



VIDEO STORE MAGAZINE

As seen in

By Dan Bennett

Before novice viewers get too excited, know this about large-format video titles: When you insert such a title into your DVD player, you won't see it played out on your television screen and the ceiling of your home, with characters 12 stories high and waterfalls threatening to crash through your living room.

Large format video titles are big, yes, but not big as seen in IMAX®-styled theaters. Rather, the size of large-format titles, industry supporters say, is measured in quality.

Many are well done, entertaining films, accomplished on mostly small budgets in sometimes brutal conditions.

They are often educational, sometimes spectacular, sometimes intimate.

And you can't always say things like that about the 12 movies playing at your local stadium-seating multiplex.

"Things have gone well for large-format video recently," said Mitch Perliss, VP and General Manager of SlingShot Entertainment, which has dozens of large format titles in its catalog, and plenty of new releases.

"This is a format that distinguishes itself from other similar special interest video product because it is theatrical, unlike other product that appeared only on television.

"Large-format titles have a certain cachet. People stood in line to see them in theaters, and they paid as much to see these films as they did to see *Shrek* or *Black Hawk Down*. This is truly theatrical product."



SlingShot Entertainment's *Haunted Castle*

Large format began in the early 1970s with the technological breakthroughs designed by IMAX®. The Toronto-based film company has remained the leader in the field, through financial highs and lows, still churning out solid product while also leasing its equipment and technology to a multitude of new large-format production companies that have emerged in recent years.

IMAX® theaters multiplied, and eventually the titles made their way to home video – first on VHS, where they were met with mild consumer interest, then for a time on laserdisc, where they looked great, but wouldn't sell in that doomed format.

DVD has boosted the large-format video industry, though VHS still sells, especially in video stores, museum gift shops, the lobbies of IMAX® theaters and mass-merchant stores.

In 2000, IMAX® theaters grossed more than \$450 million in the United States, with more than 75 million customers visiting IMAX® theaters. There are now more than 200 IMAX® theaters worldwide, often partnered with major theater chains. The films that arrive in those theaters come from IMAX® and various companies.

Invariably, these films are short but tower-

Made for extra-large screens, large-format movies won't show up 12 stories tall in your living room, but they're dressed to impress on high-quality film.

Livin' Large

Large-format films like the larger-than-life documentary subjects IMAX® has been pumping out since the 1970s are coming into their own as a special interest format thanks to DVD. Even though it's confined to the small screen on video, the superior sound and visual quality of the disc format lends itself to movies filmed on this grand scale.

ing. They make an impact. And suppliers say the home video industry, now more than ever, should share in that impact.

SlingShot offers retailers such titles as *Bears*, *Antarctica*, *Amazing Journeys* and *The Great Barrier Reef*, all produced by various companies and originally seen in IMAX® Theaters.

"We've gone out and partnered with more than a dozen independent companies to bring large-format titles to home video," Perliss said. "When we started in 1998, our basic concept was to establish a niche that was unique to us. Because we aren't a production company with our own films, we sought a niche we could be important in, and these large-format titles were not widely available on home video.

"We wanted to establish ourselves as important to the producers who made these films, and important to the video retail community who wanted to profit by selling them."

Warner Home Video, as part of its well regarded special-interest documentary line, enjoys several IMAX®-specific titles, including *T-Rex: Back to the Cretaceous*, *Fires of Kuwait* and several space-themed titles.

"Since Warner Home Video is a leading provider of documentaries in the video industry, we have several long-term strategic alliances already in place, IMAX® being one of them," said Douglas Wadleigh, VP of Marketing, special interest, for Warner Home Video.

"Our release strategy started back in May of last year, with *Blue Planet* and *The Dream Is Alive*, followed by the launch of our next three space programs – *Destiny in Space*, *Mission to Mir* and *Hail Columbia!* These titles [helped Warner] in finding and attracting a video audience eager for large-format content."

C o n s u m e r awareness of IMAX® helps push these titles, Wadleigh said, with strong brand name, reputable content and compelling stories. Likewise, the advent of DVD has helped earn the respect of customers wary of large-format titles shown on television screens.

"These are fantastically well done films, with crisp, rich imagery," Wadleigh said. "The strength of the technology holds up on DVD."

"Another reason these titles do well on DVD is that the early adopters of DVD technology are into this type of content. They are rounding out their home collections with this high-end product."

Likewise, the large-format DVD titles roar with extras, perfect for the product because they allow filmmakers to add

elements that didn't make it into the theatrical releases, often less than an hour in length.

"Because the films were shot in 70mm and were created for the large screen, the quality of the picture is very strong," Perliss said. "What we also offer is the power of Dolby 5.1 and DTS. You may not get the enormity of an 80-foot bear coming at you, but there are other things that make large-format stand out."

SlingShot has even put together a package of 3-D titles that were first seen in IMAX® theaters, complete with 3D viewing kit.

"There are already 300,000 consumers playing 3-D games on the Internet, so the audience is built in," Perliss said. "We've had very positive feedback."

Helping raise consumer awareness for large-format titles has been an increasing

star presence, with narrators of recent films including Harrison Ford, Charlton Heston and James Earl Jones, and composers such as Sting. On April 17, IMAX® hosts the world premiere of the Tom Cruise-narrated *Space Station* at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

"The talent in these films is taking the format to a whole new level and will attract entirely new audiences," Wadleigh said.

Steven Morris is president of Montreal-based TVA International, a



Wild Australia – The Edge

longtime player in the large-format theatrical market. The company recently released its debut DVD, *Great North*, which guides viewers through the land, traditions and cultures of the Inuit.

Morris is interested in the format – one that prides itself on education, but also scores with titles starring Michael Jordan and cartoon characters.

"This is an interesting and somewhat unsettling time for the large-format industry, because we are all trying to figure out where it is heading," Morris said. "Will we become increasingly entertainment driven, or stay focused on education?"

"My view is that we should stay true to our roots, and make films appropriate for museums and space centers."

"But there's also something to be said about the consumer appeal of the entertainment titles, and how they bring people to large-format when otherwise they might not have interest."

A big-screen filmmaker, Morris says he's pleased with how large-format films are transferring to DVD.

"The added values are just what we needed to help explain what we do," Morris said. "This is a content-driven medium, and there is plenty of exciting content."

"If people bring a large-format title home, then want to learn even more about an ancient civilization, we're doing something right."

Marketing of large-format titles has also proved to be a creative endeavor. SlingShot ties into education programs and struck a partnership with Langer Juice Co. in which the company's juices will feature key art from the large-format titles, offering an instant \$2 off on the SlingShot titles originally shown in IMAX® theaters.

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Mitch Perliss
SlingShot Entertainment



Lost Worlds: Life in the Balance

Warner Home Video has combined its IMAX® space titles in all-for-one packages, instituted three-for-one deals in its Warner Explorations line and partnered with educational facilities, the online company Space.com and museums.

"The marketing of these titles is the fun part, because there are so many different avenues to reach the audience," Wadleigh said. "You don't have the big budget like you do on a feature film, so you get very focused."

Retail support has been very strong, Wadleigh says, especially in specialty accounts.

"But there has also been a significant volume at mass retail: the Wal-Marts, Kmart and Targets," he said. "This surprised us somewhat. We knew the appeal to specialty store audiences, but when we saw the sellthrough numbers at Wal-Mart, we knew we had gems on our hands."

Both VHS and DVD product is doing well at museums, zoos and specialty stores, Perliss says, crossing over through demographics that include young male viewers, families and seniors.

Now, how to keep things going? "Our challenge now is to continue replenishing with a continuous flow of new content," Wadleigh said. "We don't want to flood the market, and we don't necessarily want to see huge, dedicated sections in every store."

"We don't want to over-proliferate the market and make this product less than special, so we will have timely, disciplined releases."

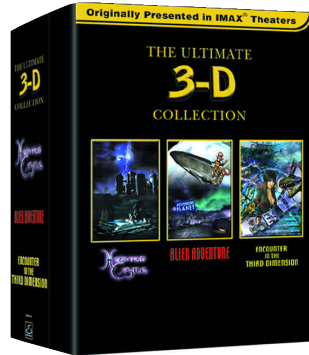
The large-format video industry is optimistic about the future, Perliss says.

"It is obviously viable," he said. "Think of movies in their theatrical runs. A big Hollywood title has done very well if it stays in theaters for 14 weeks. A large-format title sometimes stays in theaters for five to seven years. That says something about popularity."

SlingShot Entertainment

A committed presence in the large-format video industry, with dozens of titles. New and upcoming releases include *Origins of Life*, *Wild Australia – The Edge*, *India: Kingdom of the Tiger*, *Solarmax*, *Bears*, *Lost Worlds*, *Amazing Journeys*, *Sydney: The Story of a City* and *Great North*. It

also has the *Ultimate 3D Collection*, which includes three titles – *Haunted Castle*, *Alien Adventure* and *Encounter in the Third Dimension* – and a 3D Home Theater Viewing System. Catalog title include *Africa: The Serengeti*, *Antarctica*, *The Great Barrier Reef*, *Ring of Fire* and *Whales*.



Also

There are dozens of large-format titles released through a wide variety of producers and suppliers, available through most major distribution channels. These



titles include *Dolphins*, *Extreme*, *Rolling Stones: Live at the Max*, *Tropical Rainforest*, *Titanica*, *The Living Sea*, *Super Speedway*, *The Eruption of Mt St Helens*, *Ozarks* and *Wings of Courage*, among many others.

Top 10 Large-Format Films

(based on box office results from March 1-7, as reported on GiantScreenBiz.com)

1. *Beauty and the Beast*
2. *Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure*
3. *Encounter in the Third Dimension (3D Mania)*
4. *T-Rex: Back to the Cretaceous*
5. *China: The Panda Adventure*
6. *Extreme*
7. *Cirque du Soleil: Journey of Man*
8. *Haunted Castle*
9. *Wings of Courage*
10. *Cyberworld*



Africa: The Serengeti