

Al Jazeera initiatives

Al Jazeera Arabic joins Freeview

Al Jazeera Arabic became the first non-English language channel to launch its DTT service on the Freeview platform in the UK. Al Jazeera English became a part of the network in November last year in HD and SD.

The Arabic news channel will use an MPEG-4 transport stream but broadcast in SD. The channel is carried on the new digital terrestrial multiplexes awarded to Arqiva in 2013.

It is estimated that by June 2014 approximately 3.2 million Freeview HD households across the UK will have access to Al Jazeera Arabic bringing its total reach in the UK to more than six million households.

Al Jazeera launches digital service in Turkey

Al Jazeera has launched a new Turkish online service ahead of a full television channel launch from Istanbul. The service, known as *Al Jazeera Türk*, will follow its initial digital launch with a TV channel, based in Topkapi, Istanbul.

The new channel will join existing Al Jazeera news services in Arabic, English, and local Balkan languages.

Yaser Bishr, Executive Director, Strategy and Development at Al Jazeera said: "*Al Jazeera Türk* is an important new member to the Al Jazeera Network, serving a key geopolitical market. To launch on digital first continues Al Jazeera's tradition of innovation." Initially the service will be available from the portal aljazeera.com.tr.

Al Jazeera Sport renamed beIN Sports

Al Jazeera Sport was rebranded beIN Sports on Jan 1, 2014. The rebranding indicates that the channel will now be part of beIN Sports, a global network of sports channels, jointly owned and operated by Qatari Sports Investments (an affiliate of Al Jazeera Media Networks). beIN presently operates three channels in France – beIN Sport 1, beIN Sport 2 and beIN Sport MAX – and launched two channels in the United States (English and Spanish) in August 2012. The channel also holds Canadian broadcast rights to several sports properties. beIN Sport holds the broadcast rights to several top European football leagues among others.

ICON ART PRODUCTION INVESTS IN NEW EQUIPMENT

Dubai-based production and rental house, Icon Art Production (IAP), has upgraded its equipment by adding an extensive array of high-end production cameras, dollies, jibs, lights and cranes. The company has invested more than USD 2.7 million on the latest equipment.

The decision to buy new equipment was based on an increase in demand for local and international production of feature films, short films, TV programmes, music videos, TV commercials and live event productions in the UAE, according to Zakir Hussain, CEO of the company.

IAP invested in state-of-the-art kit last year to support seven feature films, 30 TV commercials, 10 music video and several corporate films. Hussain claims that the company was also instrumental in the production of the big-budget Bollywood film *Welcome Back*.

"Presently, we are quite busy with that film. We will also begin work on at least two more big productions from India very soon. In fact, we are expecting to shoot 10 Indian films in 2014, with support from Dubai Film and TV Commission. This will also include an action thriller," he added.



Zakir Hussain, CEO, Icon Art.

According to Hussain, Icon Art Production offers a one-stop shop to cater to the production and post production needs of local as well as foreign producers.

"With more than seven years' experience in the industry, our team understands the requirements of the industry, based on which we design a feasible budget for any type of project to assist directors and producers," explained Hussain.

Three Arab films nominated for Oscars

DIFF opening film and Palestinian thriller *Omar*, directed by Hany Abu Assad, is up for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards this year. The nomination for Assad's *Omar* is the second for a Palestinian film, following the nomination for *Paradise Now* in 2006.

Omar is among the five nominees in the category that includes Belgium's *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, Cambodia's *The Missing Picture*, Denmark's *The Hunt*, and Italy's *The Great Beauty*. The final five were selected from a shortlist of nine films that had been whittled down from 76 submissions.

A tale of love, betrayal and struggle in the Israeli-occupied territories, *Omar* received the Un Certain Regard jury prize at last year's Cannes film festival. The film won Muhr Awards for Best Film and Best Director at the tenth Dubai International Film Festival held in December last year.

Egyptian film *The Square* has been nominated for Best Documentary. Throughout the Best Foreign Film category's 58-year history



The team of *Omar* with Director Hany Abu Assad.

(AMPAS introduced it in 1956), Egypt has never been nominated but holds the record of submitting the most films to the competition without ever getting a nomination.

Directed by Jehane Noujaim, *The Square* won accolades at DIFF 2013, Sundance Film Festival at the Toronto International Film Festival last year.

A third film from the region, *Karama Has No Walls* will be in the running for Best Documentary Short.