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Multiplexes multi-task

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MORE ON OFFER Multiplexes are adding alternatives to Bollywood films, their revenue mainstay. The broadcast of IPL 2010 live and in 3-D, 'multiplex films' and even plays are the new avenues

Anita Sharan
■ anita.sharan@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: So now it's going to be cricket matches in multiplexes, live. The Indian Premier League 2010, to be played in March and April, is going to be screened in digital high definition clarity, across a large number of multiplex and single screens across the country. What's more, the semi-finals and final are going to be shown in 3-D on screens equipped to showcase them.

Digital satellite cinema network company UFO Moviez is bringing the technology and transmission to the screens through 50:50 revenue share tie-ups with multiplex chains, and single-screen theatres in tier II, III cities and towns. So far, it has signed on 378 screens, 220 of them multiplex. Another 150 are on the verge of signing on.

"We are finally expecting 750-800 screens signed on," says Sanjay Gaikwad, MD, UFO Moviez, which has the sole distribution rights for screening IPL in theatres and public venues.

He says the semi-final and final matches in 3-D will be screened at 70-80 multiplex screens that are already 3-D enabled. He hopes 30-40 more screens will ask UFO to 3-D enable them. Besides, "we are also looking at acquiring 150 additional public venues — restaurants and pubs — that we will 3-D enable. UFO's next move is to introduce 3-D to home television screens by the next IPL."

For multiplexes, alternative entertainment beyond Bollywood films looks like suddenly opening up. As Harshavardan Gangurde, VP marketing, INOX Leisure, says, "If IPL 2010 in cinemas turns out

well, it will encourage other events, especially sports, to come forward for live screening in multiplexes. Cricket, especially IPL, has become very large."

Last year's standoff over revenue sharing between multiplex owners and Bollywood strongly brought home the issue of monetisation for both sides. Multiplex are all very emphatic on the need for adding alternative content to their Bollywood fare to enhance earnings, although Bollywood films remain and will probably remain their biggest income source.

Multiplex chain Fame has been

IPL ON LARGE SCREENS

UFO Moviez is handling the techno-commercial aspects of screening IPL matches in theatres. The screening will be ad-free, with non-intrusive vertical ad panels on both sides. Keeping in mind the kind of experience cricket lovers in India enjoy, UFO is creating:

■ A carnival atmosphere across a select number of screens/theatres, not exceeding 100. Sanjay Gaikwad, CEO, UFO Moviez, said: "At live events, where audiences are large, no prompting is required to build up the excitement. With smaller audiences, such prompting is needed, which is what our cheerleaders will do."

■ Each screening place will have cheerleaders, a live band and merchandising.

■ A 'cinema jockey' will anchor activities.

■ Contests will be held and through a reverse-camera feed, theatre shots from one location with be shown across other screens. Winners will be shown on the screen across theatres, with their names, theatres and seat numbers.

■ Tickets will be at weekend rates, which is higher than weekday rates. Multiplexes can create season tickets in any combination they want – Gaikwad says revenues could touch Rs 32 crore if IPL shows across 250 screens.

■ No match will be screened in the city where the match is being played.

■ In bringing 3-D into sports, India is at par with global developments. The National Football League in the US has gone 3-D twice, while FIFA is going 3-D for the first time in June.

actively pursuing alternative content avenues. "We are looking at football and Formula 1, screened live. Plus, we have been staging theatre plays. Last year, we ran 50 shows of *Vagina Monologues*, of which 45 were housefull. We've also run the play *All About Women*," says Aditya Shroff, assistant VP – programming, distribution and corporate sales, Fame Cinemas.

Sources beyond Bollywood have also included regional and Hollywood films for multiplexes. In South India, regional films rule the roost and elsewhere, regional language films,

MAJOR MULTIPLEX CHAINS

Chain	Screens
Cinemax	70+
Fame	93
Inox	109
Fun (Mumbai group)	200+
PVR	108
Movietime (Mumbai/Delhi)	8
Maxus (Mumbai group)	3

Source: Company websites and UFO Moviez
All major multiplex chains are planning to add more screens and locations. There are at least six single-screen multiplex companies currently

● (From above) *A Wednesday, Dev.D, Aamir* – 'multiplex films' that proved to be great successes in recent times

depending on the language concentration in a local area of a city, deliver earnings to the multiplexes. Devang Sampat, senior VP, Cinemax India Ltd., says, "Regional content works well for multiplexes. Hollywood films are also doing better. Last year, *Avatar* and *2012* were among our top 10 grossers."

Given the rapid proliferation of multiplexes, a number of film producers are looking at producing "multiplex films" — smaller budget films with stories that need not have mass appeal. Sampat comments: "Earlier, there
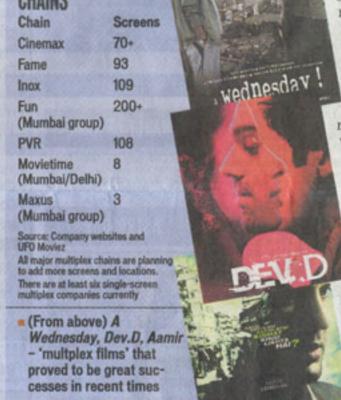
were maybe one or two such films in a year. Now there are 10-12. Studio 18's to-be-released *Striker* is one such film; Balaji will release *Ishqiya* on January 29."

UTV Motion Pictures has even set up UTV Spotboy to produce multiplex films. "It makes movies for people who will watch five films a month, for whom money is not a constraint, though they are not necessarily an evolved audience," says Vikas Behl, chief creative officer, UTV Motion Pictures. Spotboy has made films such as *Aamir, Welcome to Sajjan-pur,* and *Dev D.* Coming up are *Pan Singh Tomar, Peter Gaya Kaam Se* and *No One Killed Jessica,* based on the Jessica Lal story. "*Dev D* earned us four times what we spent," Behl says.

Beyond multiplex films, alternative content will have to be big enough to be attractive to audiences. Sampat says Bollywood films will continue to remain the biggest money earners but multiplex owners would love to add alternative content to enhance their earnings and profitability. Right now, the opportunity is wide open to whoever can come up with innovative alternative ideas.