From L-R: Pramod Chandorkar, Founder, SoundIdeaz Academy; Sonu Nigam, Singer and Artist; Tarundeep Singh Anand, Chancellor, Universal AI University and Tirthankar Das, Director, Soundideaz Academy

SoundIdeaz Expands Horizons: Partners With Universal AI University To Offer Sound Engineering Degree

"My life is Sound. I cannot tolerate any half-heartedness in it," **Dr. Pramod Chandorkar**, *esteemed Sound Engineer, proudly claims. In his effort to propel formal education in the field of Sound Engineering, Pramod, who also founded* **SoundIdeaz Academy**, *has taken the next step and introduced a degree course for sound engineers with Universal AI University. In a conversation with* **PALM Expo Magazine** *team, Pramod fleshes out his passion for sound and how it drove him to elevate education for sound engineering.*

Pramod Chandorkar is a connoisseur of sound. With his experience, Pramod, who is also the Founder of SoundIdeaz Academy in Mumbai, has been a proponent of formal education in the field. Which is why, he has ventured into a territory where few dare to enter – establishing a full-fledged degree course in Sound Engineering, in partnership with Universal AI University in Karjat, Maharashtra. In the interview, Pramod elaborates on the nuances of the course.

What was the idea behind starting SoundIdeaz Academy?

SoundIdeaz was started in 2010. It is almost 14 years old. The main motive behind starting this academy was that when I wanted to learn, there were hardly any options to do so. The only option for me was the Film Institute. It was quite the procedure to get into the Film Institute. So, when I wanted to learn, I learned it on the job, which is why, I felt that a thorough formal education should be made accessible to sound engineering aspirants. When I started working, I got a lot of inquiries by students who wanted to learn like me, from me. This made me realize that there is a lot of interest from students wishing to pursue this career. But the outlets for the same were few and far in between. At that point, I trained around 10-12 students one-on-one in the span of the first three to four years. When I saw them succeed professionally, I wondered, if I can train 10 students, why not more?

This is when it all started. Since then, for the last 15 years, the course gets updated every year based on the feedback we receive.

I wasn't the first one to start this course. Other institutes also offered similar training. They have been doing a good job as well. But I noticed several gaps in the education system which were not covered.

Can you elaborate the gaps that you noticed in the education pertaining to Sound Engineering in India?

The first major gap that I noticed, was related to communication and personality. When you work in an artistic field, your personality plays a major role. There is a lot of verbal and non-verbal communication going on in our field. At SoundIdeaz Academy, I have a psychologist on board who designed all the modules related to media. She performed extensive research to design specific modules, which would be required by all media professionals. When we implemented the modules, we received positive feedback from students and their parents. That was quite a moral boost for us.

Sound Engineering is also a very infrastructure-heavy course. You require adequate studio space, and it's not an easy task to have the infrastructure

> **We are offering a B. Tech, which is a four-year degree. In the last two years of the course, the students will choose their own specialization and work on that. We have four specializations: Music Technology, Music Production, Audiography, and Live Sound. In the first two years, the students will be introduced to aspects of all the four specializations. In the fourth semester, they have to choose their elective. We are confident that with this, we will churn out job-ready professionals who can step into the industry and start working from the get-go.**
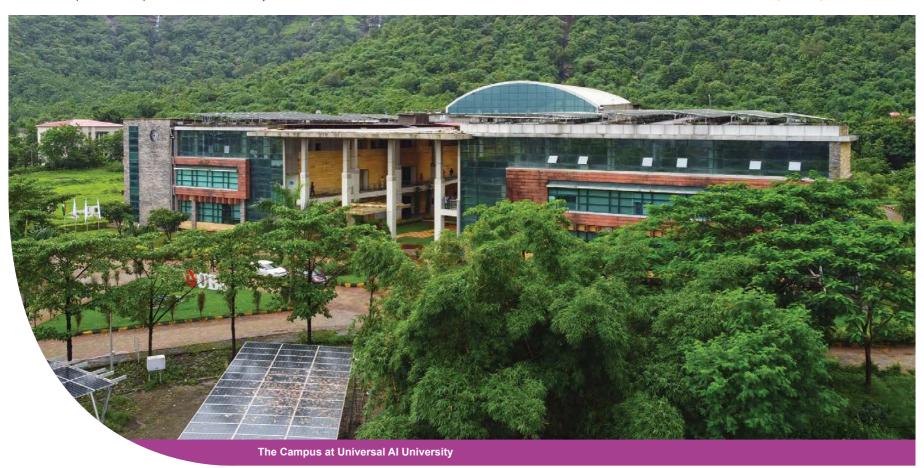
and to understand as well as learn the business aspects that come with the profession. So, it took us all these years to arrive at a point where we felt confident about taking the next step.

Another major gap that I witnessed was the lack of industry connect. A lot of graduates and hiring companies agree that the quality of the talent is not job ready, because there is a gap between the curriculum or the training which is being provided and the need of the hour in the industry. So, how good is that training? Job readiness is a major gap that I wanted to fill by establishing an industry connect, where industry experts are also involved in all the aspects of the course – right from designing the curriculum, giving suggestions, or delivering excellent trainings.

When we started a module for personality development in 2010, I was travelling around the world as a result of my profession. During my visits, I looked for educational institutes in the respective countries. I visited a lot of schools in Los Angeles and New York. They had beautiful facilities and infrastructure, and they created good intelligentsia from within the walls of the university. But even they were surprised with our personality development module. In a one-on-one discussion with a couple of senior deans, I was asked a lot of questions about the personality development module. The deans later informed me that while they are still pondering over whether to implement the module in their course, I had actually gone one step ahead and done it.

The third gap that I noticed was the lack of well-trained facility in the sound engineering industry. Since sound engineering is a nascent area, it is very difficult for the faculty to teach it. Several professionals in the industry go out of their way to teach, but having amazing subject matter knowledge serves only half of the purpose, they also need to be trained regaring the art of teaching. This needs to be fulfilled by faculty development programme. We have been working very closely on this.

It took 14 years for me to address these gaps. I wanted to be completely prepared. I wanted to be sure before I stepped up to the degree programme.

The Campus at Universal AI University

A glimpse at the state-of-the-art premises within Universal AI University

What was the genesis of SoundIdeaz Academy's degree course in Sound Engineering?

We have partnered with Universal AI University in Karjat, which is the first AI University in the country, and the third AI University in the world for a degree course in Sound Engineering. It all started when I sent an email to **Tarundeep Singh Anand**, who is the University's Chancellor. He reverted within three days and invited me for a chat. As soon as I entered his office, I realized that I was not meeting a business tycoon, but a passionate educationist. We shared the same core thought process. It was a one-hour meeting, and by the end of it, the deal was locked. For starters, we are building an exact replica of SoundIdeaz Academy within the campus of the Universal AI University – it's just much, much bigger than the facility that we have here.

The Universal AI University has a huge campus, built with passion and best-in-class international infrastructure. The surroundings are also quite beautiful, with hilly terrains and lush greens, making it a perfect place for creativity to bloom. The University is already working on experiential learning and sustainability. Tarundeep Singh Anand has identified that AI is the future, but AI is only as good as the input. AI, in my opinion, has two full forms – one is **Artificial Intelligence**, which is triggered by **Actual Intelligence**.

Can you shed some light on the course structure?

Never before in our country did we have these specializations in a degree course which we have today. So, we are offering a B. Tech, which is a four-year degree. In the last two years of the course, the students will choose their own specialization and work on that. We have four specializations: **Music Technology, Music Production, Audiography,** and **Live Sound**. In the first two years, the students will be introduced to aspects of all the four specializations. In the fourth semester, they have to choose their elective. We are confident that with this, we will churn out job-ready professionals who can step into the industry and start working from the get-go.

We have a 12-member advisory board who are best-in-class professionals from the sound engineering industry. The advisory board includes the likes of **Padmashree Sonu Nigam, Padmashree Suresh Wadkar, Ricky Kej**, who is a three times Grammy Awards winner from India, **Pandit Bikram Ghosh**, who is a tabla exponent from Kolkata and a renowned music composer. We also have **DJ Phukan**, who is a very senior music production exponent from our music

industry, **Mujeeb Dadarkar**, who is a very senior sound engineer, **Manish Mavani**, who is a big name in live sound reinforcement, and **Avinash Oak**, who is a legend in the Indian audio industry, and more. Every module of the degree course is vetted by these esteemed professionals. We are also creating an assessment technique and an assessment sheet for the advisory board, which will be used year-after-year to monitor the development of the students, basis which, the board will issue suggestions. We are also working on a unique concept where industry professionals will interact with the students on a periodic basis. These professionals will then grade each student for their work. So, if they find good students - and I am sure they will, by the end of second year - there are high chances that students might get pre-internship offers even before the end of the programme.

So, in the end, the final course curriculum is much better than the curriculum I had in mind, since it includes some AI aspects too. Since this is a business school, the students will not be trained only in audio, but also in business aspects, personality development, artificial intelligence tools, social work, and eco-friendliness, which helps the students become holistically developed individuals.

Another major USP of the course is that we have two pathways available for this degree – via B.Tech and via BA. Since, PCM is mandatory to take up a B.Tech course, but it isn't necessary to have PCM as far as the sound engineering profession is concerned, we decided to allow students to access this degree via BA route. Both the routes follow the same process and hold the same value, barring the name of the degree. We have based our curriculum on the NEP 2020.

What do you aim to achieve with a degree course in Sound Engineering at SoundIdeaz Academy?

We have received a lot of positive responses from international faculties, who are very keen to come and train because they are impressed with the degree course's structure and the modules within. My intention is to contribute towards elevating the dignity of an audio engineer. It can happen only with education. My long term goal is that Universal AI University should be a one-stop destination for Sound Engineering students from around the globe. After all, India is an education hub that offers quality, cost effective education. The ultimate aim is to provide the best possible training to the students at the industry level standards with collaboration from the industry who will eventually absorb these students.

What's next for SoundIdeaz Academy?

We don't want to keep ourselves limited to offering only audio engineering and music production courses. We plan to venture into other artistic/creative courses as well, such as cinematography, direction, and writing. We are such a big country with so much of talent and we are the biggest consumers as well as the biggest manufacturers of entertainment. So, the lack of formal education here doesn't bode well with me. At SoundIdeaz Academy, we plan to fill that gap.

After conversations with industry stalwarts like Dr. Pramod Chandorkar, it seems evident that Sound Engineeering education in India has reached the next level, and students looking for professional training will receive the same through the partnership between SoundIdeaz Academy and Universal AI University.