

World Screen

Dr. Markus Schäfer ZDF Studios

Since taking over as president and CEO of ZDF Studios in July 2022, Dr. Markus Schäfer has been driving integration within the company and with its shareholder, ZDF. “We wanted to become an even better business, which provides even more value to our partners—going along with our claim: Inspire. Create. Produce. Distribute,” he says.

And the benefits have been plentiful, including driving greater mutual understanding on both sides: ZDF Studios can better recognize ZDF’s program needs and service needs, and ZDF can better understand ZDF Studios’ strengths and abilities, “resulting in better programs and better service.” The integration also increases the level of transparency, shared knowledge and joint activities.

As broadcasters and platforms have been tightening their commissioning budgets, Schäfer sees a trend in scripted programming “to de-risk, which means that commissioners

are looking for programs that are IP-based and content that has multi-season potential.”

Factual programming has garnered solid demand as of late, says Schäfer. “In a world of ‘fake news,’ well-made and well-researched

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documentary programs have an increased value,” he says. “We at ZDF Studios are working with partners that adhere to the highest journalistic standards.”

Formats, too, are enjoying a period of high demand. “Formats have been, are and will always be a pillar of the content business,” Schäfer says. In April, ZDF Studios announced a partnership with Tom Gamlich and Jan Fritzowsky to set up Content Laden, focused on the development and production of innovative and high-quality factual-entertainment formats.

And kids’ content, of course, remains a staple of the ZDF Studios catalog, with highlights such as the live-action *Spellbound*.

With its strong programming slate and ambitious goals for the year ahead, having the right team in place has been paramount to ZDF Studios’ success. “Talent is the scarce resource in our industry,” Schäfer says, touting the company’s culture of appreciation and respect as one of the many assets that make it an attractive employer. ■