

BRACING FOR AN ICONIC FUTURE

In keeping with the rising demand for filming projects in the UAE, Icon Art has revamped its kit and studio facilities as part of a \$4m investment. CEO Zakir Hussain takes us on a tour of the facility and shares his plans

Dubai production and rental house Icon Art Production recently announced a \$4m investment in studio upgrade and broadcast equipment, to cater to the growing demand for international and local projects in the UAE.

When driving into Icon Art's facility at Al Quoz in Dubai, nothing prepares a visitor for what lies behind the doors of the production house. The dust and heat on the outside are a complete contrast to Icon's plush interiors with posters of Hollywood and Bollywood films artfully displayed on the walls. A lounge with a snooker table, a basketball facility and a bookshelf immediately puts visitors at ease.

The new look is part of a \$1m upgrade to Icon Art's 10,000sqft studio facility, which includes refurbished post-production facilities, an infinity wall, a director's lounge, a makeup room, private meeting rooms, a gaming area, sound and video editing suites as well as a state-of-the-art screening room with Dolby Surround Sound.

The facility is designed to handle indoor shoots for TVCs, TV programmes and feature films, with the capacity for everything from conception all the way to screening, says Zakir Hussain, CEO of Icon Art.

"This is one of the most stylish studios in Dubai," he claims. "With this upgrade, we have tried to meet the needs of the kind of clients that work with us. This involves ensuring they can edit, record and screen their movies here as well as hold private discussions with their customers or relax between shoots."

The upgrade includes one of Hussain's passion projects – a sound studio. "My new sound studio has an S6 console with Pro Tools, which I bought from local distributor MediaCast."

The additional equipment required to kit out the studio will entail another big investment, says Hussain.

"The console is just the basic unit. To record on multiple

channels, I need four or five musicians. Each module that I want to add to this includes colour grading, soft animation, missions, renders and more. That will involve another round of investment to the tune of \$1m," explains Hussain, adding that it is important to consistently invest in technology and have resources that will attract producers to the region. Next on his agenda is an animation studio and VFX production.

Hussain had very humble beginnings in production. Although an IT professional by qualification, he always dreamed of playing a bigger role in Bollywood. That started in 2008 with a \$1m investment in an SIK2 camera from Silicon Imaging. What began with one camera has now become a full-fledged facility in Al Quoz, not far from this studio, with a vast array of equipment that can easily support a feature film in terms of cameras, lighting, grips and support, rigs and mounts, aerial equipment, special Efx, sound equipment, mixers, recording devices, communication equipment and more.

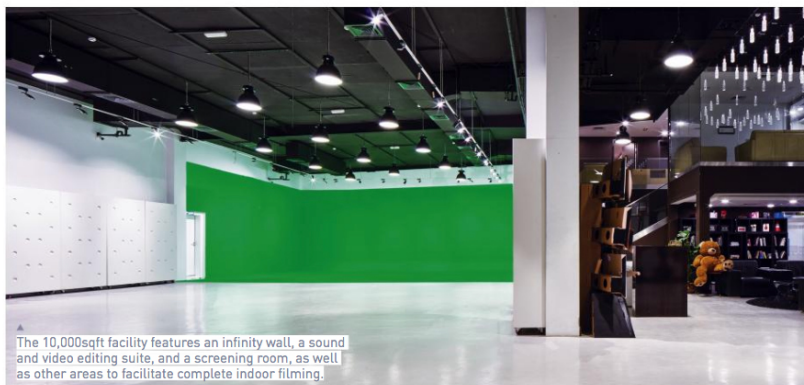
However, Hussain felt it was time to invest in more equipment to cater to a new opportunity, the details of which he is keeping under wraps for now. What we do know is that a big chunk of his current investment will go into lenses. Icon Art will have a whole range of ARRI Master Primes, ARRI Ultra Primes, RED anamorphic lenses and more.

"We are very focused on what we want to do as a production house. As a rental house, our vision is to continue expanding our inventory based on market requirements. When we hear the nature of a project that is coming to Dubai, we try to ensure that we have all the equipment to meet those demands, and that includes keeping up to date with technology," Hussain explains.

Icon Art has supported more than 50 Bollywood feature films and has helped bring several international productions to the country, undertaking a raft of production requirements

Zakir Hussain, CEO of Icon Art Production.





The 10,000sqft facility features an infinity wall, a sound and video editing suite, and a screening room, as well as other areas to facilitate complete indoor filming.

such as script approvals, location scouting and government approvals, filming permits, design, props sourcing and set building, as well as film set services such as script breakdown and shoot scheduling, cost reporting and budget management, negative processing, transfer, editing and grading, sound mixing, post-production and animation.

Attracting foreign film projects was a big driver for Hussain in setting up Icon Art Productions in 2008. He observed that many overseas clients were hesitant to shoot films in the UAE and saw

an opportunity. Icon Art has now supported approximately a thousand international production shoots – TVCs, corporate films, videos, TV programmes, feature films, documentaries and events.

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Although he initially supported independent projects, he soon learned that it was more beneficial to support actual filmmakers, making both commercial and non-commercial movies.

The first film he lent his kit to was *Heartless* in 2013. He explains that the project taught him everything required to build his inventory. It also inspired his career. Although he didn't have an exhaustive inventory list back then, the support he offered with his cinema camera, lenses and accessories helped him win the client over. Over the course of his career, Hussain has learned every aspect of



Icon Art boasts a wide range of equipment for rental purposes and intends to invest in a range of ARRI Master Primes, ARRI Ultra Primes and RED anamorphic lenses in the near future.

the filmmaking process, including budgeting and budget control.

“I've worked as a cameraman, DP, director, producer, assistant and anything that came my way. I ensured I had strong technical knowledge. Whenever a technical requirement came our way, I'd spend hours doing the budgeting for it. This is because I noticed that many projects didn't come to Dubai because the budget set by local vendors and suppliers was too high. I tried to address that challenge.”

With his 15-odd years of production experience, including reading and vetting scripts,

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budgeting for productions and participating in different parts of the filmmaking process, Hussain is gearing up for his biggest job yet.

“I want to produce a film and want to start with Bollywood. We

have four scripts ready, two of which have been approved by the Dubai Film Commission. One is a family drama and one fiction.

“We are still in the initial stages of getting one of these film projects into production.”

The CEO of Icon Art also has his eyes firmly set on a new aspect of the filmmaking business, one he believes will see growing demand in Dubai. Although we get a glimpse of an area of the facility that is still a work in progress, and it's clear that the place is being kitted out for something big, the details remain secret for now. **PRO**



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Some other features of Icon Art's upgraded studio include a gaming area and a director's lounge.