE. All the people involved in this non-profit initiative will contribute time and expertise without any charge to enhance Dubai's position as a rising regional and international film making hub."

It sounds great, but recalling the maxim "it sounds too good to be true, it probably is", we caught up with founder Zakir Hussain to try and spot the catch. It seems there may not be one: "I was recently a speaker at a media summit in Media One," he says. "I was the only one there who spoke about content – I want to open up doors for people not just look at the commercial side. There's more to life than celebrity film makers, stars and making money, and I want to bring the real heroes out and give something back to the community."

It's a noble intention, but surely this can't all be from the kindness of his heart? "It's a passion," he counters. "I have my own successful production company, and I know how many days our equipment is in use. When it's not being used, I'd rather it served humanity and made a difference in someone's life. I recently ran some free camera workshops and people

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Our prime objective is that in one year we will make four short films and four documentaries, all on a non-profit basis.

said: it changed their lives, and that's what I like."

Perhaps this all about garnering publicity for Hussain's production company? Not so, he insists: "We have partners, and Icon Arts Production is one of them," he explains. "But we're clear with our partners that there should be no business agenda. Gaining awareness and recognition is fine, but this is not a money-making exercise. We have Icon, Zaptech Solutions and Mile Studios, a great post-production house, on board, and we're also seeking affiliation with cultural agencies and so on."

So what can film makers can expect from UFM? "Currently we're just offering equipment," says Hussain. "If we use our people too, it becomes our style, and we want people to utilise our facilities to make their own product. We offer help with obtaining approvals from Dubai Studio City, costumes, make-up and so on."

"There's an online application process for writers and directors on the UFM website. We're not inviting scripts as we simply don't have the time to read through them all, so we ask applicants to fill in basic information - work experience, hobbies, then what they want to

apply for, why they deserve it, a short summary of the project, do they have crew, copyright on the script and the like."

"We also have some producers lined up who may be interested, so in future we may also be bringing the right project together with funding, but that's for the future."

Although Hussain describes the offer as 'just' equipment, the list is pretty impressive - top of the range hardware, plus post production, graphics and editing through Icon or UFM's other partners, and he is clear on his aims with the project: "Our prime objective is that in one year we will make four short films and four documentaries, all on a non-profit basis."

"We're also building a database of cast and crew who are willing to volunteer with us, and we'll have experts on hand to advise on scripts, the best cameras to use and technical issues. We've built up a comprehensive database of over 340 film festivals around the world - we couldn't believe how many there were when we started researching - so film makers can target a specific area by referring to it. We should have a new product every three months, so we will continually assess and improve, and already we've found a Bangladeshi businessman who is interested in taking the idea to Bangladesh."

If all goes according to plan, says Hussain, his project could represent a massive turning point for the regional, and even global, film making community. He adds: "You can't make a great director, but you can support people with fresh ideas and talent and let them make themselves. It's a small beginning, but I expect it to take a big turn in the future." ■

KIT LIST

Successful applicants to UFM can look forward to using:

CAMERAS

- Canon 5D70
- Sony PMW100
- P+S Technika S12K
- Arri Alexa

LIGHTING

- Arri Fresnel
- Dedo
- Kinoflo interview and gaffer kits

MISCELLANEOUS

- GFM Tracking and Dolly
- Lavaliere mics



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5:00 MINUTES WITH...

Zakir Hussain

Icon Art
Production

What first inspired you to work in the TV and film industry?

I love watching movies & TV programmes - it's my greatest entertainment since my childhood. Every movie I used to watch, I used to have my opinion about characters, directions, music, dance, emotions and drama, comedy, how realistic and unrealistic scenes/shots were. It was always part of me and I didn't know about it.

I loved taking photographs with my father's stills camera from the age of 10 and the first thing I bought with my first salary was an Olympus 100 first fully automatic camera, 17 years back.

As a businessman & creative director I got a chance to discover the passion for working in the industry in 2005, I discovered my passion in the production business and started learning about it, and as I was learning, it was easy for me because I had developed natural instinct about characters and I was learning more on technical aspect and the journey is continuing.

3D – fad or future?

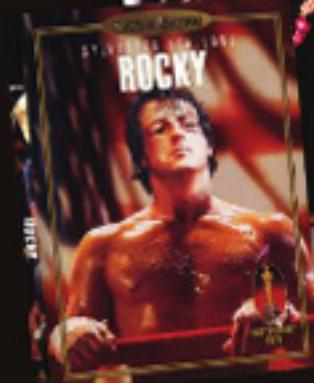
3D is a fashion now. Everyone wants to make 3D Movies & Programs but the question is how many wants to watch everything in 3D? I would love to see Avatar or Jurassic Park in 3D, but not everything.

What one piece of kit could you not live without?

My camera, gym bag with dancing shoes and music and movies.

You're marooned on a desert island. By a lucky twist of fate you had chance to pick up a DVD player and your favourite movie, and a box set of your favourite TV show before you were marooned there. What's on your hastily assembled palm tree shelf, and why?

Friends, the Rocky series & Message – Friends always make me laugh, Rocky inspires me as a sportsman and Message inspires me



has human being & reminds me how powerful my religion is.

There's a lot of talk of serious investment in the regional industry currently, as well as big news like the MI4 shoot coming to Dubai – where do you see the next five years taking us?

I am sure Hollywood, Bollywood and other filmmakers of the world will focus in making films in Dubai, UAE. As we all know Dubai Film Festival always grabs the attention of the world cinema and Studio City is actively involved in supporting film production in Dubai. The more films are made the higher the awareness of the films that is given to the world. It will give opportunity to international film makers to make their films in Dubai and there will be lots of films made in Dubai for sure.

Finally, Digital Studio's readers should use my company because...?

Icon Art Production was developed with a passion to work in the film & TV production industry not just for business but also to make a difference in the community by supporting and inspiring young and fresh talents who need a guidance and support.

We always put on the table what we have and we let the client or individuals decide what is most suitable for them. We are adapting to changes and trends within the industry.

Icon Art Production is an open door to everybody. ■

