

# How important is film marketing in attracting an audience

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The importance of marketing and promotion of films is clear in one very simple way: an entire sector of the film industry - film distribution depends for its profits and survival upon the successful marketing and promotion of films. Organizations such as Icon and Artificial Eye as well as the more mainstream distributors for Hollywood studio pictures exist to get films from production to the market and exhibition. As well as these organizations state organizations also promote films e. UK Film Council, recently disbanded in the current coalition government's bonfire of guanos but still crucial to the success of many films including the incredible recent success of Kings Speech (Hooper, 2011) which has made more money at the American box office than any other British film. One of the Film Council's avowed aims is to help British movies to market and promote themselves given the domination of the market by Hollywood movies. The type of marketing and promotion employed varies considerably from film to film.

For a film such as Lost World, the sequel to the phenomenally successful Jurassic Park saturation marketing was used. This involved everything from the use of conventional media: billboards, magazine and newspaper ads in a range of newspapers from The Daily Mail to The Times and Daily Record to reach different demographics and regions; through to a range of merchandise toys available in Burger King and promotion on a range of food products. The success of the campaign can be seen in the fact that 6 weeks before the release 100% of 15-19 year old film goers was aware of the release of the film.

A campaign that began six months before the film's release has succeeded in reaching the mass mainstream audience that the distributors sought. Such a blanket campaign depends upon a serious outlay of cash, which the distributors (United Pictures) believed they would recoup for the film. Other films however require different campaigns. A case in point is the film *Skeletons*, (Whitfield, 2010), a low budget, British independent film by a first-time director. With a budget of less than a million to both make and market the film none of the methods employed by United Pictures would have been possible.

Instead, the distribution of the film was marked by a platform release, only a handful of prints were made and most screenings around the country were introduced by the Director or members of the cast and concluded with a Q&A session. Clearly the distributors felt that the best way to sell this film was to make an event of the screening, to play on the fact that this was the debut feature of the director and that the idiosyncratic nature of the film would be usefully complemented by discussion with the audience. This film also made use of social networking sites and the Internet.

The film had a Facebook page and Twitter page - regular posts by the director as he traveled around the country; discussion about awards the film had been nominated for (e. g. The Guardian Debut film of the Year); release of the DVD etc. All of these contributed to a sense of a small community of fervent believers in the film, who spread the word for the film and gave the film a sense of excitement, a sense of a hidden gem, this was accentuated by encouraging fans to join a mailing list to get regular emails about the film.

As well as these methods the film also received covert advertising through the reviews and media coverage it received. The director and one of the film's stars, Jason Isaacs appeared on numerous film programmes. This publicity also fed into DVD sales, which for a film of this size would be crucial to financial success. One marketing device that has been used by distributors such as Miramax to great effect in the last twenty years is exposure through awards. This is important for independent and mainstream, Hollywood films. The largest award, that has the most significant impact upon box office return, is the Oscar.

For a film such as *Million Dollar Baby* (Eastwood, 2004) winning the Best Picture Oscar increased box office returns from \$9.3 million to \$92.6 million. Even the blockbuster film *Return of the King* (Jackson, 2003) despite a healthy box office return of \$338 million before the Oscar saw its box office increase by \$40 million on the back of an Oscar win. Film marketing and the art of the distributor may not be about simply attracting the largest possible audience as Item 1 indicates the audience needs to be the one appropriate for the film.

In the case of *Green Zone* the presence of Bourne director Paul Greengrass and star, Matt Damon may have led the audience to expect a repeat of the Bourne formula and thus be disappointed by the more thoughtful, slow moving nature of this film. The film poster seen in Item 1 clearly gives this impression with a full-page profile and a text that reads: "from the director of *The Bourne Supremacy* and *The Bourne Ultimatum*". A misleading trailer

and marketing campaign could raise expectations of the film that can't be delivered.

A similar example of this is *Sweeney Todd* (Burton, 2007). Despite being a famous stage musical some of the audience for this film were disappointed that it was a musical after the trailer featured no singing and cinemas were forced to refund disgruntled customers who were disappointed to see a musical they weren't expect. A similar misleading trailer can be seen for the Brazilian vela film, *City of God* (Marseilles, 2002). The trailers featured no dialogue and compared the film to *Godlessly* (Scores, 1990). The audience may have been surprised to see a film in

Portuguese with English subtitles. The art of the distributor is also to find ways to market films that are unconventional. Many genre pictures lend themselves to familiar marketing campaigns. By use of iconography, intellectual references and the association of stars with certain genres an audience can very easily understand the kind of film being marketed. Thus a Sergei Leone spaghetti Western would feature Eastward laconically chewing on a cigar, an Ennui Morrison score, sombreros, ponchos, Colt 45, swinging saloon doors,