

“Shang-Chi” marks a new moviegoing normal

Article

The news: Disney and Marvel's “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings” brought in an estimated **\$75.5 million** over three days and **\$90.0 million** over the extended four days of Labor Day weekend, Comscore estimates.

- That blows initial expectations of **\$50 million** over three days out of the water.
- It's also the second-highest box-office debut amid the pandemic, just behind the **\$80 million** that “Black Widow” brought in over three days.

What this means: In some ways, “Shang-Chi” marks a return to normal for theaters, both in terms of ticket sales and release strategy. Unlike many of Disney’s pandemic-era movies, it got an exclusive theatrical release instead of going straight to streaming.

- **Disney+’s Premier Access**, which lets subscribers pay an extra \$29.99 to see movies on the day they premiere in theaters, brought in an additional **\$60 million** for “Black Widow.” The streaming release was a huge financial **success** for the company—not to mention the Disney+ subscribers it helped attract or retain.
- Major blockbusters like “**Black Widow**,” “**Cruella**,” and “**Jungle Cruise**” were released via Premier Access over the past year.

The challenge: Theaters complained that the simultaneous release strategy hampered further success at the in-person box office.

- “Black Widow” lead actress **Scarlett Johansson** also filed a lawsuit against Disney in July, alleging that the strategy limited her compensation, which is partially tied to theatrical ticket sales, according to **The New York Times**.

The bigger picture: Despite the financial incentive, it’s possible that Disney will retire the practice altogether due to the controversy.

- The success of “Shang-Chi” could be further encouragement for Disney to return to exclusive theatrical runs. (As of this writing, Disney+ has no more Premier Access movies listed for future release.)

What’s the catch? “Shang-Chi”’s exclusive theatrical run is promising. However, it’s also the first of Disney’s blockbusters to get a shortened, 45-day exclusive theatrical window, down from the usual 90.

- 45 days is quickly becoming the industry norm, with **WarnerMedia** and **Paramount** both opting for the same time frame.
- Though that’s better than straight-to-streaming, it still eats into theaters’ profits and could incite further ire from actors.