

# Digital revolution takes on movie industry

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With Hollywood's largest studios launching a download-and-own film service via rivals Movielink.com and Cinemanow.com, the move towards digital distribution also means the move toward D-Cinema.

The movie industry may soon be taking the lead from its independent filmmaking colleagues making a significant move towards digital filmmaking. That could be the catalyst for the digital revolution in every arena of the film industry.

"This is a landmark development in the evolution of home entertainment," said Benjamin Feingold, Sony's president of worldwide home entertainment, digital distribution and acquisition. "Allowing consumers to download and own movies digitally via their broadband Internet connections, gives them more power to be entertained when and how they choose."

Sony Pictures Entertainment was among those studios partnering in the Movielink deal, which also includes Paramount Pictures, Universal Studios, Warner Brothers, MGM Studios and 20th Century Fox. Sony along with Lions Gate also has a deal with CinemaNow.

Earlier this year there was uncertainty when the movie industry was going to embrace digital distribution. Only a handful of companies had already started the trend, not including video-clip download sites.

Apple's iTunes allows consumers to purchase \$1.99 per TV episode downloads from ABC, NBC Universal, USA Network, Disney and the

Sci-Fi Channel, while TiVo and DIRECTV announced plans of a launch to-go service that allows transferring shows to portable media players.

The Starz Entertainment Group launched its own video-download service, Vongo, for purchase or download of its some 1,000 movies onto different consumer electronics.

Already video download and streaming sites have been providing content including do-it-yourself vids on eBaum's World, Google and YouTube sites as well as the successful indie short-film haven Atom Films, which has moved towards a multi-format download service.

And with big studios joining the bandwagon, such service may spell trouble for snail-mail DVD services like middlemen distributors Blockbuster and Netflix, which may be adapting quicker than intended if it means they could be cut out if not experience a split in the profitable revenue sector.

But movie theatres, not to be left out, will soon find themselves turning completely into digital cinemas within the next 10 years if not sooner, says John Fithian, president of the National Association of Theatre Owners.

"This will be the biggest transition in the movie theatre industry since the advent of sound," he said.

That means over the next several years the some 6,114 movie theatres that exist in the United States today will make that move, which will result in them ultimately downloading movies from satellite or broadband or receiving HD disk tape, replacing the expensive and fragile 35 mm cellulite film stock on bulky reels.

According to Fithian, the industry has already spent five years

transferring to digital technologies with technical specifications that promote compatibility and interoperability, enhancing quality levels with the best visual systems, and financing the transition.

Digital for the theater not only provides owners a solution to deteriorating film but enhances the patron's experience, Fithian noted.

With D-Cinema, it signals 3-D production of high-quality experience and provides greater flexibility in programming, which would include music concerts, sports and more indie movies.

But this move towards digital distribution both in home delivery and theater also suggests the drive to digital filmmaking. Hollywood has been slow to adopt digital filmmaking, unlike its up-and-coming independent colleagues who have embraced the digital movement as a cost-effective approach to making films.

And the accessibility provided by digital video is a major step into democratization of the film industry, says Connecticut-based independent filmmaker A.D. Calvo of Goodnight Film.

The digital movement along with the Internet, Calvo says, has in fact opened up the filmmaking realm by allowing anyone to get involved with a decent camera and good footage, making it more economically efficient in producing and disseminating.

"LA has been slow to adapt new technology," says the filmmaker, whose most notable work is a documentary on now infamous nude-Britney-Spears-birth-on-a-bearskin sculptor Daniel Edwards called "The Several Severed Heads of Daniel Edwards."

According to Calvo, Hollywood spends a huge amount of money to digitize film after shooting in order to control color and visual effects in

the digital intermediate process and then converts it back in the film out process.

And he says while this process won't go away for major studio epics like "King Kong," most people don't notice subtleties of color, grains or resolutions, and because of this, Hollywood should allocate that money to fund more indie projects.

"People want a broader range of films and choice than millions of dollars spent on color touch-ups," Calvo said. "It makes sense to keep work entirely digital, that's what most indie films are doing."

The former software and interface developer interested in making psychological horror films was inspired by the good story-low cost J-Horror films or Japanese horror films that have inspired American movies like "The Ring" and "The Grudge."

And the low-cost digital movement is making that dream possible for him.

"It's an avenue for new talent to get their works seen, short film or demo reels," he said. "And as a director, with digital video, I don't have to view daily screenings but see the takes on the set and get multiple cameras and shoot more coverage at a lower cost."

Still at the end of the day, Calvo says two things are the most important.

"Even with technology, it comes back to story and acting," he said, "but it is making the cost of production go down, providing more choices for consumers to choose from, and making niche films a profit."

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