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What's in a name?
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Asian Idol journey

Chasing the Idol to Indonesia and back

By David Scott

Being in the right place at the right time helped Mike Bickerton, BA'01, expand his *Idol* experience from Canada to Asia.

The MIT grad seized an opportunity while working as a producer on the internationally successful *Idols* series created by Simon Fuller and produced in Canada by Toronto's Insight Production Company.

The parent company and copyright holder for *Idols*, FremantleMedia, resides in London, England. It was a visit by a FremantleMedia producer to the Toronto studio in July 2007 that led to Bickerton packing his things and working in Jakarta, Indonesia a few months later.

"She asked me 'Where could I find someone who'd spend two months in Jakarta from October to December (to work on *Asian Idol*)?'" Bickerton asked a few questions, saw the opportunity and the producer from FremantleMedia told him "you might be who I'm looking for."

It was the question of being in the right place at the right time. And also following advice that Bickerton offers to new graduates: "Take advantage of, and recognize, opportunities." The opportunity to work in Jakarta also fit into his scheduled down time on *Canadian Idol*, which starts pre-production for each season in January.

Although Bickerton is familiar with the format for *Canadian Idol*, the concept of *Asian Idol* was slightly different. The idea was to take an *Idol* winner from each of six countries in the region and bring them to the same stage, competing against one another and showcasing the diversity of Asian cultural and music traditions. Similarly, on the production side, FremantleMedia drew upon its international network of producers to lead the Indonesian team in creating the shows in Jakarta.

"We had workshops with producers from different series – an international round table. I found that certain challenges we'd had with *Canadian Idol*, they also experienced in India and Malaysia," said Bickerton.

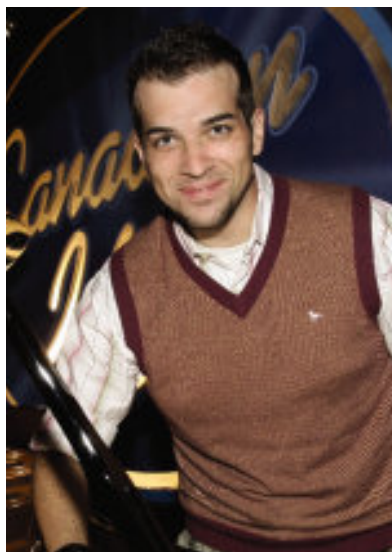
Working alongside a veteran producer from Australia, and the local team that produces *Indonesian Idol*, the series involved making three international shows and an additional three for the Indonesian broadcaster.

There was an obvious language and culture barrier that the producer adapted to in directing, conducting and editing interviews and segments

for *Asian Idol*. The language spoken is Bahasa Indonesia, which according to Bickerton is "unlike English, French, Spanish or German which have some similarities. I picked up a little by the end of my time there by writing down key words for editing – like 'shorten' and 'lengthen' – and making good use of a pocket-sized phrase book bought when I arrived." From Bahasa to Tagalog, Vietnamese to English, the production was as multilingual as it was multinational.

The *Asian Idol* became a multi-task experience that Bickerton was thrilled to have. "I wasn't just directing camera crews on shoots, for the first time I became a camera operator shooting reality footage for my own segments. It drew upon so many of my creative skills, which is an experience that doesn't happen often. I was writing, producing, directing, scheduling, shooting, editing, interviewing, consulting on songs, etc."

The path to success is not always straight and easy. After graduating from the MIT program at Western, Bickerton went on to do a joint Master's in Communications program at Ryerson and York universities. During his first year, he started as an intern production assistant working on the reality show *U8TV: The Lofters* in Toronto, where another Western grad, TSN anchor Jennifer Hedger, BA'98, got her start. Pairing an interest in television with not wanting to finish another degree without any practical work experience, the internship was the perfect introduction to the world of television production.



From there he worked on *Canadian Idol* in its infancy from a lead he followed at *U8TV*. His first job with *Canadian Idol* was a part-time production assistant in the first season. He was then hired on full-time as a researcher that summer, and now in his sixth season with the show, he's made it to one of the senior positions as a co-producer.

Opportunities open doors and it is something Bickerton says new grads should always look for. "Volunteering and interning gives you a taste of what you like to do and don't like. Get the experience, do the work. It's better to show that you are a good worker willing to

contribute to the process rather than trying to impress people with your lengthy resume. At least that's how we notice people on our *Idol* team when staffing for shows."

Being open to new opportunities and the multiple outcomes they may present is where Bickerton thinks success is found.