

# MINI MAYA AIMS HIGH

## Distrib hopes to break into Latino market

By ANNA MARIE DE LA FUENTE

**M**ini-Latino studio Maya Entertainment is steadily building its empire, snapping up 10 theatrical and 30 straight-to-DVD Latino-themed pics for distribution in the U.S. since its launch in February, and exploring a diversity of revenue streams. Sister exhibition company Maya Cinemas will reach its initial target of nearly 100 screens by next year.

As the only Latino-owned-and-managed production/distribution/exhibition company in the U.S., Maya is facing its challenges head on. "We're still going through a learning cycle, but we're proud of what we've built," says Maya founder-chairman Moctesuma Esparza, a vet producer whose credits include "Selena," "The Milagro Beanfield War" and HBO's "Walkout."

Maya Releasing's aim is to put out at least eight pics per year, with upcoming titles including "Sleep Dealer" and "Mancora," as well as some 36 straight-to-DVD pics a year.

Distrib unit has released five pics so far, among which "Talento de Barrio," the bigscreen debut of Reggaeton star Daddy Yankee, has raked in \$1.6 million so far. Other pics have brought in smaller six-figure returns given their limited releases. Maya Entertainment Home Video forged a strategic pact with Wal-Mart, which accounts for 50% of the domestic home entertainment market.

"We've taken a practical, strategic approach to theatrical distribution by limiting our P&A costs per film for a start," says Maya co-chairman Jeff Valdez, founder of pioneering bilingual cable TV station SiTV. Both co-chairmen's deep ties to an array of Latino orgs and unions fuel Maya Releasing's grassroots campaigns.

On the production side — led by development head Sandra Avila — Maya has two pics in post and various film and TV projects in development. These include a 10-hour mini-series for HBO, "Rain of Gold," and slacker comedy feature "Hollywood Players," written and to be directed by Joaquin Perea.

"The beauty of film is that you can exploit it on multiple platforms," says Valdez, who is focusing on the company's goal to launch a Video-On-Demand service. Maya has also acquired LatinoReview.com, a 7-year-



Cine, Latin Universe, Arenas Entertainment) that faltered in their attempts to break into the elusive U.S. Latino market. The ace up its sleeve: Maya Cinema's growing chain of state-of-the-art megaplexes in underserved urban and rural areas through which it could release

old online entertainment news source.

Maya's vertical integration could help it avoid the fate of past Latino distribs (Televisa

its growing slate. "Just give us a few more years to figure out this theatrical (distribution) conundrum," acquisitions head Jose Martinez Jr. says.



"Talento de Barrio," above, and "Sleep Dealer" are on Maya's slate this year.

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47003 Valladolid, Spain  
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Fax: +34 983 42 64 61  
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