

Amazon to produce, acquire original movies (Update)

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Amazon is getting into the movie business.

Amazon Studios announced Monday that it will significantly expand into movie production by acquiring films for theatrical release and early-window streaming through its subscription service, Amazon Prime Instant Video. A key part of the new venture is to shrink what's historically been a three-month window reserved for theaters, instead getting movies to its website four to eight weeks after theatrical release.

Roy Price, vice president of Amazon Studios, said the company's goal is to produce 12 movies a year, with production beginning later this year.

"Not only will we bring Prime Instant Video customers exciting, unique and exclusive films soon after a movie's theatrical run, but we hope this program will also benefit filmmakers, who too often struggle to mount fresh and daring stories that deserve an audience," said Price.

The announcement marks a new foray into the movie business for the online retail giant, which has in recent years developed a slate of TV series since Amazon Studios launched in 2010. Most recently, its acclaimed "Transparent" won two Golden Globe awards, including best comedy or musical series.

Independent film producer Ted Hope, who co-founded the production company Good Machine, will oversee creative development for the new unit, Amazon Original Movies.

The move marks the latest major digital player pushing into Hollywood's movie business. Netflix last year inked deals with Adam Sandler and the Weinstein Co.

Amazon's entry into movies also comes on the heels of Sony Pictures' unprecedented digital distribution of the Seth Rogen comedy "The Interview," the first major studio film to be released simultaneously in theaters, online and on video-on-demand platforms.

Top North American theater chains have vigorously protested such moves. On Friday, Patrick Corcoran, vice president of the National Association of Theater Owners, fired back at those who saw Sony Pictures' digital release of "The Interview" as a sign of things to come. Corcoran said the movie's release "doesn't change anything," and noted that its two-week \$31.5 million digital gross was far less the film would have made at multiplexes.

But new entrants such as Amazon and Netflix don't have to worry about

theater chains the way Hollywood studios do. Any Amazon Studios movie release will likely only play in independent theaters.

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