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MoviePol launches wide with indie flicks

By Lanie Goodman

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CANNES -- When audiences go to MoviePol.com -- a new movie premiere Web site for top indie films never released worldwide -- they arrive in a virtual movie theater with plush purple velvet seats and a big white screen.

Launched by Irish helmer Mary McGuckian ("The Bridge of San Luis Rey") and her team at the Internet Cafe in Cannes on Thursday, MoviePol.com offers movie buffs a choice of international indie features that they would not otherwise have a chance to see.

"Our mantra is 'three clicks to a flick' and we've done away with the annoying ads and pop ups," says McGuckian. "You view the poster, watch the trailer, buy the ticket for less than it would cost at your neighborhood theater. Then you sit back and watch."

The idea was born, explains McGuckian, during recurrent late night discussions with filmmaker friends about their frustrating battles with U.S. distribution companies and the daunting politics of importing feature films to the domestic market.

"The problem was how to cut out the middlemen and democratize the system." McGuckian says, "At first, we imagined building our own art house cinema for imported films somewhere in trendy downtown Manhattan. But after we drew up plans and budgeted the enterprise -- a cool \$25,000,000 -- we thought, whom are we kidding? Any venture to make British, French, Irish, Italian and Spanish films commercially viable wasn't about to happen in our lifetimes. So we built a worldwide cinema online instead."

Each film presented by MoviePol is streamed for one view only per ticket purchase just like a regular movie theater. "The film is released for a six-week promotional window, but if it performs well, it may run for another six weeks."

Beyond their user-friendly design, there are other distinctively convenient features. For one, the audience is not required to subscribe on an ongoing basis. Powered by VIVADAS, the high-quality viewing experience can also be hooked up to a home cinema. If you want to get up and make popcorn, you just push on pause, like you would with a DVD. MoviePol also uses a secure digital rights management system that prohibits any illegal Internet downloading.

Other members of the creative team include theatrical director, MJ Peckos (formerly with First Look Pictures, Tartan U.S. and Mitroupolis Films), a U.S. domestic distribution consultant, who heads the acquisitions department.

"We decided to launch in Cannes because it's the most important European film market and festival on the calendar," McGuckian said. "The whole point of MoviePol is that it was designed by filmmakers, for filmmakers."