



## How multiplexes can tackle safety concerns after reopening

Industry biggies talk about measures multiplexes can take to win back the trust of audiences after theatres reopen



As restrictions on the Covid-19 lockdown are being lifted slowly, people are concerned about the safety of public spaces. Like most experiential businesses, media and entertainment were affected the most. Theatres were shut and the releases of various big projects were stalled. The curbs on content production also hit the industry.

Various industry bodies reached out to the government to address their concerns. The industry is also trading cautiously by releasing a few movies on OTT platforms to balance the investments. In this scenario, it is important to know how theatres will address the audience's concerns. Alok Tandon, CEO, Inox Leisure, said Inox has undertaken various measures to ensure sanitation and safety of viewers. Tandon was speaking at a webinar held by UFO Moviez and FICCI to discuss the new normal for the movie industry.

"Our first objective is to bring trust among audiences. We divided the entire thing into three buckets. Pre-resumption, post-resumption and the audience visit. We will address how people don't crowd at the cinemas and stand in line at least two to five feet apart," he said.

He said they will rearrange the traditional theatre seatings to address social distancing. "We will allocate seats and divide audience groups that come together and ensure there is a seat between them that will divide them from another group," he added.

Tandon said their focus will be scheduling shows in a way to avoid crowding. "We have made various schedules for shows; things like the interval, entry and exit can't simultaneously happen for two movies at once," he said.

Audiences will be encouraged to practise paperless transactions at food and ticket counters. Tandon said temperature checks for audiences, staff and other visitors at theatres will be made mandatory.

Safety kits and gloves would be available at stalls. Food supplies and drinks would be served in single-use disposal bags, to avoid the reuse of cutlery and crockery, Tandon explained.

The webinar's panel included important personalities from the industry. Kamal Gianchandani, CEO, PVR Pictures, explained how the dynamics of the weekend collection will change for the industry. According to Gianchandani, movies will run longer in theatres. "Everyone knows our occupancy is the highest on weekends but now in the next 5-6 months, we will have the ability to space out films at auditoriums and give more shows to films," he said.

"We don't have a backlog of 15 films that will need to be accommodated. Films that will release at that time can be spread across auditoriums and times. Films will run longer in theatres because people will also select distancing and prefer to come on weekdays over weekends," he added.

Kapil Agarwal, JMD, UFO Moviez, also explained how the phenomenon of the weekend collection will change as people continue to work from home. "Earlier, the entire pressure used to be on the weekends but now I can watch a Wednesday morning show because I am working from home," he said.

While the Indian film industry awaits a response from the government, a few Hollywood studios have already announced their major releases after theatres reopen for the US market. Warner Brothers and Disney have announced the release of their respective films Tenet and Mulan in July. According to Gianchandani, the release of these films will allow the distributors and producers to read the demand and study the box office better for the post-Covid period.