

CASE STUDY

RA.ONE – Strategizing the Business Perspective in Bollywood

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ABSTRACT

The case is focused on the business perspective of the Bollywood movie Ra.One. It took 4 years to conceptualize and 2 years of intense hard work at a cost of Rs. 160 crores approximately to come in its present form in front of audience. Although Bollywood has almost abstained from making super hero films, yet producer and director were confident enough about success of the project. Focusing on the business perspective, marketing of the movie was unprecedented and started 9 months prior to release. Lots of buzz was created using careful placement of news items and skillful use of social medium like twitter. The film was released on more than 4000 screens simultaneously throughout the globe. The collection of few days' revenue recovered the investments and overall revenue was Rs. 228 crores. The film proved to be a successful business project. Considering the creative perspective, the film has weaknesses in script characterization and over emphasis has been given on special effects.

Key Words: Ra.One, G.One, Buzz Marketing, Censorship ratings, Merchandising.

INTRODUCTION

Ra.One (Full form - Random Access Version 1.0) is an Indian Science Fiction Superhero commercial feature film, written and directed by Mr. Anubhav Sinha, released in October 2011. The film features Shahrukh Khan (SRK) in dual roles, Kareena Kapoor and Arjun Rampal in the lead character roles. Shahana Goswami, Dalip Tahil, Tom Wu (Chinese-American actor) and Armaan Verma in supporting roles; along with Rajnikanth, Sanjay Dutt and Priyanka Chopra making special guest appearances.

The film highlights relationship of a typical Indian father and son, their aspirations, ambitions, dreams, desires and expectations from each others; and how life changes their perceptions. The story progresses with computer game development and virtual world; leading to creation of villain by father, and ends as super hero defeating the villain. Ra.One was jointly produced by Eros International and Red Chillies Entertainment (Shahrukh Khan's production company).

Starting with a small concept by Anubhav Sinha in 2004; the concept evolved and became a full film script in 3 years. After finalizing the story, pre-production work began after the release of Khan's Om Shanti Om in 2007. The visual effects of the film were carried out by Red Chillies VFX, under the supervision of Hollywood effects technician Jeffrey Kleiser, with an

expense of 135 crores, and were claimed to be most advance and unique.

Ra.One is the most expensive film ever produced in Indian cinema history till that time, with an estimated budget of Rs 135 crores in the beginning that was revised to Rs 160 crores later. The movie had an estimated budget of Rs 52 crores for marketing, which set the record for largest marketing budget in India. The film faced multiple problems prior to its release, including censorship, soundtrack 'leaks' and copyrights. The film witnessed a level of advertising and publicity campaign previously unseen in Indian film industry. Ra.One had its marketing plan extending over a period of nine months and involving major brand tie-ups, merchandise, theme-based video games and extensive viral marketing. The marketing strategy systematically recovered project cost by exploiting the brand placements, merchandising, selling music rights, etc.

Prior to its worldwide release, Ra.One had multiple premieres in Dubai, London and Toronto during the period of October 24 – 26, 2011. Ra.One was the largest Indian cinematic release in the world. The film went on to break multiple box-office records, including highest Diwali day collections, highest single-day collections, highest three-day collections in Indian and biggest overseas collections of 2011. The film has been widely praised for its visual effects and action, though criticism has been generated regarding its weak script and story gaps that revealed directors failure.

PRODUCTION FACTS AND FIGURES

Pre-production work for the film began in November 2007 after the release of Khan's Om Shanti Om in 2007. Khan and Sinha both spent several months going through video clips, digital art portals and comic books in order to understand attributes which audience loved in super hero films. They watched as many as 200 superhero films in multiple languages from all over the world including Spider-Man (2002), Batman (1989) and Krrish (2006).

Casting and Shooting

Principal photography for the film began in March 2009; one-and-a-half years after pre-production work began. As a way to make his character more believable, Khan decided that he would perform his own stunts in the film. Sinha approached his friend Arjun Rampal to take up the title role of a villain in the film, to which he readily agreed. Kareena Kapoor was later signed on to play the female lead. Child actor Armaan Verma was selected to play the role of Prateek. In July 2010, it was announced that Chinese-American actor Tom Wu would be part of the film.

Sanjay Dutt and Priyanka Chopra were confirmed to make guest appearances while actor Rajinikanth was slated to perform in a special scene. Later on, it was announced that Amitabh Bachchan would be doing a voice-over for an important scene in the film.

The shooting of the movie was originally supposed to begin in Miami, USA; but due to budget concerns this was scrapped. The first phase production began in India in March, 2010 and continued till May, 2010 in Mumbai's Film City and Goa. Production of the film's second and third phase occurred with the entire cast in London, which included a song sequence being shot in a restaurant from where the London Bridge was visible. The film's final phase commenced at Filmistan Studio in December, 2010 and was shot over seven days. The remaining portions were shot in Mumbai and completed in July 2011. A music video for the song 'Raftaarein', choreographed by Feroz Khan on Shahrukh Khan, was shot one week before the release of the film.

Post-production

The film's crew consisted of more than 5,000 members from India, Italy and the US working in shifts, in and around 15 studios across the world. Nicola Pecorini was roped in as the director of photography, V. Manikandan providing extra assistance and Martin Walsh was responsible to edit the film. Sound designer Resul Pookutty was assigned the duty of enhancing the sound effects with the use of the Dolby Surround 7.1 system. In October 2011, post-production work on Ra.One faced a minor setback when Pookutty's studio space in Andheri, Mumbai got flooded and eventually damaged some of the film's footage.

Due to the revived interest in 3D technology in India, makers of the film announced that they were contemplating on turning portions of the movie into 3D. Khan revealed that parts of the film may be converted to 3D, provided tests and screen shots of some scenes of the film were deemed satisfactory by the technical crew. However, there was a good deal of skepticism regarding such conversions, especially since 3D shooting required completely different types of cameras. In July 2011, it was announced that the entire film would be converted into 3D, a process that required the collaboration of around 1,000 individuals. 'Prime Focus', which had gained considerable experience for performing 3D conversions of major Hollywood productions like 'The Chronicles of Narnia' (2010) and 'Transformers: Dark of the Moon' (2011), were tasked with the 3D conversion of Ra.One.

Visual Effects

Extensive research was carried out by the Red Chillies crew, and no other new films were accepted by the studio after My Name Is Khan (2010), to keep focus on Ra.One. To minimize the risk of future delays, the task of adding special effects was outsourced to multiple specialty studios around the globe. In addition, Prime Focus also provided digital and visual effects services to Red Chillies VFX for the film.

Impressed by the work he had seen in 1994 Hollywood release Stargate, Jeff Kleiser was hired by Khan as the supervisor of visual effects in May, 2010. A team of 750 technicians under Kleiser carried out the addition of special effects into the film.

Special effects creator Robert Kurtzman was assigned to design the suits of Khan and Rampal's characters.

The film is reported to have close to 3,500 VFX shots (occupying about 135 minutes of footage), with 800 of them being solely dedicated to G.One's shots alone, thus exceeding the total amount of shots that was used in the 2009 Hollywood film *Avatar*. There is no software or technique in the film industry that Red Chillies had not used for *Ra.One*. For 3D, they had used software like Maya, Houdini and Macs. For composites, they used Nuke and Shake. It was estimated that about 60% of the film is visual effects.

Soundtrack

The soundtrack of *Ra.One* released by T-Series on September 12, 2011; was composed by Vishal-Shekhar with lyrics penned by Atahar Panchi, Vishal Dadlani and Kumar. Director Anubhav Sinha announced that singer Akon would be recording two songs for the film while the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra would also be making a contribution. The makers of the film have complied with international copyright laws and have obtained the license to use Ben E. King's 'Stand by Me', on which they have based the song 'Dildaara'.

The music album features fifteen tracks including seven original songs, four remixes, three instrumentals and an international version of 'Chamma Challo'. Subsequently, the Tamil and Telugu versions of the film's soundtrack were released on October 10, 2011; featuring six tracks each.

MARKETING STRATEGY

Ever since its inception, movie making business has changed in leaps and bounces, and now it is a full-fledged business which requires management concepts specially advertising, promotion, operational processes etc. Over a period of two decades, the Indian movie industry has churned out largest number of movies; some of them generating revenues of over Rs. 100 crores. However, in 2011 Indian super star Shahrukh Khan's magnum opus has redefined the ways movies are being marketed in India. Popular film star Shahrukh Khan's movie *Ra.One* had generated buzz even before the movie was to be released.

The total marketing budget for the film is said to be about Rs 52 crores, which includes Rs 15 crores for online promotions. Rs 14 crores have reportedly been earmarked for promotion on news channels, a fortnight before release. Print advertisements have been booked in all leading publications while 1,700 billboards will show SRK in his superhero gear - the role he plays in the movie. Some of the innovative marketing strategies which have caught the attraction of over a billion Indians and others are discussed below.

Production and Branding

The movie's biggest USP is the presence of Bollywood star Shahrukh Khan as a super hero. This concept in itself is very unique and has been used sparingly in the Indian film industry. The fact that India's most popular film star coming up in a new

avatar, with Kareena; another top actress, attracted attention quickly. Apart from this, roping in popular international singer Akon added a different dimension to the branding of the movie.

The curiosity triggering events like the costume publicity in media ensured that the public curiosity is kept alive. It was repeatedly claimed by producer, director and Shahrukh Khan that the special effects of *Ra.One* were unparalleled and the Hindi Cinema had never seen it. This kept the buzz flowing.

Advertising, Marketing and Co-branding

Newspapers, popular websites, magazines, music channels etc. are flooded with advertisement posters of the movie, showcasing unique characters much before the movie is released. Tie-ups with popular brands are also done as a part of co-branding and increasing the credibility of the movie.

Merchandising

As far as Bollywood is concerned, no movie has been associated with exclusive movie merchandise products. *Krrish* tried, but was not too successful. It was not handled too professionally as it was in the case of *Ra.One*. Merchandising enables the target audience to relate to the brand and helps them become a part of the product. *Ra.One* is the first movie in India to come up with an exclusive store having merchandise for the people to purchase. Toys, computer accessories, t-shirts, apparels, stationery, coffee mugs, wrist bands, watches etc. were all part of the merchandising available online as well as at popular destinations like McDonalds.

Video Games and Comics

Video games related to movies are a popular concept in Hollywood; it was a fairly new concept in Bollywood. Sony along with Red Chillies released a Play Station 3 game for *Ra.One* featuring all the characters. Also, it was the first movie to come up with a comic series showcasing the characters and promoting the film. Even iPad and Android appliances are available for *Ra.One* movie.

Release and Premiere

The movie was released at over 3000 screens in India and over 1000 screens abroad. Apart from this, premieres at international destinations like Dubai, Toronto and London; which have a high popularity for Indian films.

Marketing Mantra creates Buzz

An excellent marketing strategy adopted by the producers of the movie *Ra.One* managed to generate a lot of positive word-of-mouth communication. Co-produced by Red Chillies Entertainment, *Ra.One* is considered an expensive Bollywood film and was the most advertised film as well; the expectations were pushed up by news channels and media. SRK knew the pulse of Indian public; hence look of the film's title character *Ra.One*, portrayed by Rampal, was heavily guarded and kept under strict wraps. The first look of the character was initially scheduled to be revealed on the eve of Dusshera. According to the producers, the time was chosen to show the symbolism

between Ra.One and the mythological villain Ravana (of the Ramayana), both of whom are supposedly 'equally bad'.

SRK kicked off the promotions of Ra.One in January 2011, when he unveiled the first look on his twitter page. It was followed with a 10-second trailer during the World Cup semi-final match between India and Australia. This was done almost 7 months prior to the film's release in October 2011. Shahrukh Khan, who has also toured 10 cities in India, interacted with his fans, danced with them, distributed Ra.One collectibles and mesmerized them with his wit and charm. In March-April 2011, he has appeared on three reality show finales — India's Got Talent, Just Dance and Sa Re Ga Ma Little Champions. A couple of days ago, he was on the hot seat of Kaun Banega Crorepati with Amitabh Bachchan. He launched the Ra.One game on Sony Play Station and social games on Indiatimes to attract children.

Even brands that SRK does not endorse were associated with Ra.One. One such was Western Union, a leader in global payment services, which will soon launch a million dollar global mass-media campaign in association with Ra.One. It encompasses TV, radio, print and outdoor advertising as well as local activities at Western Union's agent locations. It was a win-win deal for both Ra.One and Western Union.

Another interesting thing never done before by a Bollywood film was the association with Google and YouTube. Google and YouTube had launched a custom built movie channel for Ra.One, which will host promotional video content for Ra.One premiere and red carpet events planned in London. Shahrukh Khan will also among one of the first Indian celebrities to be on the Google+ platform and engage his fans.

Leveraging the movie's hi-end graphics and special effects, the channel will also host games, digital comics and unique contests where participants get a chance to create Ra.One promotions from clips, music and dialogues of the film. SRK also planned tie up with McDonalds for toys. All brands whether it is luxury or small want to piggy back on SRK's popularity. Luxury bike Ducati, apparel brand Tommy Hilfiger, Videocon, Tag Heuer, Sony Computer Entertainment Incorporation and Volkswagen AG; among others, had signed up for Ra.One.

The promotion of the film was similar to the way Hollywood producers promote their films. Lots of money was riding on Ra.One. The way Shahrukh Khan was going about the marketing and promotional strategy; it considerably reduced his dependence on box office revenues for the movie. It is understood from industry sources that almost 80 percent of the cost will be recovered from the pre-licensed content distributed across platforms such as cable, digital, home theatre, etc., before the film hits the theatre.

Ra.One team used several innovations in the promotion of the movie. For instance, there will be 3,600 feet long fan mail, collecting audience wishes and messages, as lead actor's travels to 36 cities across the world to promote the film. The

movie would definitely prove to be a landmark in the Indian film industry for its advertising and marketing strategies.

Positioning

The positioning of the movie was done considering the following points:

- Target children audience up to 15 years of age.
- Urban dominated script, NRI family and metro life.
- Competition from Hollywood, Hindi dubbed films.
- Curiosity triggering events like the Costume Publicity in Media.
- Release Timing, perfect Diwali.
- SRK and Kareena Kapoor, lead actor and actress of Bollywood.
- Akon's song.
- Released simultaneously on 4000 screens.
- Released in 3D effect.
- A third of the film's budget has gone into special effects. Ra.One boasts of 3,500 VFX shots. James Cameron's Avatar had just 2,700.

Censorship Ratings

On October 14, 2011; Ra.One was submitted to the Central Board of Film Certification to receive an official rating. After submitting the script, the board showed strong objections to the film action scenes as they felt that it would influence young children to emulating them. After much deliberation, the film was passed with a 'U' certificate without any cuts, but only under the conditions that it would display prominent disclaimers stating that the stunts should not be imitated and were computer-generated.

Decision Day

During the time period of October 24 – 26, 2011; Ra.One had its international premieres in three cities namely Dubai, London and Toronto. All of these cities were chosen keeping in mind their large international significance, as well as the presence of large south Asian populations. The film's first international premiere was held in Dubai on October 24, 2011 at the Grand Cinemas, Wafi, along with co-stars Kareena Kapoor and Arjun Rampal, followed by a high-profile dinner and charity auction; where Shahrukh Khan had raised Kuwaiti Dollar 30,000 for building a workshop for children with special needs for India and abroad. The premiere is notably first Indian film to sell tickets for its shows, as well as, to have three simultaneous screenings for the event. The London premiere of the film took place at the O2 Cineworld on October 25, 2011 while the Toronto premiere took place at the TIFF Bell Lightbox on October 26, 2011.

Nationally, the film released in 3,000 screens, way ahead of Bodyguard (2011), which was released in 2,700 screens in India. Overseas, it was released in around 1,000 screens.

Moreover, Ra.One 3D version released in 550 selected screens around the world. The dubbed versions have released in 250 screens across south India. The film's release has also been noted for its wide use of digital prints, as an effort to bring down distribution costs, release the film to a wider audience and also reduce piracy. A week prior to its release, multiplex owners across India decided to allot the project with 95% of the total available screen space.

REVENUE

Pre-release revenue

In March 2011, it was announced that the television broadcasting rights for Ra.One had been sold to Star India for a record sum of Rs. 40 crores surpassing the previous record set by 3 Idiots (2009) of Rs. 33 crores. The film's music rights were bought by T-Series for Rs. 15 crores while the distribution rights were acquired by Eros Entertainment for Rs. 77 crores. The distribution rights for the film in Tamil Nadu and Kerala were bagged by Abirami Ramanathan for a reportedly record, but undisclosed price. Ra.One set a new record for total pre-release revenue earned, netting Rs. 132 crores, and surpassed the previous record held by 3 Idiots, which had netted Rs. 85 crores.

Market Economics of the movie

Shahrukh Khan has left no stone unturned and has come out of around 50 products as a multi-facet franchise from graphic novels to social games and action figures for Ra.One. SRK starrer films have ruled the overseas box-office charts and it is expected that Ra.One will yield a distributor share of Rs. 40-45 crores approximately, from the overseas markets. Ra.One will have a five day weekend at release and is expected to yield a distributor share of Rs. 55-60 crores approximately, from Indian movie markets in its first week. The movie was released in more than 3000 prints all over India and 1000 prints abroad. Ra.One will also be released in Telugu, Tamil and German.

Box office

The world wide box office collection of the movie on November 14, 2011 is about Rs. 228 crores approximately. Box Office declared the film a 'hit' in India, and a 'super hit' in the overseas market.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MOVIE

Ra.One saw an opening of 70-100% occupancy levels all over India, with full houses in many multiplexes which is lesser than expected occupancy level. It was mainly affected due to the Diwali festivities, which took a decrease on the evening shows. The morning opening was described as 'historic' by several trade analysts. Generally, 3D version of the film saw better occupancy levels than the 2D version. Families and children comprised of the major demographics of Ra.One audience.

The high budget of the film was another area of concern for the film, as these meant high prices for distributor rights and lesser chances of profits. Some trade analysts were, however,

quite positive about the film. As noted by Ormax Media, a specialist consumer research company for films; Ra.One set records for buzz and reach among audience even six weeks before release. Moreover, Ra.One team adopted unique and vast marketing campaign, which was unheard before. It was also widely noted that in spite of high cost of the movie and the seemingly risky venture, Khan managed to recover most of the film's production costs well before the release time through various film rights and sponsor tie-ups. As time progressed, the layered marketing campaign coupled with extensive brand tie-ups and new concepts built up to a very high expectation level among the audience.

The visual and special effects are spectacular which designed them and brought them alive. The top-notch effects are the only reason for most viewers for watching the movie. The producers paid so much attention to the look and presentation of the movie that they overlooked its content and substance.

Movies tell us stories, stories inspire us; and Ra.One lacked a well crafted story. Weak plotline, random song and dance routines and a plethora of tacky jokes, made a super hero movie, a B grade Bollywood movie.

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