

Assemblage Entertainment: Daring to Dream or Dreaming to Dare!

ASSEMBLAGE

Assemblage Entertainment is a young entrant into the Indian animation industry, started by the industry veteran A K Madhavan aka Mad Max. The company has been attracting some of the brightest and experienced talents from the space and fairly recently Milind D Shinde, an industry veteran, came on board as the chief operating officer and as a member of the Company's Board.

Milind has over 14 years of experience in the field of animation, across production, project management, operations and strategy planning, new studio set ups, business turnaround strategy, relationship management, business development, ROI accountability and operations. Most of his previous experience is spread across setting up new business and start-up companies and taking it to fruition.

Prior to joining Assemblage, Milind D Shinde was part of the core team of the India unit of DreamWorks Animation USA at Bangalore, and Oriental DreamWorks, part of China unit of DreamWorks Animation, where he has worked on several feature film projects including Oscar nominated feature films.

In a recent tête-à-tête with TheGraphicSlate.com, Milind opens up on his new role, future plans for Assemblage and the challenges that lie ahead of him to make this studio a globally recognised name in the coming days.

Excerpts:-

What are your plans for the company in your new role as COO? How do you plan to achieve them?

Being COO of Assemblage is as challenging as exciting. Challenging because I inherit a floor with about 300 people, buzzing with lots of activity, working on two full-length features along with a few other projects! Exciting for the same reasons in addition to the immense potential I see in this set-up and the heights to which it can go.

As COO, my primary focus is currently to ensure delivery of the projects on the floor and simultaneously build the pipeline and processes required to channel the raw creative talents of the young artists. My experience at DreamWorks comes in handy to understand the larger picture.

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I understand the value of people in building a solid pipeline and am focused to bring the best of talent to ensure each segment of the production workflow is as strong as the other. This limits inefficiencies, builds productive capacity and optimally utilizes the human and technological capital at hand to create world-class products.

And finally, maintaining the ethos of this organisation of nurturing the creative aspirations of its people is what I would continue to do.

What are your views on the current animation industry in the country?

The animation industry in India plays a crucial role in the global context, not only as a growing domestic consumer market with the emergence of local content, but largely as a world-class animation production services provider. The increasing nature and number of partnerships of Indian studios such as ours, with leading international independent production houses is a testament of the sheer dependence on the Indian animation industry.

As a hub for animation and production services, India is playing a major role with its low-cost yet high quality capabilities (state-of-the-art hardware, software and human capital), convergence of technology and creative sensibilities, growing track record of delivery and strengthening relationships – India remains a valuable partner in productions across the value chain.

What is the USP of Assemblage that you intend to promote to get some good work?

The culture of creativity, together with a passion to produce high quality work is thriving at Assemblage. In this profession, creative entrepreneurship is as essential as technology or production processes. As we try and create the right framework, working environment, pipeline processes in place, it is quintessential that the young team of about 300 artists and technologists pride themselves in the work they do and aspire to excel in each project.

That's the culture that I intend to nurture and foster to produce some world-class products.

Will you be working on a mixed business model (create original IPs and work on production of outsourced IPs)? Or do you have anything else in mind?

Assemblage is currently a work-for-hire animation production studio with a global clientele. We've done a few DTH DVDs as we speak and are currently working on two 90 min full-length features for theatrical release in September 2015 and January 2016 respectively.

As most other studios, we also aspire to participate in the higher end of the value chain in terms of co-owning the IP and creating our own content, however, we recognise and appreciate the challenges before we get there.

A sign of progress for Assemblage is that in addition to the remuneration for the work-for-hire services to the producers of these feature films, Assemblage also has a small back-end percentage interest in the recoupment and copyrights schedule. That in my opinion is a step in the right direction to being IP/content partners in the future.

What are the most crucial business decisions that you are undertaking at present, considering you are a new studio?

A start-up animation studio has multiple challenges and decision-making is often non-programmed, that's the nature of the beauty and the beast.

As a people driven business, there is no substitute to artistic talent. Having the right people doing the right job is absolutely critical and hence finding and hiring the relevant domain experts have been not only crucial but also undeniably necessary to build a strong production pipeline.

We're bound by many limitations – time, costs, talent etc. Optimizing the resources at hand and managing the floor to ensure we hit the required milestone deliveries amidst the fire of various setbacks is challenging. Here's when tough decisions have been made but that's the nature of the filmed entertainment business.

What kind of talent does Assemblage intend on grooming? Will you be more inclined towards 2D or 3D animation?

Assemblage is a full-service capability CGI studio and we pride ourselves in the quality of work we do. As a start-up animation studio it is necessary that we groom and lure the best talent in the industry. There is no substitute for good work. Having said that, our team consists of some award-winning technocrats and artists and keeping them challenged, motivated and excited is what we aspire to do. Any project that excites and matches our creative and technological aspirations is what we'll try and do.



Is it intimidating to work with an industry veteran like Madhavan (Mad Max), describe how's it working with him?

I have had the pleasure of working with Max in the past, although very briefly. As always, the experience has been terrific. A people's person par excellence, Max brings with him the perfect blend of control and charisma. His acute sense of understanding people and processes makes him a great leader – someone I've aspired to work with in my career in this industry.

Assemblage was the best platform to partner with Max and help build a world-class studio. Although Max carries a huge wealth of industry recognition and goodwill, his inclusive attitude and permissive style of management allows people to bloom around him and makes the working environment very convivial – far from intimidating!

Finally, where do you see Assemblage 5 years down the line and do you see yourself continuing to be in the animation industry personally?

In a rapidly growing business and industry such as ours, 5 years is a long time.

With the right organisational foundation we're trying to lay, a seamless production pipeline, a talented team of artists/technocrats and the right mentorship and business network, Assemblage is poised for a solid future.

I am confident that Assemblage would not only grow into a world-class studio by then but also demonstrate how we can use our core skill sets in industries outside of entertainment.

The future of this industry has a lot to offer and studios like us are here to play a crucial role. As for me, I see myself playing an important part in the unfolding of this evolution, both from the point of view of Assemblage, and the industry at large.