

Fox sets up Russian office with Gemini Film takeover

Brings local distrib into studio play

By Ray Bennett

LONDON — 20th Century Fox International on Monday launched its own theatrical and home entertainment distribution operation in Russia by taking over its longtime distributor Gemini Film and naming its chief, Michael Schlicht, as managing director.

No financial details were revealed for the deal under which all Gemini staff have become employees of Fox. It follows the Fox release in Russia of "Ice Age 2: The Meltdown," which had the biggest-ever opening for a non-Russian film, taking in \$8.6 million in its first weekend.



"X-Men: The Last Stand" will be the first pic distributed by Fox's new Russia unit.

"X-Men: The Last Stand" will be the first release under the new Fox banner on May 25. Gemini had distributed Fox pictures in the territory for more than a decade. The Fox

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Takeover

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shingle will operate in Russia and other CIS states, though the Gemini name will continue to be used in Ukraine and Siberia.

Christian Grass, 20th Century Fox International executive vp Europe, Middle East & Africa, said in a statement that Russia had become one of the Top 10 inter-

national territories in terms of revenue, with a \$420 million boxoffice projected for this year.

"The improvements in the exhibition sector and the resurgence of local films have ignited a revival of the Russian film industry. We are delighted that Michael Schlicht, who is such a force in the Russian market, has joined us as our managing director," Grass said.

In a statement, Gary Ferguson,

senior vp 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment International, said that while piracy remained a major concern in Russia, there had been a turn in the tide.

"The next few years will be a historic period in the battle to legitimize packaged entertainment in Eastern Europe, and here at 20th Century Fox we are committed to the forward evolution of that process," Ferguson said. ■