

Screen Currency 2026

Understanding the value of
Australian screen and games

A study in 5 reports with
supporting case studies

 Case study

MasterChef Australia

TV Series • Released 2009
Fremantle Media Australia and
Endemol Shine Australia



Australian Government



Introduction

 Individual	 Community	 Industry	 Economy	 Nation
Entertainment	Family & co-viewing	18 seasons with minimum 60 episodes a year	Cross industry innovation	Soft power
Relatability	Representation of multicultural Australia	Skills development & on-the-job training	Global format sales	Profile for Australian food products & culinary culture
Inclusivity	Accessible cross-cultural engagement	Highest ever TV event ratings	Internationally successful export	Talent & skills profile
Positivity	Impact on culinary culture	Broadcaster benefit	Positive perceptions of Australia	Confidence
Cooking skills		Evidence of Australian format skills	Tourism impact	National pride
Food culture			Trade impact	

***MasterChef Australia* is a competitive cooking show that has aired 18 seasons on Network Ten since its debut in 2009.**

It continues to offer an increasingly rare experience: intergenerational event TV. Audiences, including families, have come together for almost 2 decades to watch ‘real Australians’ from a range of multicultural backgrounds as they are tested on their cooking skills. Based on a format created in the UK in 1990, the Australian version reworked the original with great success, influencing other adaptations around the world. Its success derives from placing kindness and collegiality at the centre of the reality format, and the universality of food within culture.

The show has arguably changed Australian food culture – Australian children now talk about ‘plating up’ – and has profoundly impacted how we as a community cook, shop and think about food. The show’s sales into multiple territories have also exported Australian sensibilities, talent and a new image of diverse contemporary Australia across the world, particularly in our neighbouring region, offering a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy and connection.

“The nature of the judging is positive and the contestants are set up to succeed, not to fail. There’s a kind of camaraderie and a team spirit encouraged between contestants rather than fighting and conflict. It really swims in the other direction of all the tropes of reality television, and I think it has just broken the mould.”¹

– Peter Newman, CEO at ESA

Creation

Companies involved

Production companies: Fremantle Media Australia (2009–2011) and then Endemol Shine Australia (2012–present)

Commissioner: Network 10

MasterChef Australia was originally produced by Fremantle Media Australia, with the rights transferring to Shine Australia in 2012. In 2015 the company merged with Endemol to become Endemol Shine Australia (ESA), part of media and entertainment group Banijay Entertainment. The transition marked the program's evolution into one of Australia's largest and most enduring reality television franchises.

ESA was acquired by Banijay in 2020, the world's largest international content producer and distributor spanning 25 territories with over 130 production companies, a multi-genre catalogue of over 265,000 hours of programming and 170+ labels. ESA's team is based in Sydney and Melbourne, and creates TV and digital productions for Australian free-to-air networks, pay TV channels and streamers.

MasterChef Australia was commissioned by Network 10 and has become one of the network's most commercially successful and internationally recognised formats.

Origin story: the idea and initial development

MasterChef Australia is a competitive cooking game show based on the original *MasterChef UK* format, owned by Banijay Group (which owns ESA) and Ziji (the company of Franc Roddam, who created the original format).²

While the *MasterChef* concept was originally developed in the UK in 1990 and was revived by the BBC in 2005,³ it was the Australian version, reworked under Mark and Carl Fennessy at Fremantle Media Australia, that has been replicated in multiple markets around the world. As of 2021, the *MasterChef* format had been produced as 64 localised versions with more than 10,000 episodes around the world. It

was named the Most Successful Cookery Television Format by Guinness World Records in 2017.⁴ It generates \$700 million a year in licensing fees and commercial revenue for Banijay.

The creative process

Format

MasterChef Australia has a different format from the original British *MasterChef* and *MasterChef Goes Large* format. Initial rounds consist of a large number of hopeful contestants from across Australia 'auditioning' by presenting a food dish before judges in order to gain one of 50 places. Entrants must be over 18 years old, and their main source of income cannot come from preparing and cooking fresh food in a professional environment.⁵

“The thing I can say about *MasterChef* is that genuinely the best cooks, at every stage of the process, are the ones who get through ... there's a real rigour around that.”⁶

– Peter Newman, CEO at ESA

Casting

Reality TV is all about casting – and in *MasterChef Australia* the judges are every bit as important in delivering the format as the competitors. In 2020, the announcement that new and unknown judges would be replacing the popular prior trio “created a lot of chatter ... and uncertainty of the show's continued success”.⁷ Despite this, the first season that followed the arrival of these 3 lesser-known judges resulted in some of the best rating success for the show in years, indicating that the strength of a format like *MasterChef* surpasses the importance of the associated talent, like the judges. The food is the vehicle for creativity, allowing the series to tell stories of cultural hybridity with multiple origins and sources of inspiration.⁸

Location

MasterChef Australia was filmed in Sydney between 2009 and 2012 and has been filmed in Melbourne since 2013.⁹



“I think audiences around the world love the positivity of *MasterChef Australia*. They love the inclusivity of it ... every year there was such a phenomenal multicultural cast.”¹⁰

– Peter Newman, CEO at ESA

Production

Cast and crew metrics

Sourced directly from Endemol Shine, the following metrics reflect the scale and composition of the *MasterChef* workforce across cast, crew and creative roles. Across each year, the numbers are as follows:

Producer team:	22
Directors:	1
Cinematographers:	1
Camera operators:	25
Cast:	24
Key Talent / Hosts / Judges:	4
Crew:	131
People with multiple roles:	6

Across the 18 seasons, the total numbers are as follows:

Producer team:	286
Directors:	6
Cinematographers:	3
Camera operators:	50+
Cast:	616
Key Talent / Hosts / Judges:	12
Crew:	138

Production financing: investment and presales

Direct supports

MasterChef Australia does not receive direct production financing or investment funding from federal or state government film agencies or from any other party.

Training and skills

The scale and longevity of *MasterChef Australia* has enabled the program to function as a significant training ground for the Australian screen industry. The series has supported the development of production, post-production and editorial talent across multiple generations of practitioners.

“There’s such a lack of training in this industry. There is a lot of upskilling that we do with people as they come through under our roof. We have had post-production training initiatives that we established with help from the NSW government because we do feel the responsibility to help train the next generation of producers, editors and production managers ... we’re in a position to do that more than others.”¹¹

– Scott Howard, COO at ESA

“If you think about the amount of crew that would have gone through *MasterChef* over the years. It’s a big production, and just as big in post-production. Minimum 60 episodes a year. It’s a training ground ... we use it for up-and-coming editors. The production talent that have come through *MasterChef* is huge.”¹²

– Scott Howard, COO at ESA



Economic impacts

Although the *MasterChef* format was invented in the UK, *MasterChef Australia* has become a significant economic contributor in its own right, generating an estimated \$700 million annually in licensing fees and other commercial revenue for ESA, according to the Australian Financial Review.¹³

Employment

While there is no exact official statistic for the total number of jobs created, *MasterChef Australia* has generated substantial employment in the production and media industry across 18 seasons. Beyond direct screen industry employment, the series has also been a launchpad for contestants' careers, with many becoming media personalities, cookbook authors, successful food-industry businesspeople and – in the case of Poh Ling Yeow and Andy Allen – judges on subsequent seasons.¹⁴

MasterChef Australia provides national exposure for multiple products including food, wine and kitchen equipment.

Its move to Melbourne in 2012 was expected by the Victorian state government to enhance the state's reputation as Australia's food and wine capital. Exposure through the show boosts rural and regional food and wine tourism.¹⁵

Innovation

Brand integration was a central component of *MasterChef Australia*'s commercial strategy, with sponsorship designed to feel “subtle and clever” rather than overtly promotional. In 2010, Network 10 appointed its first brand integration officer to oversee in-program product placement, online brand extensions and retail licensing partnerships connected to the series.¹⁶

Coles became a major sponsor from the program's first season and developed highly coordinated cross-promotional campaigns linked directly to episodes and cooking challenges. By the third season, ingredients featured on the program were reportedly stocked and discounted in Coles supermarkets on the day after they appeared on screen. Advertising campaigns featuring celebrity chef Curtis Stone further reinforced the partnership through the slogan “To cook like a MasterChef, shop where a MasterChef shops”.¹⁷

“We run one of the biggest post-production facilities in the Southern Hemisphere and ... generate a huge amount of talent training ground for hundreds of people.”¹⁸

– Peter Newman, CEO at ESA

“IP ownership is important ... it's even more important for Australia to look at creating new IP and generating an environment that is encouraging of that.”¹⁹

– Scott Howard, COO at ESA



Dissemination

Distribution

First release platform:	Network 10
Global distributor:	Banijay Rights

MasterChef Australia is distributed internationally by ESA and parent company Banijay Entertainment, reflecting the program’s position as one of the most globally successful adaptations of the *MasterChef* format. The series is broadcast in more than 120 countries and, since launching in Australia in 2009, has contributed to the expansion of local *MasterChef* adaptations across approximately 60 international territories.

Domestically, the series airs on Network 10, with current episodes available on its streaming platform 10 Play, a selection of past seasons on Paramount+, and individual episodes for purchase through transactional services such as Apple TV.²⁰

According to Howard and Newman, the distribution landscape for unscripted television is currently undergoing significant transformation, with traditional broadcast models now operating alongside expanding digital distribution strategies. In addition to free-to-air broadcasting, *MasterChef Australia* has increasingly engaged with FAST channels (free ad-supported streaming television channels), dedicated YouTube channels, non-exclusive digital licensing arrangements and evolving social media distribution models for both short and long-form content. Producers noted that these developments remain in a relatively early stage but are expected to become increasingly significant to future distribution strategies.

India was also identified by the duo as one of the program’s strongest international markets, with the series achieving particularly high audience engagement due to its “aspirational, positive and celebratory nature.”

Exhibition

MasterChef Australia launched on Network Ten on 27 April 2009 and has remained with the network since.^{21,22} It was an instant success. Nearly 1.5 million people watched the opening episode, and more than 4 million tuned in for the first season finale.^{23,24} By the second season, advertising slots were nearly all pre-sold, a turnaround from the first season “before it became TV’s hottest property”.²⁵ An average national audience of 4 million, with a peak audience of 4.3 million. Including regional viewing, its peak audience was more than 5.7 million.²⁶ Adam Liaw’s win in Season 2 is still the most-watched non-sporting event in Australian TV history.²⁷

Awards

MasterChef Australia has 28 award wins and 56 nominations, including 7 Logies for Most Popular Reality Program, 9 Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) Awards including 8 for Best Reality Program and an Australian Screen Editors Award.²⁸

Nominations for Season 5 in 2013 established its credibility, followed by a peak in 2015 with Season 7, which delivered the most significant award success. *MasterChef Australia* received the AACTA Award for Best Reality Series in 2015 and 2017, and was nominated for Best Editing in Television, and Best Direction in a Light Entertainment, Lifestyle or Reality Series in 2017. Subsequent seasons continued this trajectory, with five AACTA Award wins from 2016 to 2024, alongside ongoing Logie and international award nominations.



“I think without doubt it is one of the greatest television exports in Australian television’s history. I would say we’re in well over 150 territories around the world. We are absolutely loved in places like India, the UK, the Philippines, South Africa ... it’s flown the flag for Australia around the world ... the lens that it’s shown back onto Australia, that it’s so positive it’s inclusive it’s multicultural, it’s exciting. You get all of that through the show. It’s not just a television export, it’s a cultural export.”²⁹

– Peter Newman, CEO at ESA

Renewal

Season 18 of *MasterChef Australia* has been produced and broadcast. The 18th season premiered in April 2026, with casting now open for the upcoming 19th season.³⁰

The series has also spawned 5 spin-off series:

- *Celebrity MasterChef Australia*, which featured high profile contestants.³¹
- *Junior MasterChef Australia*, which featured younger contestants.³²
- *MasterChef Australia All-Stars*, which featured returning contestants from the first 3 seasons.³³
- *MasterChef Australia: The Professionals*, which featured professional chefs as contestants.³⁴
- *MasterChef Australia: Dessert Masters*, which features Australia's top dessert chefs competing against each other.³⁵

MasterChef Magazine launched in 2010 and was an immediate sell-out.³⁶ Ultimately, however, its magazine spinoff succumbed to the “very sensitive” magazine market, closing 2 years later after losing more than one-third of its readers in a year, though the timing of this decline coincided with a general downturn in magazine publishing.³⁷



In 2010, *MasterChef Australia* broke the record for the highest rating non-news and sport show on Australian free-to-air TV.³⁸



Engagement

Online metrics

MasterChef Australia is highly rated by audiences on IMDb.³⁹

IMDb: 8.2/10

Reception

Australian audiences

MasterChef Australia has very high recognition amongst domestic audiences. Over half (54%) of the Australian general population report to have watched *MasterChef Australia* in full or partially. Viewership is higher among those aged 45–54 (61%), females (58%), culturally diverse communities (61%), those living in a capital city (56%) and those with dependents (60%), but lower viewership for this title was noted among older Australians aged 65+ (42%) and males (49%).⁴⁰

International audiences

MasterChef Australia has received widespread global attention with fan communities in India, South Africa and Norway.⁴¹ Screen Currency’s international audience study shows that awareness of *MasterChef Australia* varies substantially by market, with strongest recognition in New Zealand (69%), reflecting close cultural ties and strong format familiarity. High awareness is also evident in India (49%) and Singapore (38%), aligning with strong local interest in cooking competitions and the broader *MasterChef* franchise. In India, the *MasterChef* program has stronger awareness among high-income households (57%). UK shows moderate awareness (31%). In contrast, awareness remains relatively low across other Western markets such as Canada (16%), the US (9%) and Germany (6%), suggesting more limited penetration where local or alternative versions of the format dominate. Overall, *MasterChef Australia* demonstrates notable strength in Asia-Pacific and South Asian markets, particularly among those living

in high-income households.⁴² A 2013 Sydney Morning Herald article identified why *MasterChef Australia* was popular with Indian audiences. According to Pradyuman Maheshwari, editor-in-chief of media monitoring website MxMIndia, “The (Australian) hosts are tough, but they aren’t rude ... Indians typically don’t like to be rubbished in public, and don’t like people subjecting others to it ... *MasterChef Australia* is gentle. The star chefs are very, very popular here. There are emotions, there is some fun. All the ingredients that work here in India.”⁴³

Online engagement

Online, *MasterChef* has a strong social media following, demonstrating its ability to engage audiences beyond broadcast viewing. Its Instagram account has 1 million followers and more than 9,600 comments, while its official Facebook page, ‘the official home of *MasterChef*’, has attracted 4.7 million followers.⁴⁴ Creating spaces for viewers to further engage with the program through recipe sharing and discussion enables the program to broaden its social and cultural impact.

Social and cultural impacts

MasterChef Australia has generated significant social and cultural impact through its broad appeal to audiences, by fostering interest in food culture and promoting diversity and inclusion. As one of Australia’s most successful television formats, the program has entertained over 300 million viewers locally and worldwide, shaping attitudes towards cooking and food, whilst inspiring a new generation of home cooks and aspiring chefs.⁴⁵ Beyond its entertainment value, *MasterChef Australia* has become a prominent representation of contemporary Australia and promotes social connection through authentic representations of cultural diversity.

 High global awareness (49% in India, 38% in Singapore).⁴⁶

 *MasterChef Australia* has been the most popular version of the format worldwide.⁴⁷

 In 2010, *MasterChef Australia* broke the record for the highest rating non-news and sport show on Australian free-to-air TV.⁴⁸

 The official *MasterChef Australia* Facebook page has 4.7 million followers.⁴⁹

Entertainment value

As one of Australia's most successful reality television programs, *MasterChef Australia* has demonstrated enduring entertainment appeal, reaching its 18th season in 2026.⁵⁰ In the first half of 2024 alone, the series reached 10.26 million Australians, averaged 815,000 viewers per episode, and attracted an average streaming audience of 142,000 viewers on 10 Play – its largest streaming audience to date.⁵¹ Together, these figures illustrate the program's ability to attract and retain audiences across both traditional broadcast and digital platforms, reinforcing its status as one of Australia's most widely watched and enduring entertainment formats.

Historical and educational value

MasterChef Australia has changed attitudes to cooking in Australia, influencing not only what Australians eat but also how they think and talk about food. The program has been credited with making cooking part of mainstream popular culture, with one commentator observing that it even had 12-year-olds talking about “plating up”.⁵² Often referred to as the ‘MasterChef Effect’, the series has inspired many Australians to pursue careers as chefs or work in professional kitchens, encouraging viewers to transform a passion for cooking and interest in food into vocational pathways. More broadly, the program has fostered greater public appreciation of cooking skills, fresh produce and culinary creativity, demonstrating its educational influence alongside its entertainment value.⁵³

Social value

MasterChef Australia has become synonymous with diversity on Australian TV. It has consistently featured contestants from a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds, with its reach and access suggesting it is a model for authentic representation.⁵⁴ The series has been cited as proof of Australia's diversity.⁵⁵ Its multiculturalism is reflected through the diversity of its contestants as well as its general audiences.⁵⁶

A former contestant, Adam Liaw, writing for *The Guardian*, suggests that the social value of *MasterChef* lies in its ability to model and encourage authentic behaviour “To me there's a beautiful truth in reality TV. In our everyday lives we live under a veneer of politeness, rehearsed social interactions and mores. By creating a fantasy world where those mores no longer apply, we see reality. There are no social rules for how to act when competing with a total stranger over who can make the best risotto. It's ridiculous, but it's not about the risotto. It's an unvarnished look at human nature.”⁵⁷

This emphasis on human experience is also reflected in the program's portrayal of contestants, with *MasterChef* owing its success in part to the authenticity of personal experiences – such as childhood memories associated with food or treasured family recipes – rather than racial or ethnic stereotypes.⁵⁸

The show has also been described as a family viewing experience. A submission to the government by FreeTV Australia has identified *MasterChef Australia* as one of the country's leading family entertainment formats, noting that it attracts an average audience of 219,000 aged 0–14. Unlike programming aimed solely at children, *MasterChef* appeals across generations, bringing families together around a shared viewing experience while introducing younger audiences to cooking, food and Australian culture.⁵⁹

Other impacts

The success of *MasterChef Australia* was immediately apparent in the nation's supermarkets, where demand for previously unknown or unfashionable ingredients surged. Kitchenware shops reported unusually high sales of kitchen appliances like blowtorches, croquembouche cones and potato ricers. The Thermomix, formerly confined to professional kitchens, began to appear in foodie homes.⁶⁰

Former contestants of the show have leveraged the profiles they built through the series to create new careers and businesses. Marion Grasby's brand, *Marion's Kitchen* is estimated to generate around \$10 million in revenue per year. Other business ventures by ex-contestants include releasing cookbooks, opening restaurants, appearing on other reality TV series and returning to *MasterChef* as judges.⁶¹



“Australia has a phenomenal global reputation for taking other people's IP and super-sizing it ... but ... that IP is from another country. The creation of IP is not a problem. We've got tonnes of brilliant ideas. There are amazing creatives in this country. We just need the infrastructure to support the creation and commission of more Australian created IP.”

– Scott Howard, COO at ESA⁶²

Endnotes

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