

## Mall Mini-Studios Offer New Route to Auditions



By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer  
LOS ANGELES April 30, 2011 (AP)

Larry Ryckman wants you to go into the shopping mall a dreamer and come back a star.

The entrepreneur and his company spent more than six years developing a portable, 10-foot-by-10-foot recording studio that can be plopped into malls or elsewhere for aspiring singers, actors, models or anyone who wants to make a splash with crisply engineered audio and hi-def video.

MyStudio, which Ryckman said cost \$15 million to develop, is getting its biggest boost yet from Fox's upcoming "The X Factor," Simon Cowell's U.S. version of his hit British talent show.

Besides relying on nationwide cattle-call auditions to find contestants a la "American Idol," "X Factor" made a deal with MyStudio's parent company, Studio One Media Inc., to use its mini-studios in Honolulu, Phoenix, Denver, Nashville, Tenn., Kansas City, Mo., and Anchorage, Alaska.

It was the U.K. "X Factor" and Fox's "American Idol" that provided the impetus for MyStudio's development, said Ryckman, 50, who co-founded an audio technology company, Q Sound, in the 1980s and is a former co-owner of the Canadian Football League's Calgary team. He's president and CEO of Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Studio One Media.

"We realized there were millions of people that believed they had talent and had no way to showcase that talent easily," Ryckman said. "I thought, 'Wow, there's all these people with dreams out there.'"



AP

In this April 2011 publicity image released by FremantleMedia North America, THE X FACTOR MyStudio audition booth is displayed at MyStudio headquarters in Los Angeles. These studios allow hopefuls in other cities the chance to audition if they aren't able to make it to the open calls for the new talent competition series, "THE X FACTOR." It is the first show to utilize these state-of-the-art recording studios, giving more people the chance to become a global superstar and win a \$5 million recording contract with Syco/Sony Music. (AP Photo/FremantleMedia North America)

Nicole George, an executive with ASCAP, the U.S. performing rights organization that represents songwriters and publishers, said she sees the value in creating new ways for artists to be heard.

"I think for a TV show it makes perfect sense. It ultimately just opens up the barrier ... for talent to enter, which can be healthy for the entertainment industry," she said in an email interview.

With green-screen technology used in filmmaking, MyStudio offers some 1,000 virtual backgrounds — think bright lights, lush scenery and the like — and a long list of karaoke tracks licensed from EMI Music Publishing, Universal Music Publishing and others.

The promise: no shaky, homemade-quality visuals or murky sound here.

Recorded videos are automatically uploaded to the MyStudio.net website, which includes member profile pages, video sharing and free performance DVDs.

The cost of a recording up to five minutes in length is \$20. The MyStudio auditions for "X Factor," which producers said Friday have been extended a week, to May 8, are free.

Beyond would-be stars, MyStudio is aimed at anyone seeking a snappy video resume to pursue a garden-variety job. Personal messages and greeting cards represent another market.

MyStudio has struck deals with, among others, the Grammy Foundation for a scholarship contest for high school jazz musicians and singers; London's Crack Comedy Club, for an international standup contest; and reality producer Mark Burnett, who has used MyStudio auditions for shows including "Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?"

There were several obstacles to creating a small but professional-quality recording facility, Ryckman said, including the right camera and lens for the limited space. Then there was the thorny problem of sound quality.

"The biggest problem was with distortion. Kids would sing to a background karaoke track and the track was too loud, or the adults were too loud. We had to develop proprietary software" to level and mix the audio to create studio-grade sound, he said.

Each MyStudio has a price tag of \$250,000, with all of them company-owned and, at this point, with no plans to franchise, according to Ryckman.

The inaugural MyStudio was test-marketed two years ago in Phoenix and the first of a planned 25 openings followed in Miami, Dallas and three other markets. Then Ryckman saw a major opportunity. He approached a friend, TV host Terri Seymour, and asked her to speak to her pal, Cowell, about using MyStudio for "X Factor" auditions.

"Simon understood it immediately. He understands the value of finding talent," Ryckman said.

TV contests aside, could a venture such MyStudio be useful for the music industry? Yes, with reservations, said ASCAP's George.

"A music label could use it to scour the world and search for the next talent, the same way a TV show would. But then you also lose the interaction or feeling you get when someone is singing right in front of you as well," she said.

"Ultimately it comes down to the voice and talent. ... If it's good it will be recognized and something will happen."

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