

# Nicca Dekker

Table Mountain Film Studios (CTFS), formerly known as Dreamworld, is finally beginning to take shape. CTFS is the largest and most ambitious film studio project ever to be undertaken on the African continent and will be a ten-year, multi-billion Rand project. Phase I of construction has already begun on the 200 hectare piece of land in Faure under the watchful eye of newly-appointed CEO, Nicco Dekker.

Dekker, currently the most successful studio manager in South Africa, is clearly the perfect man for the job. In 2004, he transformed a fertilizer factory into a viable studio called Table Mountain Motion Pictures Studios (TMMPS). TMMPS was South Africa's first successful film studio complex, with 15 film-related companies on site. And Dekker made it all happen with no financial assistance from government or any other industry organisation.

"It was the most difficult challenge you could have thrown at someone and it wasn't easy," Dekker admits. "But, I managed to convince the shareholders of my vision and I signed personal surety for the studios."

In addition to signing personal liability, Dekker initially didn't earn a salary. Fast forward two years, and the studio was running at a profit. He was able to pay a dividend to the shareholders and the studio space boasted 80% occupancy. Furthermore, TMMPS hosted some of the world's biggest stars like Ethan Hawke, Steven Seagal and Nicholas Cage.

The movie *10 000 BC* based its production at TMMPS for an entire year.



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Using a multiplier factor of 3,5 for every job and Rand spent, approximately R1,4 billion in economic activity is calculated to have been generated over a nine-month period.

Suffice it to say, TMMPS was a raging success. A grand total of 169 jobs were created and the 15 companies on the back-lot had a combined turnover of approximately R70 million per annum. TMMPS also boasted the largest sound-proofed stages in the country.

Sadly, TMMPS was forced to close its doors after the owner sold the land to developers. Dekker was given the option to buy, but at that stage the value of the land had increased from tens of millions of Rands to hundreds of millions. The market value had gone

beyond their reach, and Dekker simply could not afford it. All the film studios were consequently demolished.

"This was my first taste of creating a common base for companies in the film industry to work together," Dekker says of the project. "It gave me a clear understanding of what was needed."

Not disheartened, Dekker went on to redesign, build and transform some old sheds near the township of Alexandra in Johannesburg into what is now Q-Studios. The project was finalised in 2006 and Studio 2 of Q-Studios is considered to be one of the top sound stages in Gauteng with superb sound quality.

During the last 12 years, Dekker has been involved in the creation of various companies in

different sectors of the economy. He has a proven track record in marketing, sales, financial management and the structural planning of larger projects. Amazingly, all of the companies he co-founded during this period were running profitable within a 24-month period of operation. Some of these companies include Cinegate Africa and The Editing Cafe.

After nine years of self-imposed exile in Germany with his wife, Dagmar, Dekker returned to South Africa in 1991 when most people were leaving the country. Vehemently anti-Apartheid, he came back with a strong vision in mind and a head full of practical, creative ideas to help his fellow citizens.





Today, Dekker foresees the studio space as playing a pivotal role in the South African film industry. He wants to create a friendly studio environment where people can live, work and play. He believes that South Africa needs world-class studio space to accommodate international and national productions. In addition, he deems that big productions will never be brought to the country unless we can provide highly competitive conditions.

"I don't just view the studio as a building," Dekker explains, "I see it as a vehicle for taking the industry to new dimensions. We, as an industry, cannot grow if we do not create a home for ourselves where we can establish long-term foundations. We have the oldest industry in the world, but it seems to have gone backwards. We need the stability, longevity and co-production that only a studio can provide."

Dekker, who has also worked as a script-writer on feature film projects for Constantin Film in Los Angeles, has a sound understanding of the film industry.

"We are an industry that is driven by facilitation," he says. "And there is a more stable future in a studio environment. Studios mean that the seasonality of the industry is changed profoundly. People can look forward to being employed for a full year as opposed to shooting a commercial for three days or less."

So, what is this creative thinker's management style?

"To get the absolute best results, you need to choose the right people with whom you can share your vision and goals in a transparent fashion," Dekker elucidates with a warm smile.

He firmly believes in strong leadership, empowering people and leading by example.

"You can't expect your employees to work until late if you aren't prepared to do the same," he justifies. "If I expect a lot, I must also deliver."

In addition, he is not afraid to humbly admit when he has made a mistake.

"You have to share what you believe in, and that means sharing your weaknesses, too," Dekker explains. "I make mistakes every day but I am willing to apologise for it."

Dekker is far from a ruthless dictator, instead he is always "willing to take the pain".

"You have to share profit with those who have worked hard for it," he believes. "You have to show recognition and couple that with transparency of vision. I am always willing to take personal risks and that's why people trust me."

"Respect is not demanded, it is earned. I prefer to gain respect based on what I believe in and what I do, rather than people respecting me because of my title," Dekker says. "I think in modern company management, people hide their bad leadership qualities behind titles and hierarchies. I prefer to empower people by giving them love, trust, care and compassion."

Dekker's recipe for a successful business is three-fold.

"Firstly, make sure you understand your market and do your homework with regard to price, demand and competition. A sound business and financial model is essential as the foundation for any new business: set realistic and achievable targets and make sure your overheads are under control. I have never seen a business financial model that doesn't show profit. This means that one should not confuse dreams with reality.

"Secondly, remember that people are more important than great financial models. Without the right mix of people in management who form a great dynamic and harmonious working team, no business can succeed. The same principle applies to choosing your financial and business partners. If you are, for instance, a small company and want to partner with a major company, it can create tremendous difficulties.

"Last but not least, develop the right strategies to achieve those goals. This is the most important step. Sometimes

you will have to develop new strategies and apply lateral thinking to achieve success. This simply means that you need to be inventive if you don't have money and the less money you have, the more inventive you need to be."

While Dekker and his wife were living in exile, he became a well-known critic of the Apartheid regime. During that time, he wrote for major German and Swiss newspapers and radio stations. He also organised various conferences and congresses that were actively anti-Apartheid. Furthermore, he was vice-president of 'Umoja', an organisation of African professionals living in Europe who focused their time and attention on transferring skills back to Africa.

Dekker is also a trained journalist who has worked for radio, TV and the print media in both Europe and South Africa. He has strong communication, marketing and management skills. He also has organising and marketing prowess, as he has coordinated numerous functions and events, most notably one of the largest fairs in Europe, the Museumsurfer Festival.

Dekker was, until recently, the managing director of Table Mountain Pictures, (TMP) an independent sales agent and distributor of South African film, which he co-owns with business partner Rashay Magan. The company specialises in developing new platforms and distribution for film and TV content. In addition, the company is also a consultant for studio development. TMP has also recently created an editing hub, which brings South Africa's leading feature film editors together in a dynamic environment.

Dekker injects personal commitment and passion into every project he oversees. He is what many people would call a visionary. Through strong leadership, every project he touches turns to gold. It's no surprise that he is part of history in the making and head of the greatest investment in the South African film industry. If anyone can facilitate bridging the gap between South Africa and the international film industry, it's Nico Dekker. 📺