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## Disney Bets Big on 3D

April 11, 2008

By Steve Sechrist

Not sure the 3D cinema revolution is "real"? The Walt Disney Company's recent announcement may change your mind. The studio along with sister company Pixar Animation said this week they plan to roll out ten new animated films well into the next decade (through 2012 to be exact).



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The announcement was given at a New York press conference by Disney Studios chairman Dick Cook, and Pixar Animation Studios John Lasseter. They said, "Starting later this year with the release of Disney's Bolt, all Disney and Pixar animated features will be presented in state-of-the-art Disney Digital 3D. Additionally, newly converted 3D versions of the beloved classics, *Toy Story* and *Toy Story 2* are set to debut in 2009 and 2010 respectively."

Disney isn't the first studio to commit to an all-3D format. Back in 2007 DreamWorks Animation (DWA) announced it would be an all-3D house from 2009. What is significant about the Disney announcement, according to London-based Screen



*The new look of 3D in theaters*

Digest, is that together the two powerhouse animation studio's represent about half of the fifty or so announced titles to be produced in 3D and a full two-thirds of these are animation films. Screen Digest sees this commitment to 3D as a tipping point for the animation genre. We agree.

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But that's not to say 3D is in an animation niche. The prior financial success of *Beowulf*, *U23D* and more recently Disney's 3D concert film, *Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus*, which grossed over \$65.0M from just 683 locations, offer studios compelling reasons to jump on the 3D bandwagon. And, many live-action films rely on computer-generated special effects, which, like animation, can adapt well to 3D production techniques.



Beyond the higher associated costs, complexity and shortage of venues to display 3D, live action titles are growing in number. The next big release due out this summer is a 3D remake of the 1958 Jules Verne classic, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. There are other live action 3D projects in the works from New Line /Warner and Lionsgate that including portions of 2D films that will be reworked in 3D for viewing at IMAX theaters. In fact, Screen Digest reports fifteen new 3D features scheduled for release in 2009 including four from Disney, two from Fox, and one each from Dreamworks, New Line, Lionsgate and Focus Features.

So for now the gating issue doesn't seem to be lack of content, but venues to display the 3D titles. There are currently 1,298 3D enabled screens, and those, according to Research and Markets, these are highly concentrated among the leading exhibitors. But there is progress in the build-out. The research group also said nearly two thirds of all 3D equipped screens were added in the first half 2007 alone and predict that globally, there will be over 5,900 digital 3D screens by 2009, with 70% of that number in the US.

One final note, this week marked the passage of the 55th anniversary of the first major studio release of a 3D title. That honor goes to *Man in the Dark* that opened at the Globe Theater in New York City on April 8th 1953, just two days prior to the more well known, *The House of Wax*. So why did it take fifty-five years to reach the tipping point in 3D? Maybe we all just had to get used to those funky glasses.

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