

Home Video

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■ If you want to watch 'J. F. K.' in private, you'll have a shorter wait than expected.

How fast can a hit film move from the theater to the video store? The prevailing wisdom in the business says the passage requires a couple of months for distributors to promote titles and for stores to order videocassettes. Now, however, Warner is halving that with its release of "J. F. K.," which is to appear in video stores on May 20. If other studios follow Warner's lead with their top movies, some big hits could virtually step from theater to store.

Instead of releasing "J. F. K.," which opened in theaters in December, in a summer already crowded with big titles (including "Cape Fear" and "The Addams Family" in June and "Bugsy," "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle" and, possibly, "The Prince of Tides" in July), Warner suddenly circled "J. F. K." back to late spring and jumped into a time slot where there is no competition.

The move, which was announced last week, cuts the traditional ordering period to four weeks from eight. Consequently, the film, which as of last week was still playing on 750 screens and had grossed nearly \$70 million, will be available in stores that much sooner.

Warner would not discuss its marketing decision. Jim Salzer, the owner of Salzer's Video in Ventura, Calif., theorized, "They saw an opening and dropped this into it." He and other dealers said they saw no problem with speeding up release schedules.



Melinda Sue Gordon/Paramount Pictures

Anjelica Huston and Raul Julia in "The Addams Family." Scheduled for release in June, it is expected to be a leader in summer rentals.

"There's no need to have that long an ordering period if you know what you're doing," said Rich Thorward, the owner of four Home Video Plus stores in Bergen County in New Jersey. "The shorter time is good because the film is fresh in people's minds, and with it just coming out of theaters you get more bang out of the theatrical advertising."

Mr. Salzer and other video store owners said they needed movies more quickly to satisfy customer demand for new titles. "We need that big title to maintain momentum, get people into stores and keep them in that pattern," Mr. Salzer said. "It's important to get titles like this into weeks where there are none."

On May 27 two more hits — "Father of the Bride" and "My Girl" — will be released, but most dealers said the field would belong to "J. F. K.," at least for a while.

"The other two are strong titles, but 'J. F. K.' will dominate until June

when 'Cape Fear' and 'The Addams Family' will take over," said Paul Deneault, the owner of Video Galaxy in Enfield, Conn., who said he believed that the latter two movies would be stronger summer rentals than the Oliver Stone film because suspense and family films normally do well in the summer.

Mr. Deneault said he welcomed quicker release dates. "As long as it's a title that I rent and not one I have to sell," he added. Priced at \$94.99, "J. F. K." is intended primarily for rental. Lower-priced titles that are meant to sell, he said, need a longer time before release to allow for the accumulation of advance orders from customers.

As for quicker release dates becoming a trend, Mr. Salzer said he thought any acceleration might be a reflection of hard times at movie theaters. "The studios need the money," he said. "Speed up the schedules, fill up the coffers."

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