

CASE STUDY: ANIMAL LOGIC

Winner: Creative Industries, 51st Australian Export Awards (2013)

For outstanding international success across all creative industries including advertising, art, crafts, design, fashion, film, music, performing arts, photography, publishing, software, games, TV and radio, and video games.

Background

Animal Logic is one of the world's most highly respected digital production studios, producing and developing award-winning design, animation and visual effects for the film and television industries.

Established in 1991, Animal Logic originally produced work for advertising agencies and television commercial directors. This led to expansion into feature films and great success followed.

Today the company is renowned for films such as The Matrix, Happy Feet, 300, House of Flying Daggers, Moulin Rouge, Walking with Dinosaurs: The Movie, The Great Gatsby, The Rover and The LEGO® Movie. The studio is currently in production on Angelina Jolie's, Unbroken, Joss Whedon's, Avengers and Chen Kaige's, The Monk.

With studios in Sydney and Los Angeles, Animal Logic is one of Australia's largest employers of digital artists with 250 full time staff (growing to as many as 600 during busy production periods).

Approach to business

According to co-founder and CEO of Animal Logic, Zareh Nalbandian, the company's ability to constantly change and evolve is a key factor in its ongoing success.

"The only constant in our business is change," he says. "We regularly review and reflect on our strategy – sometimes daily. We have to stay nimble, be able to manoeuvre and be opportunistic."

This approach has certainly worked, with the company seeing phenomenal growth during the past 23 years – almost 80 per cent in the three years from 2010 to 2013 alone.

It's foray into big screen animation came with the Academy Award winning Happy Feet (released in 2006).



SNAPSHOT

- Established in Sydney in 1991
- More than 250 permanent staff
- Export accounts for 78% of their sales revenue and 95% of their business
- Winner of the 2013 Premier's NSW Export Award - Creative Industries category
- Winner of the 2014 NSW Creative Laureate



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ANIMAL LOGIC

“It was our ‘can do’ attitude that got us through that four year project,” says Nalbandian.

“At the start of Happy Feet, I was getting calls from colleagues saying things like – do you know what you’re doing, do you know how hard it’s going to be, do you really want to do this and the like. We actually didn’t know what we were doing at the time, but, collectively, we said we’re up for this and we did it!”

It is this attitude, combined with its considerable creative prowess and leading-edge visual effects technology, that has allowed Animal Logic to continue to succeed around the world.

“When the company started in 1991, the most sophisticated piece of technology was a colour fax, and there was no Internet. Since then we have seen a revolution, which made us realise almost anything is possible,” says Nalbandian.

Despite its success, Nalbandian is eager to point out that Animal Logic will never rest on its laurels.

“We are in an industry susceptible to many influences – things like the fluctuating Aussie dollar, changes to government policy and tax concessions and, of course competition,” he says.

Looking ahead, Animal Logic hopes to do some more work in television and develop content for digital screens (eg mobile apps). Major projects in the pipeline include a new movie with legendary Chinese film director, Chen Kaige (Farewell My Concubine), and work on the next Avengers movie.

Once ‘desperate in debt’, he says success has allowed him to focus less on money and more on the product. “You’ve got to dream the dream and be pure about what you do – that’s the key to good business.”

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– Co-founder and CEO, Zareh Nalbandian

International engagement

Although Animal Logic has worked on a lot of high profile Australian movies (representing around 80 per cent of its business), most of them are financed overseas.

Hollywood remains the primary source of the company’s income, with emerging markets like China expected to provide massive opportunities.

“We are particularly excited about our new project with Chen Kaige,” says Nalbandian.

“It’s a really exciting direction for us – getting involved at the high end of the emerging Chinese film industry. Chen is a legendary

filmmaker and he approached us to work with him – based on our work on House of Flying Daggers, amongst other things.”

Nalbandian said although there was often temptation to outsource some of their work overseas, the company remains committed to Australia. “I want to build my business and this industry on the back of Australian talent,” he says. “The thing I am most proud about is our ability to create jobs.”

Nalbandian says the tremendous success of the company overseas is due to a number of factors – the opportunities it gets to work on major film projects, the creative and technology skills of its team and the ongoing support of the NSW and Australian governments. This included an offer to join Prime Minister, The Hon. Tony Abbott on a Trade Mission to China in April. Nalbandian graciously accepted.

When asked about why Australians continue to make their mark overseas, Nalbandian says it has a lot to do with our creative edge. “We have been punching above our weight since I started in the film industry in Australia in 1970, with directors like Peter Weir, Bruce Beresford and George Miller,” he says.

“We have always had a disproportionate level of talent compared to our population and I don’t think that has changed in 40 years. We just turn out amazingly talented people.”

The only thing Nalbandian feels may let us down on occasion is our lack of assertiveness.

“By their nature Australians aren’t as aggressive or competitive as our overseas counterparts. I expect this will change with time though,” he says.

Animal Logic now has its sights firmly set on China. It has a Joint Venture agreement in place with Village Roadshow Pictures Asia where both parties are looking for projects to work on together.

“We will still be very engaged and committed to the US market – which is very important to us – but China is in our back yard and we have a great reputation there.”

Winning an Australian Export Award

Nalbandian says winning an award – Animal Logic has won more than 20 of them – are certainly a great morale booster for the team. “They also make a statement to the world about the quality of our industry in Australia and what we are able to achieve here,” he says.

“It’s a great introspective process and helps credential us when we are seeking out new business opportunities.”

Animal Logic
www.animallogic.com

