



Bollywood Changing: 40 Per Cent Of The Revenue Grossed By Recent Hits Has Come From Digital Theatres

FILMS TAKE DIGITAL ROUTE TO HIT JACKPOT

Get ready for a better viewing experience soon

Meena Iyer | TNN

Mumbai: Digital cinema has finally arrived in Bollywood.

The technological revolution has also brought in a revolution in the way films are distributed and exhibited in Bollywood and nowhere is this shift — away from the old theatres and old technology — more visible than in the collection figures. Bollywood has earned 40 per cent of its revenue from these digital screens between March 2007 and August 2008.

The number of prints of recent hits that has been released in the digital theatres — over and above the prints released in non-digital format — gives another indication of the direction in which things are heading. "Amitabh Bachchan's *Sarkar Raj* released in 372 digital theatres all over the country, Shah Rukh's *Om Shanti Om* on 384 digital screens and Akshay Kumar's *Singh Is King* in 415 such theatres," Sanjay Gaikwad of UFO Moviez said.

The trend remained the same for the other big releases like *Love Story-2050* and *Welcome*; the first released in 320 and the latter in 392 digital theatres.

"It has paved a new path for the century-old film business. The large number of digital screens all across the country gives an extra opportunity to our fantasy-loving janata to catch a film's very first show throughout India," he added.

What he leaves unsaid is that the industry is also loving it. These digital releases are over and above the normal quota of non-digital releases and give collections a huge boost.

Money plays a large role in Bollywood's eagerness to release films on multiple (digital) screens. Trade guru Amod Mehra explained: "Pro-

ducers today are keen on releasing their film in the digital format with a pan-India release because they can cash in on the initial hype. The digital format is advantageous to the producers and distributors as they are sometimes able to recover the cost in the first week itself, irrespective of how the film fares later. *Singh Is King*, for instance, has earned something to the tune of Rs 59.5 crore in the first week-end itself; and 40 per cent of this revenue has come from the 415 digital theatres."

Digital cinema also helped *Om Shanti Om* earn Rs 48 crore over the first weekend. And *Welcome* earned Rs 44 crore over the same period when it was released.

Trade insiders say the biggest grossers of 2007, like *Heyy Babyy*, *OSO* and *Welcome*, managed their numbers because of the unyielding advantage that digital cinemas gave.

Being able to release in around 300 theatres in A, B and C centres simultaneously along with the X number of non-digital prints gave them an unbeatable lead. *Heyy Babyy*, like *OSO* and *Welcome*, released in 340 digital theatres.

Siddharth Roy Kapur of UTV agreed that the digital cinema had proved to be a boon for the film industry. "It has other advantages," he said.

"By going digital, for instance, we save on the print cost and so our earnings from digital theatres start being counted from the first rupee that comes through the door," he explained.

Kapur also added that most up-market single theatres had been digitalised in even B and C centres. So they, too, can beam movies on the first day just like A centres.

meena.iyer@timesgroup.com



HOW'S DIGITAL DIFFERENT FROM ANALOG PRINTS?

THE TECHNOLOGY

The analog version (called prints) comes in reels and has to be 'interpreted' by a movie projector. Cinemas stored on digital format are kept in a CD; it is encrypted with a secret code and played back by a digital/computer projector.

THE CONVENIENCE

Reels are bulkier and occupy more space; they have to be physically moved from the film laboratory to the theatres. But there is no physical lugging involved in the digital format and it eliminates the cost of making prints.

HOW'S 2K DIFFERENT FROM 1.3K?

● **RESOLUTION** in digital films is measured in terms of **picture elements or pixels**.
● The specification of the **RESOLUTION** is determined by **pixels**

in the **horizontal direction** multiplied by **pixels** in the **vertical direction**.
● The **2K STANDARD** calls for a resolution of **2048 pixels multiplied by 1080 pixels**.

DIGITAL IS KING

Most of the big movies of 2007 and 2008 have been released in at least 280 digital theatres

FILM	DIGITAL THEATRES
<i>Singh Is King</i>	415
<i>Welcome</i>	392
<i>Om Shanti Om</i>	384
<i>Sarkar Raj</i>	372
<i>Heyy Babyy</i>	340
<i>Tashan</i>	327
<i>Love Story 2050</i>	320
<i>Jodha Akbar</i>	302
<i>Bhool Bhulaiyaa</i>	297
<i>Mere Baap Pehe Aap</i>	285

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Mumbai: There is a chance that you may soon get to see movies the way world sees them.

Two theatres in Mumbai, which already have digital screens, are now planning to upgrade their projectors. Bollywood insiders say they have come to know that the two halls, which plan to get the 2K projectors from top-notch manufacturers like Christies or Barco or Sony, are PVR (Juhu) and Metro Adlabs (Dhobi Talao). And when that happens, these two halls — along with Inox in Goa — will be the first to introduce this technology to Indian viewers.

"Use of 2K projectors will definitely raise the bar as far as digital formatting is concerned," a senior Bollywood technician said. "There will be a discernible improvement in both picture and sound quality and, in short, will allow us to see movies the way the West now sees them," he added.

But the industry is not leaning towards the digital format only to improve your experience inside the theatre; the reasons are entirely different and only have to do with commerce and convenience.

"Lugging around the old analog prints is very inconvenient and costs money, more so if you have a theatre somewhere in Sangli. A digital screen straightaway does with this inconvenience and cost," a marketing executive of a top Bollywood distribution house told TOI. "And there are sceptics even now who say that the analog version is better than at least the 1.3K digital projectors we now have," he added.

"And don't forget that going digital also helps the environment; it minimises carbon emission," he said. But the advent of 2K digital projectors in India — and their replacing the 1.3K digital projectors — is likely to end this debate, say Bollywood technicians. "There is a difference between analog and digital, especially in the clarity of sound," one of them insisted.

UFO Moviez has introduced digital technology to 1,200 theatres across the country. Sanjay Gaikwad of UFO Moviez said: "We are using Panasonic projectors that have a resolution of 1.3K." But don't expect all digital screens to switch over from the 1.3K projectors to 2K immediately. 1.3K projectors cost something to the tune of Rs 5 lakh but the 2K projectors coming from Christies cost almost Rs 23 lakh.

Devang Sampat, senior vice-president of the Cinemax group, which has a stronghold in western India, said: "Theatres in India are in talk with Christies and other contemporaries to purchase 2K projectors. We at Cinemax are also thinking about it for the future. However, if you introduce a 2K projector, it pushes the capital cost up."

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THE TWO BIG PLAYERS

Real Image and UFO are the two big players in the digital cinema market. Real Image has around 600 theatres across India; UFO has 1,200.