



AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

Branded as a "next-generation global entertainment media studio", **Experience Media Studios** established business in early 2009 at the TwoFour54 media zone.

Poised to play a key role in Abu Dhabi's emerging media industry, EMS CEO **Michael-Ryan Fletchall** talks about his Hollywood background, opportunities and investments for movie and TV programming

In Hollywood, a number of things limit how you can do business – an antiquated studio system, high government regulation, a massive amount of taxation, writers' and actors' strikes.

They are trying to figure out how to monetize the internet, and every step of the way they are being fought by the unions.

The stronghold that Hollywood has on the industry has loosened up and the industry is becoming much more competitive on a global scale. I see the business changing drastically in the next 10 years. What we are

trying to create here in Abu Dhabi is a business that can be ready for the next 20-30-40 years - being on top of how that industry is done. We are going for an across the board digital situation and trying to be in a position where we are globally positioned for rapid distribution of content which we feel is here. And the second part of it is we are looking at situations where we can capitalise on using technology, using the internet, using all the tools that are available today.

What are the difficulties and the advantages of being here?

I'll give you an example: In order to set up business, you have to have a bank account so that you can pay for the licence whenever that gets issued. However you can't set up a bank account without a licence. That was the case at the beginning of the year, but now a lot of issues have been sorted out.

As for the benefits, the government has a really good vision how they are going to use the emerging creative media market to help expand their overall economy. They are putting the tools in place but now, with millions of dollars in equipment sitting here, there needs to be private equity investment in order to get any media done. It is a real tough proposition in an economy like this to say "I want you to invest \$10m dollars into this movie" but you don't know what the return is going to be, or if there is a return – nobody has ever done it before.

On the TV show side, they are putting tracking and measurement systems into place. That's a real big thing if I'm trying to sell a scripted TV show – if someone wants to put their corporate brand on this, they'll want to know how many people are watching this.

So we have been really pushing on the marketing side – teaching not just the industry how it works but also some of the ways that people can profit, some of the benefits besides profitability, and of setting those things up.

If you look at cities like London or Berlin, infrastructure has grown up over hundreds of years so people have the stimulation that creates creativity. Isn't that missing in places such as Abu Dhabi?

I agree. If you look at what people do here for their time off, they are going to malls and to the movies. There is not much in the form of creative groups or creative people getting together yet.

That's what they are still working out, that's the whole point of the media zone - a giant group of people that all bring their specific aspects

into the melting pot of creativity.

However, it is not going to work unless you have communication between the people there, you have to build more of a community than a group where people talk to each other, where there is crossover on certain business aspects and creativity flows amongst all the people.

The next step is giving investment into actual projects so that people can do things - if nobody buys a web site or nobody buys a TV spot or nobody buys a movie or TV show, then it's all for nothing.

You are the boss - what about the rest of your staff?

We have a development team – three people in LA and one person in New York – and we have a couple of advisers that we will probably bring here once we get our production pipeline going, but right now we do everything via conference calls and web conferencing, that's how we've been running and that's how it will continue.

Our core team when it's scaled up to its full capacity, is only 24 people. We realise in order to make our margin we have to be able to compete on the internet, and if I am competing against 'guy gets hit in the head with a bat' on YouTube I have to be the most streamlined company I can possibly be.

What effects of the global downturn do you see in your region?

Everybody is kind of tied together now in some way or fashion. While this region has definitely been affected it has been affected much less than many places. Specifically though the downturn has definitely taken its toll on film financing, it has dried up capital and made people apprehensive to jump into some new never-before-done venture.

That's what is happening in this region. From an entertainment standpoint, when you have a down economy – when people need to get away from their lives - it actually boosts the box office. It's never been better.

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What's your outlook for the next five years?

Regionally and globally, the film and TV business will find its feet in new and different ways by combining some of the technologies on the internet, by still utilizing TV and ad revenue and all those things, people will still go to the movies. I would say that in order for any media company to survive – I'm talking movies, TV, web sites, whatever – they are going to have to engage users and viewers and audiences in a whole new way, create an unforgettable experience for them – that's why we are called Experience Media Studios, by the way.

So maybe the movie theatre looks different, maybe there are some events happening around the movie theatre, all I do know is that you have to create something more than just the media. More interactive, more accessible, with the user giving feedback. Some of the things that are coming out with the social media sites demonstrate that.

Over the next five years I really see the industry here growing, I would not be here if I did not think that. There needs to be some equity investment and some projects and once the capital and credit starts to get rolling again there are going to be definite opportunities here.

Michael-Ryan Fletchall, thank you. ■



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