

Digital technology beams Bollywood into small towns

Bharati Dubey | TNN

Mumbai: Remember the time when prints were carted around in the boot of a car from one theatre to another in the first week of a film's release. Today, technology has changed the mode of transport and the growing use of satellites for the transmission of a film from a remote centre has not only cut costs but helped curb rampant piracy in the smaller towns.

Increasingly, producers are waking up to the potential to reach larger audiences and guard against copyright infringement by using this technology. 'Om Shanti Om' and 'Saawariya' are among forthcoming films whose makers are riding piggyback on digitalisation to broaden their release.

Producer-actor Shah Rukh Khan says, "Digital is going to be big in India, we too are releasing our film through UFO." He's referring to the firm which is a major player in the business. Of 850 prints, Khan's OSO will release 350 digitally across the country. The plan is to bombard mofussil areas or B and C centres (as they are known in trade jargon) and capitalise on the hype generated by the film within the first few days of its release.



REACHING OUT

It's a tried and tested formula. Digital prints of Sajid Nadiadwala's 'Heyy Babby' have garnered huge revenues and more than compensated for investments made by exhibitors to set up the technology in movie halls in the interiors. Sanjay Gaikwad of UFO Moviez says, "We made 342 prints of Heyy Babby. With so many big releases coming up in the next four months, I am sure the number of digital screens will rise to 90 per cent."

Digital prints require projectors which cost Rs 40 lakh plus transmission

equipment to beam the film down. But the economics work in its favour. Each physical print costs Rs 70,000 whereas the new technology allows a few master prints to be used to transmit the film across the country. Hence, had Sajid Nadiadwala released 350 prints of 'Heyy Babby' in a celluloid form, it would have cost him Rs 2.5 crore. But by using digital technology, he has managed to cut down costs by 80%.

As for distributors and exhibitors, they gain by being able to screen the film in the initial weeks of its release. "There is potential for an increase of 100 per cent in box-office revenue. Piracy that takes 40 per cent revenue away from the industry can be easily curbed now," said a cinema manager from Amravati in Maharashtra, where the release of new films is finally beginning to coincide with their worldwide launch. Until now, places such as these were used to new movies releasing a week or two after they were seen in the metros, allowing pirated prints from getting there earlier.

Albeit, the use of the new technology remains limited to remote towns in the hinterland. The bigger metros still depend on the physical transportation of prints for a variety of reasons.