



## **Indie spearheads digital cinema revolution**

By Nyay Bhushan

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Perhaps it's the advantage of having the world's most prolific film industry: India is now home to the world's largest installed base of digital cinemas (at over 700), an impressive number given that the technology was only introduced over the last couple of years.

About 17,000 new D-cinema screens worldwide are forecast to be in place by 2010, according to U.K. research agency Screen Digest. India seems poised to lead the growth in D-cinema penetration given that, at about 10,000 screens, this is one of the world's most under-screened markets, with only 12 screens per million people compared to 117 in the US.

"Digitization will lead to expansion of large scale exhibition networks and multiplex chains into non-urban cities as well," says Saurine Doshi, partner at Mumbai-based A. T. Kearney India. "This is going to alter the balance of power with large production houses and force the production houses to embrace corporatization."

Indeed, while Hollywood still debates issues related to D-cinema standards set by industry technical body DCI (Digital Cinema Initiative), the cost advantages of an alternative non-DCI compliant system has fueled D-Cinema growth here thanks to domestic content, given that India produces more than 1,000 films annually.

Leading players include Mumbai-based United Film Organizers Moviez (918 screens), E-City Digital (101) and Chennai, South India-based Pyramid Saimira (371). By 2011, these three companies will expand their networks to cover more than 5,000 screens.

"In India, the biggest films go for a maximum of 600 screens in the opening week," UFO Vice Chairman Raaja

Kanwar says. "Digital cinema has the potential to provide a medium budget film a release of 1,000 screens at affordable prices."

Kanwar feels that DCI-approved equipment, which costs about \$125,000, is not viable in India. "India is perhaps the only country where we can create our own solutions to adapt to such a price sensitive market because the Indian box office doesn't depend on Hollywood (which only commands a 4 per cent share)," he says.

By contrast, Qube offers a DCI-compliant system as Real Image Media Technologies Director Jayendra Panchapakesan explains: "Our system follows international standards which means we can also export our Qube server to foreign markets."

However, Qube also offer an alternative MPEG2 system which competes against UFO. "Its for the market to decide which system is better and they can co-exist but the fact is that digital cinema is here to stay", Panchapakesan says.