

THE AUSTRALIAN

Paramount gets an outing

Sandy George - February 22, 2007

A CHANGE in arrangements behind the Australian release of a significant number of big US films will bring the Paramount logo out from backstage.

"It is one of Hollywood's great brands but internationally it has been lying dormant," Paramount Pictures Australia managing director Mike Selwyn said.

Up until this year Mr Selwyn has headed the Australian office of United International Pictures, which has distributed 30 to 40 films a year on behalf of US studios Universal, Paramount and DreamWorks SKG.

But, driven by the increasingly lucrative revenues available from outside North America, the two US studios are breaking apart the UIP joint venture in many countries.

"It is a new dynamic company that happens to be 95 years old," Selwyn said.

"Paramount internationally will be light years away from UIP ... initiatives had to be agreed by both partners so, essentially, there were no initiatives because they were competitors." In other words, both were firing on all cylinders.

Paramount executives, including Paramount Pictures International president Andrew Cripps, say they are keen to get into production partnerships and acquire local films across the world to release alongside Paramount's own films.

Mr Selwyn said the Australian industry had not been making films of a large enough scale and Paramount intended helping change this. But nothing would happen overnight, and change would depend on government incentives.

Up to 30 films will be released annually by Paramount. The different brands include DreamWorks, DreamWorks Animation, Paramount

Vantage, MTV and Nickelodeon.

UIP's biggest hits in 2006 were Over the Hedge, MI:3 and You, Me and Dupree.

Selwyn expects his most popular films in 2007 to be Shrek the Third (pictured), Transformers, The Bee Movie and Mr Bean's Holiday.

Paramount will continue to release Universal films until July 1, then the new office of Universal Pictures International Australasia will take over under Mike Beard, starting with the release of Evan Almighty.

Revenues from outside North America account for 60-70 per cent of the total theatrical business for the US studios.