

Alex Schloesser

Sound Engineer...Sound Designer and now.. Sales Engineer – Cologne, Germany

One of the most humble people you will ever meet, Alex Schloesser is a man who is not afraid to get down and dirty. Having started his career at the tender age of 23 in a brewery, Alex has already done more than 15,000 shows and has no intention of slowing down. His resume includes clients from American heavy metal bands to the United Nations. In an exclusive interview with E-Tech Asia, Alex takes us on a walk down memory lane through his 25 year journey in the industry and explains how it has lead him to where he is today.

ETA: Let's go back to the beginning, how did you first get started?

Alex: It all started after I got my Diploma in Technical Acoustics. Which is funny because when I was in High School I really enjoyed mathematics, so I initially set out to study that. It turned out to be a complete nightmare since it was all theory and I am a very hands-on guy and I quit after one semester. From there I decided to study Electro Acoustics and got my Diploma. And just one year before I completed my studies, private TV networks had just started, so there was a high demand for engineers and as long as you knew what a fader was and you could handle a system there was no problem finding a job.

ETA: Do you remember your first show and how it was like?

Alex: I remember my first ever live gig was a weekend at a Steam Beer brewery and I had to do 13 hours of Dixieland Jazz followed by 11 hours of *Skiffle* music. It's was OK for the first hour or so but if you've got 6-8 bands playing all day Dixieland and then 11 hours of *Skiffle* the next day, its really bad and after that weekend I was almost ready to quit the industry!

(Skiffle = Pop music with jazz, blues, folk, and roots influences, usually using home-made/ improvised instruments.)

ETA: What made you change your mind?

Alex: It just so happens that I met up with a friend who worked for a TV company as a Video Engineer soon after my first gig and he said his company needed people and if I was still interested I should just apply. So I went for the interview, and they asked if I could do the job and the next thing I knew they put me in an OB van for a live broadcast. They liked my mixes so they kept hiring me for their shows then, as it happens, networks talk to one another. Word got around and so did I and within one year I gained a tremendous amount of experience just by being willing to work and I fell in love with my work.

ETA: What would you consider your 'Big Break'?

Alex: In the late 80s there were a bunch of German boxers who were becoming quite famous but German producers didn't know how to produce a boxing event so they hired a Director, Lenny Stucker, who did boxing events for 16000-18000 people at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. The problem there was, while they had a lot of permanent staff, no-one could speak decent English at that time so they asked me to do it. Me and Lenny worked so well together and he liked what I did so he told me whenever he came to Europe he wanted me there in the OB van. It was like 'BOOM!' you go up to the top right then and there.

I remember an instance where I had to do a recording for a TV show and I had a limo waiting outside to take me to the airport to fly to Vienna for a German boxer event. I literally mixed, waited until director said 'cut', put the faders down, grabbed my bag and ran to the limo straight to the airport!

ETA: Sounds exciting! You must have been on top of the world!

Alex: That's the thing, when you do the job you never recognise how wild it is. I just felt 'Hey I have to do the job, I have to hurry and I have to make sure I get into the airport on time', you never have the time to think you're special. I can tell you literally all my events in Europe have been covered by magazines but usually you do the event and you only see the article 2 months later but when you read it you go like, 'Wow that was damn cool and who did the job, oh it was me'.

ETA: Tell us about your transition from Sound Engineer to Sound Designer.

Alex: I became a sound designer because I prefer to create. Its like with tattoos. If you ask a tattoo artist do they prefer just putting someone else's picture on their skin or do they prefer to do a painting. Guess what they will say? And while you have to do both, I appreciate it when a client asks me to give my creative input but I also understand when a client says, 'Look I want this, is it possible' and we brainstorm from there.

ETA: Do you consider yourself to be a first class sound engineer?

Alex: I seriously believe you can never be a sound designer if you're not a first class sound engineer because how can you design something when you don't know if its feasible. That being said, I don't know what defines first class but I consider myself a very good sound engineer. When I listen to what I mix and when I listen to what everyone else does, I know that I'm good at what I do.

ETA: You've done a lot of touring, can you tell us some of the people you toured with?

Alex: I toured with mostly heavy metal bands, such as, Heaven and Hell, Manowar(loudest band on the planet), and pop group, US5. My first ever rock and roll tour was with Roger Taylor, who was the drummer for Queen, and his band, the Cross.

ETA:What's the most ridiculous expectation you've come across from clients/artists?

Alex: The most ridiculous was an event where we had to have our PA system reach 126db of SPL at the FOH position which was 48m away from stage. We knew it was going to be tough because it was so far but I got to a point that I just didn't care already because the artists were just being a**holes. We eventually reached the level but we had LETHAL levels the first 20-30m in front of the PA because the level was louder than being next to a jet when it takes off. We had a situation at the end of certain songs when there was a lot of low end and literally the first 10rows had difficulty breathing. We destroyed a lot of equipment that night but I had already made the band sign a document that held them liable for all the damage they did to my PA.

ETA: What's the most creative show you've ever done?

Alex: Sheesh.. That's a tough one.. When I was working for the German version of the TV show *Pop Idol*, I wanted to create the atmosphere of a concert in a TV studio and normally in a studio that's difficult because then the quality of the broadcast sound will suffer. It would either sound very Rock N Roll and the broadcast sound would not be good or vice versa. I managed to design something which I knew would work but when I told the boss, Allen Boyd, who used to be a sound engineer, he literally said, 'ARE YOU CRAZY'? He was really worried it wouldn't work but everything was installed and he had no choice but to trust me. When we did the opening of the first show and I was in the sound control room, my hair stood up for 2 minutes.

ETA: Tell us a bit more about your time working with the United Nations.

Alex: For the UN job, it just happened that I had a creative idea and it landed on open ears and when it lands on open ears, that's when I can do crazy stuff. I got involved when I served on a smaller scale for some local meetings in Germany and I invented a bunch of systems in the climate

changes negotiation which involved billions and billions of dollars. They recognized that I had some ideas for their main problem which was commercial companies bugging meeting rooms so they could gain access to information. So my responsibilities there as a sound engineer was making sure there were no bugs and nothing confidential left the room during negotiations. It was an honour that the UN trusted me with this.

ETA: Coming from a sound background, you are now a Sales Engineer. Why the switch?

Alex: I wanted to work international and there are very few international German artists. I felt I had done everything you could do in Germany and I had hit the ceiling. So the only way I could go international was to take my knowledge and experience and put it into products which ultimately is sales.

ETA: If your path in life had been different, where do you think you would be today?

Alex: Uh, hospitality? Yea, I would have a restaurant or a bar. I like cooking. There was always a running joke where I told everyone that if I can't make a living in this industry I'll buy a large frying pan and go make *Paella* and sell it somewhere.

- *Paella* = popular Valencian rice dish

ETA: What is your weapon of choice?

Alex: Laughs..Why would you ask me that?! It depends on the size, when I do large scale, I love Adamson's Y18 because I know and like how they sound. I know what they can do and I have mixed a number of really great shows on them so this is the tool that I really like. On a small scale, friends of mine, EM Acoustics, a small English firm, build stuff that sounds amazing and I absolutely love the designs that Ed (INSERT NAME) and Mike(INSERT NAME) do, 2 wonderful and beautiful gentlemen with brilliant minds.

ETA: Is there anyone you feel that has had a great influence on your career?

Alex: Yes while there are a bunch, obviously, but there is one who is my icon. He's not even a sound engineer, he's a musician, Frank Zeppa. Listening to music when I was young I was interested in what more can you do, my ears like stuff I have to analyse and when I listened to Frank Zeppa, I felt it was genius. The more I listened to him, the more I admired his brilliance. I saw 6 or 7 Frank Zeppa shows and I even got married on his birthday! I remember visiting his grave and crying when he passed. And I think the one thing for me that makes him an icon in my professional career is he knew where he wanted to take the music and he was not willing to compromise. He did a lot of sound engineering and he knew everything, he knew how it should sound, he knew how it should be, and he was a perfectionist. That is something that I very much aspire to be because I am a perfectionist. I know I will never reach perfection but that shouldn't mean that I shouldn't try.

ETA: You have already accomplished so much, so what's next on your to-do list?

Alex: Its a difficult question to answer, and I would like to quote Steve Jobs (I'm not a promoter for Apple products), but he said, 'Stay humble, stay thirsty'. That's what I strive for and I always want to learn. When I go, I want to leave a bit a of a stamp of something that I did. I want people to say maybe I've added something to the industry, I want to work hard to leave something behind, to accomplish something. Even though I have accomplished a lot, I'm still thirsty. There are still more opportunities, and if presented, I would definitely take them on.

ETA: What advise do you have for the boys on the ground that are just joining the entertainment industry?

Alex: Hmm... I would say if you have the feeling that this is your industry then go for it 100% if

you feel its not your industry, leave it as soon as you can because it's not going to get better with the years. For me, this is my industry, I live, breathe, eat, drink and s*** this industry. This is me, I am as childish and stupid and silly as serious and as focused as you can be because being in this industry I can be all those things. So if this is your industry, if you feel this is it, then go for it and I'm sure you will have a good career. If you feel like you just want to be the cool guy then you will hit the ceiling very quick and you will be very disappointed because this line is definitely not about being cool. When you have to put on the cool, that's when you start to look like a giant c***.