

The cricket extravaganza

IPL live shows provides a stable alternative revenue stream for exhibitors

On the evening of 12 March, just as the Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket matches made their third edition beginning on Indian soil, the MD of the Valuable Group, Sanjay Gaikwad, and his colleagues Ameya Hete and Kapil Agarwal, heard their multiple cell phones ringing incessantly. The calls were from the different corners of the country – all honey to the ears. “Houseful sir, it is houseful! All tickets sold,” said a voice from Jaipur. “All 32 theatres in Rajasthan are packed to the capacity and thousands have queued up to buy tickets for the next show.”

There were similar calls and text messages from theatre owners in different parts of the country that have signed up with UFO Moviez of the Valuable Group, started in 2004, and now the world’s largest digital satellite cinema network that provides a new platform to view and enjoy cricket matches in movie theatres. “All this is wonderful to hear; we were waiting for the news,” says Gaikwad who, along with his colleagues, thought of showing the IPL matches live on gigantic screens in multiplexes and single-screen theatres across India in high-definition format (HDF) without being interrupted by advertisements. The idea germinated keeping in view the months of March and April when there are no movie releases, adding to the woes of film producers, distributors and exhibitors as revenues clog up during these two months due to exams and holidays. This firm’s additional attraction will be the introduction of the 3-D format at some stage of the event. “This cannot be seen on home TV sets,” says Hete, director, Valuable Group.

UFO has more than 1,700 digital screens across the country. Of these, over 700 screens, including more than 200 multiplexes, are showing the matches. And Gaikwad feels that due to the tremendous response these matches have elicited, the number of



Gaikwad: confident

theatres might go up to 1,000 in the next couple of weeks. “Another major attraction is that the matches will be seen seamlessly as there are no ad breaks throughout the game, which will be the highlight of this format of viewing,” adds Agarwal, joint MD, Valuable Group.

Unlike the previous two editions, IPL will no longer be a threat to movie exhibitors, as UFO, along with the exhibitors, is replicating the stadium-like atmosphere in a number of theatres. “We have created opportunities for marketing cricket-related merchandise, exciting gifts and multi-cuisine stalls to cater to the entire family,” says Charuhas Satam, strategic advisor, UFO Moviez. Moreover, to add to this excitement, a number of screening venues have cheerleaders and live bands, making for a perfect match-like atmosphere. At various places ‘cinema jockeys’ have already started anchoring various interactive activities, such as prize-winning contests in the foyer and inviting celebri-

ties to the cinema halls and stadia for 45 days at a stretch.

The IPL beaming rights have come for a price. The Valuable Group has tied up with Entertainment & Sports Direct (ESD), promoted by the DAR Capital Group, a Dubai-based investment advisory and private equity company, which won the theatrical exhibition rights to the IPL through a bid for 10 years (2010-19) for Rs330 crore in November 2009. There were two bids – from Triplecom Media as well as ESD – and the base price for the bid was set at \$2 million or around Rs9 crore. According to Lalit Modi, IPL’s chairman and commissioner, “Both the bids were of high standard.” ESD excelled due its excellent network connectivity with the Valuable Group and its ready availability of technology. The Rs150 crore Valuable Group are pioneers of the digital media platform in India as well as across the globe. It expects to touch a turnover of Rs300 crore, with earnings from the IPL, by the end of 2012.

Two years ago, the Valuable Group acquired moviebeam, a digital media platform from Disney with over \$250 million in investment, and has gained a pre-eminent position for itself in hospitality and public venue markets around the world. The deal has given both ESD and UFO Moviez exclusive exhibition rights to cinema halls, stadia, auditoriums, water-borne vessels, buses, trains, armed service establishments, hospitals, spas, bars, hotels, restaurants, clubs, airports, railway stations, shopping malls, offices, construction sites, oil rigs and various other public venues.

According to Narayan Alva, president, Association of Hotels and Restaurants (AHAR), about 7,000 hotels and restaurant members are screening IPL matches through cable connections. These commercial screenings at public places are being provided for a charge and monitored by Valuable with the help of United Spirits. “For starters, this will be a good season for us,” says Gaikwad. “We expect revenues of at least Rs25 crore from this season alone. In 2011, it will be more than double – about Rs60 crore.”