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## Public Relations and Promotion in Film: How It's Done and Why It's Important

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# Public Relations and Promotion in Film: How It's Done and Why It's Important

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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## **Abstract**

Films have been huge revenue drivers in the entertainment industry. However, not all films succeed with high profit margins. Success can be contributed to aspects such as the writing, the production quality, or the acting within a film. These aspects contribute to how audiences, critics and media receive a movie. Unfortunately, these aspects typically overshadow one of the most important functions contributing to a film's success: promotion and public relations.

For my capstone, I researched how films are promoted, branded, and distributed through public relations functions. Research largely relied on secondary research, with primary research added for deeper concepts. After basic knowledge was attained, the theories and concepts were applied in an additional creative component included for the capstone. This component attempted to create promotional materials in line with industry requirements, giving readers and the writer a tangible example to see film communications theory.

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## **Executive Summary**

When people think about a movie, they typically think about the acting talent, the special effects, the videography, the music, the sound, the story...the list goes on. However, people rarely think about the marketing, advertising or public relations efforts that also go into the movie. Film communications is often overshadowed by more glamorous aspects of film, such as acting or production. Acting performances and movie production are hot topics in pop culture and highlighted during huge award broadcasts (i.e. Golden Globes, Academy Awards). Film promotion, on the other hand, does not receive this type of recognition. While not expressly reviewed, film communications plays a crucial part to a movie's success. By understanding the process, development and implementation of communications in film, filmmakers and studios will boost the success rate of their films and deliver a product the way it was intended.

Film communications supports every stage of a film's creation. In pre-production, films need to control the flow of information to the media and release announcements in a way that makes sense for its project. Plot spoilers and screenplay devices are sensitive information that could destroy the potential success of a movie if improperly distributed. At the same time, casting and plot announcements could drum up hype for a movie. It is important to learn the correct way to implement these strategies and ensure they will be balanced effectively. In production, communicators must take the same caution and plan how to protect and release information about the movie.

After the movie is made, it is the communicator's job to make sure the movie is marketed well and reaches the intended audience. While a large part of promotion relies on the movie's content, the production value and its celebrity actors are common elements to campaigns. Using celebrity status and general pop culture helps raise awareness about the movie. Common methods include having actors work the TV talk show circuit, attend conferences and festivals, and conduct media interviews. Now more than ever, these methods are being done traditionally and through social media. Trailers are now created and distributed through movie theaters (traditionally) and YouTube (social media). Trailers can now be watched multiple times, paused, and dissected, so careful production and release of the trailer is needed. In addition, trailer releases need to be timed effectively, targeting (or avoiding) specific periods in the year to take advantage of competition or lack thereof.

Even after the movie has had its time in theaters domestically, many films are distributed internationally. International distribution also can happen during domestic release. Film communicators need to keep this in mind and plan ahead. At times, messaging and promotion is the same across different countries. However, more often than not, movies must be promoted significantly different in foreign countries. Names need to be changed, plots need to be highlighted differently, and cultures need to be taken into respect. These modifications fundamentally change the way communicators market their films.

In addition, after a film has been released and made its way through theaters, it may make its way to DVD. DVD releases are marketed differently since the target consumer is a home audience. Home audiences need different incentives than theater moviegoers, and therefore the promotional plan needs to be adjusted. Trailers and TV spots used to promote the theatrical movie release typically cannot be used the same way for DVD releases.

This research serves as support for the creative component of this capstone. The creative component includes tangible pieces such as a trailer, promotional posters, and TV spots, as well as written theoretical promotional, marketing efforts in conjunction with the tangible components. These components will follow traditional and social media practices, using points of research as a real life application of film communications theory.



### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my mentors and colleagues for their support and assistance in completing this capstone. Specific acknowledgements go to Professor Robert Kucharavy and Professor Richard Dubin; without you both, this project would not have been possible. Thank you to the Renée Crown Honors Program for giving me this opportunity.

## Introduction

Films are some of the most exciting, emotional, entertaining pieces of American culture. Successful films achieve excellence through different elements, such as acting, writing, editing, directing, cinematography, music; the list goes on.

However, all successful films have benefitted from one, common element: promotion. Promotion makes a great film reach its potential to become the *greatest* film. Promotion makes the audience excited to see the movie. Promotion makes the biggest opening weekends at the box office.

Trailers and posters are key components for marketing a movie. These materials often include a visual glimpse into the actual film, giving their audience an idea of what to expect and hopefully a reason to see the movie in theaters. However, promotion does not just include trailers and posters. Rather, promotion starts much earlier, from the pre-production stage of a film all the way through post-production and release. According to Steiff (2005), each stage of filmmaking is defined as follows:

**Pre-production:** The phase where preparations are made to film, including hiring cast and film crews, selecting locations, building sets, editing/finalizing scripts, and generating far-reaching goals.

**Production:** The phase where raw elements are recorded and filmed during shooting.

**Post-production:** The phase where imaging, sound editing/mixing, and visual effects are added, finalized and corrected to present the final film.

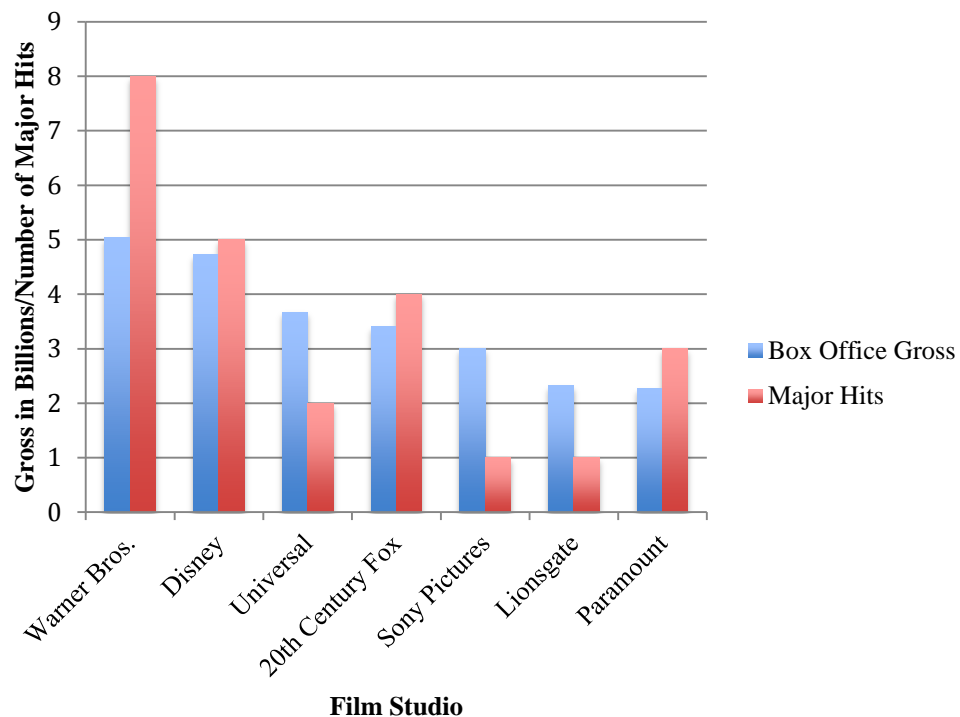
It is also important to recognize the role of film studios in promotion. Film studios are profit driven, typically responsible for financing and distributing film projects simultaneously. However, there are many opportunities for these studios to act as a partner and distributor with third-party production companies, acting more as a facilitator rather than a content creator. As a communicator, understanding the roles of studios and production companies can help direct efforts to campaign effectively. As of 2013, the top seven studios in box office revenue included Warner Bros., Disney, Universal, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Sony Pictures, Lionsgate, and Paramount (Diaz).

For my Honors capstone, I have chosen to research promotional methods in the film industry and apply them through a creative component accompanying this report. The creative component, which includes promotional materials for *Whacking 101*, follows a screenplay written by Bryce Garcia and Jake Korell, two accomplished Television, Radio, and Film majors at Syracuse University. The creative component contains a theoretical public relations campaign for the film, from pre-production to post-release.

## Chapter 1: Why is Publicity Important?

“According to Jack Valenti of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), movie budgets in 1997 averaged a record \$75.6 million” (Eastman, 2000, p. 231). Today, average budgets have risen to over \$100 million (Mueller). These high costs jeopardize the financial solvency of major film studios and have led to “tent-pole” films. Tent-pole films are highly successful films that financially support the entire studio through box office failures (Eastman, 2000, p. 232). Without tent-pole films, many studios would cease to exist. For this reason, studios do everything they can do ensure a potential tent-pole film succeeds as anticipated. Promotion and distribution is a major part of this planning.

### 2013 Box Office Grosses and Major Hit Films per Studio



*Diaz, J. (2014). Metacritic's 5th Annual Movie Studio Report Card. Metacritic.*

\*Box office grosses are combined domestic and foreign sales

\*\*Major hits grossed >\$150m domestically and/or >\$300m worldwide

As seen in the graph above, total box office grosses per studio did not correlate with the trend of major hits per studio. For example, Sony Pictures and Lionsgate both achieved over \$3 billion in box office grosses, largely in part to their one major hit (tent-pole) film in 2013. Without their respective tent-pole films, their box office grosses would have been dramatically different, leading the studio to difficult annual performance metrics.

As a rule-of-thumb, a studio should plan to have media expenditures of approximately two-thirds the cost of movie production (Eastman, 2000, p. 231). However, with rising costs and an evolving marketing landscape, it is becoming more common to follow a “50/50” rule. If \$100,000 were spent for filming, industry professionals would not be surprised if \$100,000 were spent on prints and advertising (P&A) distribution (Reiss, 2010, p. 39). According to Forbes, the film industry spends on average a total of four billion dollars per year (McGlade, 2013). According to Eastman (2000), overall marketing efforts include promotion, advertising and theater distribution (p. 232). Because promotion is quite a large investment for film companies, it needs to be treated seriously. Successful promotion requires thorough preparation, planned implementation, and anticipation for crises or unexpected responses. Forward-thinking is required to accomplish all necessary stages of film development, with some processes lasting for months (or even years) before or during a film’s release. In Table 0.1, general promotional processes are plotted in respect to a film’s theatrical release. Typically, “contract promos and merchandise,” “positioning study – research,”

and “publicity” (both digital and production) occur before a movie runs full film production (Marich).

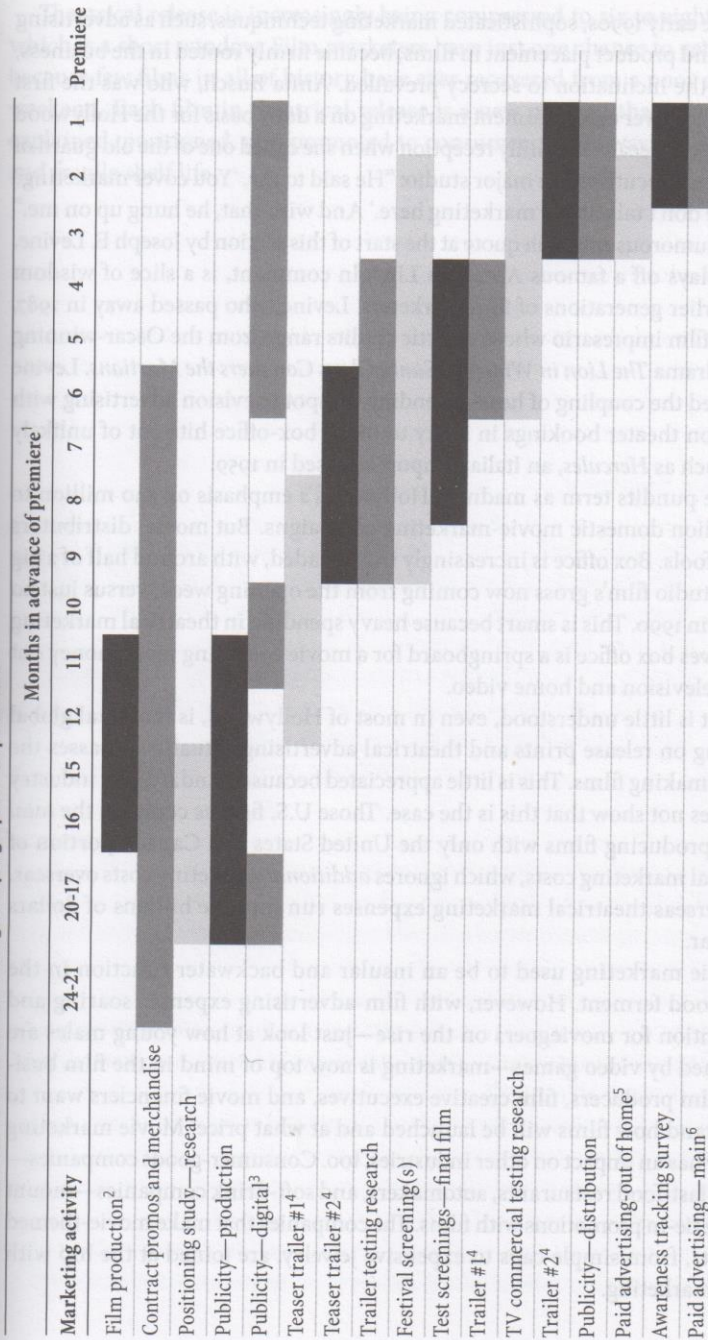
These processes require planning, time to implement, and a period of analysis.

While these are important to consider, the creative application accompanying this report assumes market research and positioning data gathered by secondary research and appropriates the data as its own.

Sunny Entertainment and Sunnyside Studios will be funding and distributing the movie, *Whacking 101*. As an independent studio, Sunny and Sunnyside will operate under the assumption that it has access to more resources than DIY film distributors, but less than full-fledged, vested studios in the industry. According to Reiss, this would put Sunnyside’s spending at approximately \$700,000 for production. Following the 50/50 rule, \$700,000 should be attributed to publicity budgeting (2010).

While \$700,000 is a considerable amount of funding, it is relatively limited compared to the millions vested studios typically spend on production and P&A. Therefore, *Whacking 101* will operate on a lean budget, following budget structures of low-financed movies/films.

Table 0.1. Timeline for strands of marketing campaign prior to premiere



NOTES: 1. Limited publicity and paid ads bursts may occur earlier than indicated.  
 2. Principal photography can occur up to 2.5 years prior to premiere and typically runs about contiguous 70 days.  
 3. Timing for digital publicity varies greatly depending on availability of film content, stars, and design of overall campaign.  
 4. Timing for flights of trailers varies, often due to holidays; sometimes there is only one main trailer.  
 5. Out-of-home advertising is billboards, transit-bus ads, and the like.  
 6. Short bursts of advertising such as a TV commercial in the Super Bowl may start much earlier.

Note. Timeline for strands of marketing campaign prior to premiere. Adapted from *Marketing to Moviegoers, a Handbook of Strategies and Tactics* (p. 3), by R. Marich, 2009, Southern Illinois University Press. Copyright 2013 by Robert Marich. Adapted with permission.

## **Chapter 2: Promotion and Publicity in Pre-production**

Before a movie even begins to create visual content for trailers and posters and enter principal filming and photography, the marketing/public relations team needs to create a strong, comprehensive communications plan to anticipate the needs of the film's full life cycle. Typically, these plans are created during the pre-production stage of filming.

To increase the marketing plan's effectiveness, communications teams conduct market/consumer research to gain insight on its audience. The movie, whether it is an adaptation, re-release, or an original film, needs to be treated as a new product entering the market (Marich, 2005, p. 8). Research is conducted with the intention of predicting audience response to a film. Even before research can be conducted, however, the audience must be identified. Audience identification is important in general public relations practice, but in film communications, proper audience identification can make or break an entire company. By correctly marketing to an audience, a company can save millions of dollars and immeasurable damage to brand reputation from a box-office flop.

While research can never gather data on *every* type of viewer the film will receive, films can benefit from research by focusing on primary audiences. Primary audiences are typically the first wave of ticket buyers, identified by an initial team comprised of the "filmmakers, top executives and the marketing department" (Marich, 2005, p. 20). Audiences are commonly categorized into four groups:



males under twenty-five; females under twenty-five; males over twenty-five; and females over twenty-five (Marich, 2005, p. 45). More specific categories include tweens (ages eight to twelve), women with children, or genre aficionados (Marich, 2005, p. 48). In addition to identifying the type of audience, the research team uses other film elements to gauge interest. Some of these film elements include the actors' and director's following, the story, the main character, the film's dependence on reviews, the title of the film, whether its fiction or nonfiction, the setting, and the intended MPAA rating (Marich). By combining each of these elements, film communicators can create a relatively accurate picture of its future primary audience.

For *Whacking 101*, no actual research was conducted on the basis of theoretical usage. With no evidence based in real activity, surveys would reveal biased or skewed results. However, assuming *Whacking 101*'s lean budgeting, research would most likely be streamlined to discover demographics. The film is intended to target male audiences under 25. In more general demographic targeting, college students are ideal for the movie.

In light of this, a common promotional obstacle includes actors hired against their type (Marich, 2005, p. 22). Many actors and actresses actively seek roles against their type to reduce or mitigate the effects of being typecast, showcasing their talent and breadth of skill.

Typecasting occurs when an actor or actress is cast based on their previous performances, creating a style of character linked to their persona. Typecasting is both a blessing and a curse. It provides an actor with a clear path for work, but it restricts actors to a narrow acting style, impeding diversity of film projects and possibly chances to win awards or achieve recognition. For example, actor Patrick Stewart has realized massive success through his roles in *Star Trek* and the *X-Men* franchises, but his roles have always been linked or been similar in style to his famous role as “Jean-Luc Picard.” While Stewart is critically acclaimed for his acting talent, he has never received an award for his roles in film (Appleyard). Therefore, casting actors against type is occasionally unavoidable, either by the director’s choice or by an actor’s determination to avoid typecasting, in which case the marketing team must find a way to market the actors in an innovative, yet careful, light. Using an actor’s brand can be effective, but it cannot be misleading to the true feel of the film. Craig Johnson, director for *The Skeleton Twins*, cast Bill Hader and Kristen Wiig to star in his newest drama. Bill Hader and Kristen Wiig are well known for their comedic performances; especially from their work on the television sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live*. Johnson recognized this challenge and spoke about it in an interview at the Sundance Film Festival (sff, 2014). Johnson commented:

I love movies that take actors that are largely known for comedy and re-contextualize them in a more emotional drama, going back to Mary Tyler Moore in *Ordinary People*, Adam Sandler in *Punch Drunk Love*, Jim Carrey in *Eternal Sunshine [of the Spotless Mind]*. These actors who are

known for broader stuff who just shine in these roles that allow them to be more human... What's most exciting about this movie is you're seeing them as you've never seen them before... They're both playing characters that are very real. I think people will be surprised and hopefully delighted by this new twist on their partnership... Some people may perhaps be thrown off by the fact that its Bill Hader, Kristen Wiig, Luke Wilson, and Ty Burrell, actors who are largely known for comedy, doing something that is more emotionally dramatic. I think once they settle into it, they'll be surprised and really into it.

In the pre-production stage, the filmmaking team and the marketing team need to work together and create a marketing plan addressing these concerns. If an actor is well known for a different genre or character work style, the director and the communications department need to be on the same page to market the movie correctly.

In 2004, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* starred Jim Carrey, well known for his comedic performances and slapstick style. The film was marketed and distributed by Focus Features, who branded the movie as a “quirky new take on the romantic comedy,” allowing the film “to tap into a mainstream audience” (Chen, 2010). Up until this point, Carrey had been in very specific comedies, creating an overly emphatic personality known throughout his films. *Eternal Sunshine* was quite different. Carrey was playing a much more emotional role, highlighting loneliness, introversion and sadness. To market the movie correctly,

the studio kept one foot in the comedy realm while emphasizing the emotional aspects of the film. This way, audiences could relate to Carrey's character by meeting somewhere in the middle. Originally, the studio intended to market the film as an art-house film, stressing the "prominent positioning of Academy Award-nominated writer, Charlie Kaufman, who had developed a strong cult following" (Chen, 2010). This marketing strategy would have been sensible, since many art-house films are marketed as "the next newest piece of work" by [insert famous director/writer]. However, *Eternal Sunshine* ultimately made its central selling point Carrey, using his stardom to initially attract audiences and then retain their attention with an unexpected plot synopsis. Audiences received Carrey's out-of-character role well. While no specific research was conducted to test audience reception of Carrey's new role, these sentiments are sometimes probed through market research surveys.

In *Whacking 101*, all actors are assumed to be relatively unknown, making their debut in the industry as fresh professionals. Oftentimes, these actors will have had some other form of work, ranging from television appearances or brief cameos in commercials or online videos. If any of these appearances have had any cult followings or significant views, the publicity team should take their previous work into account. However, most of the time, these actors are marketed with a clean slate.

The data gathered from market research is mainly for marketing/promotion use, since the data typically does not affect significant filming processes or plotlines. The studio and the filmmaking team, due to the artistic and personal nature of a film, decide these procedures. However, research data from test screenings resulting in substantial negative response can motivate films to change major elements, if possible. These test screenings can be presented to public audience members or members of the production team (Marich, 2005, p. 45). *World War Z* provides a recent example of a test screening changing the fate of a film.

*World War Z*, a film based off of the 2006 novel of the same name, was initially slated to be released theatrically December 21, 2012. After struggling to finish principal filming and spending more than the budget allowed, the film was screened for film executives and affiliates. After review, the film's ending received general negative reactions, citing its lack of emotional investment in the lead character and the overwhelming aspect of the battle scene. Even though the studio was already over budget, the studio found a way to rewrite and reshoot 72 minutes of film, pushing back theatrical release until June 21, 2013 (Holson). All of the revisions pushed the film's expenses to approximately \$230 million. However, because of the revised ending, the film went on to generate over \$500 million worldwide, marking Brad Pitt's highest grossing movie ever (Fleming). In this case, the test screening changed the fate of the film, saving Paramount and Brad Pitt from a considerable amount of loss and embarrassment.

In addition, due to the rise of social media and audience interactivity through digital platforms, there have been rare cases where market research has directly affected film elements. In 2006, *Snakes on a Plane* garnered large online hype and discussion, leading to a hyperactive community producing “t-shirts, comics, photo groups and internet ‘tribes’” to discuss potential film elements. Their activity produced results, including adoption of fan suggestions into the film. One of the most notable additions came after Samuel L. Jackson’s casting announcement, giving his character a memorable quote that dominated internet memes for years (Ross, 2009).

In addition to research, film marketers must consider merchandising and promotional contracts at the pre-production stage. “Merchandising refers to creating or licensing others to create merchandise based on a movie” (Eastman, 2000, p. 244). “Promotional tie-ins are partnerships developed with other organizations designed to promote both of the organizations” (Eastman, 2000, p. 245). Both can provide massive boosts in audience awareness and word of mouth. However, even though both are not seen by consumers until well into the production cycle of the film, marketers need to make necessary arrangements and initiate legal proceedings at the pre-production phase to accommodate procedural lead time. According to Table 0.1 (page 10), These procedures can occur up to two years or more before the theatrical premiere of a film (Marich).

When films lend themselves to merchandising, the financial rewards are lucrative. In 2010, “retail sales of licensed merchandise based on ‘entertainment and character’ properties were nearly an \$11 billion business in the United States and Canada,” marking a *weak* year, indicating the massive opportunity the industry holds (Marich, 2005, p. 181). In 1992, *Batman* earned Warner Bros. \$251.1 million in its theatrical premiere, with “an additional \$500 million [coming] from the sale of licensed t-shirts, coffee mugs, soundtrack albums, cereal, and other gimmicks tied into the movie” (Soter, 1992). Merchandising also includes other business initiatives, such as video collections and movie-based theme park attractions (Sally & Heller, 1998). Disney provides a great example of these merchandising initiatives, with their successful Broadway show *Lion King* and theme park attractions based off of *Cars*, *Toy Story*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. *Pirates* went on to release more sequels, with *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* licensing over 16 million books sold, 24 million sticker packs, Lego sets, fashion accessories and branding of merchandise (Marich, 2005, p. 183).

While merchandising is an attractive option, merchandising is a double-edged sword, leading to harder and more painful flops. Films that fail in theaters accompanied by heavy merchandising will realize heavy losses. An example of this can be seen with *Godzilla*’s 1998 release or *Babe II*, when both films failed at the box office and sequentially found none of their merchandise moving through retailers.

Promotional tie-ins share similar risk, but typically do not carry the same financial losses seen with failed films. Recently, Spider-Man 2 was released in the UK, slated for a May 2, 2014 release in the U.S. At the end, as per tradition as of late for comic book movies (thanks to Marvel), the film included a post-credits scene. While these scenes usually give hints or nods to future content, typically within the franchise, this scene was different. The Spider-Man 2 post-credit scene was a teaser for X-Men: Days of Future Past, slated for a May 23, 2014 release. While both films are comic book movies, a different studio owns each franchise. The Spider-Man franchise is owned by Fox Searchlight Pictures, while the X-Men franchise is owned by Sony Pictures. Normally, these two franchises would never be seen together, due to their contrasting studio ownership. However, due to some compromises and behind-the-scenes agreements, the cross-promotional addition became a reality (Setoodeh). Both are successful franchises, but even if one was failing, this promotional tactic holds more brand reputation risks than financial risks.

This promotional tactic between Sony and Fox carried a lot of benefits, especially riding the success of Marvel's cinematic universe and now-expected promotional tie-ins across its releases. Marvel has seen global success with its comic book movies, and the studio is known for its exciting and provocative post-credit scenes. By emulating their model, Sony and Fox both generated hype and excitement for both of their franchises, giving each studio access to each other's audiences. Even within Marvel, the studio has managed to promote its television



shows through its theatrical films, creating a synergy rarely seen in the entertainment industry. These promotions have targeted their audience across multiple platforms and outlets, reaching their niche comic book lovers and casual comic book fans. As such, promotional tie-ins require a significant amount of negotiation and legal proceedings before approval. Film communications teams should recognize opportunities early and close deals and contracts as fast as possible, most typically during the pre-production stage of a film (well before premiere).

Cross promotional marketing can also venture outside of the film industry.

Promotional tie-ins are commonly seen in society through McDonalds and Burger King in the form of toys accompanying children's meal options. Children's toys are attractive options for promos, especially through fast-food companies such as McDonalds or Burger King (Eastman). These tactics target the younger audience demographic effectively. As these options generated large amounts of awareness in the past years, studios are beginning to utilize promotional tie-ins on a larger scale.

As Soter mentioned, a common revenue stream for films includes the sales of its soundtrack music (1992). While remaining true to this day, the form of these sales and distribution has changed dramatically. Digital platforms and social media have changed the way audiences receive messages. The 2006 movie *Snakes on a Plane*, distributed by New Line Studios gained hype just from releasing the film

title online. The title was provocative, prompting a “spontaneous, organic...surge of interest on the internet. Over two million people visited the film’s official website before any paid promotion was instigated by New Line” (Ross, 2009). To further its connection with its audience, New Line contracted Cobra Starship (along with members of other popular pop-emo bands) to record a joint single for the film. These bands had audiences coinciding with the films target audience, and through YouTube and MTV, reached four million viewers.

*Whacking 101* would not pursue major merchandising or promotional contracts. The film has limited opportunities to merchandise, as the story is character driven with minimal product placements. Opportunities for t-shirt sales, mugs and other memorabilia are dependent on exposure and reception of the movie. While this risk applies to every movie, films that operate on limited budgets risk netting a negative comprehensive budget result due to their lower budgets. Studios running millions of dollars in production and P&A have more room to take on this risk without the same relative chance of loss.

### **Chapter 3: Promotion and Publicity in Production**

In production, communicators must continue to stay on schedule and implement campaigns and messages created during the pre-production phase of the film.

These objectives include trailers and other promotional materials, talent presentation, and media preparation. Even though the film is still being shot, materials can be prioritized and created at the beginning of production to be released during the same period.

During production, every film has a unit publicist on or near filming. Unit publicists are responsible for preparing distribution packages and press kits, film synopses, actor biographies, production stills and video clips (Marich, 2009, p. 215). At this point, the unit publicist (or the marketing team in general) must have received actors' consents for legal rights over their performances and images.

According to BBC, these should contain:

- Consent to take photographs and/or recordings of their performances
- Consent to use and authorize others to use their photographs
- Consent to use and authorize other to use their recordings together with their name and biography in connection with the publicity of the film
- Consent for all the above to be used for personal publicity, if applicable (for show reels or personal websites)

These consenting legal measures should be expected, and no additional fee must be charged to gain these agreements (Legal guide, 2014).

While movie marketing depends to an extent on its content, the production and the movie's stars are general elements of both the domestic and international campaign (Eastman, 2000, p. 238).

For example, press releases for movies normally include an outline of a movie's plot, but they will focus on the story's historical foundation or its connection to real happenings or current events, discuss unusual production achievements or problems, give facts about (enormous) production costs, and so on. Any information that can help create anticipation for the movie is appropriate. (Eastman, 2000, p. 239)

While using production stories is important to the film's publicity, most marketing resources are committed to highlighting the movie stars. Eastman (2000) states, "Hollywood learned long ago that it can sell movies by selling their stars. Very famous stars (and some directors) have great box office appeal, and these stars become the focus of promotional efforts" (p. 239). These promotional goals focus on attracting or modifying attention to the stars rather than the stars' role in the movie itself.

Traditional promotional techniques include print tactics and audio/visual tactics. The print tactics, such as news releases, feature stories, and media kits are standard for any public relations campaign. Standard, traditional media press kits include a short and long synopsis, cast and crew bios, production stills, production stories, a director's statement, final end credits and technical specs (Reiss, 2010, p. 88). These media components can create a strong digital media kit that benefits

the most in the long run of a publicity campaign. For example, a digital media kit should include *all* news releases, press kit components and feature stories, accompanied by components of an electronic press kit (EPK). EPKs include interviews with actors, “behind the scenes” footage and “making of” footage.

According to Reiss (2010, pp. 90-91) a final distribution package should include:

- all press kit components
- the EPK
- final trailers
- proper chain of title and copyright registration
- all cast and crew releases
- music licenses and composer agreements
- stock footage releases
- music cue sheets
- stock footage cue sheets
- dialogue lists
- final credits

While some of these elements may not be available until post-production is completed, these distribution packages must be prepared immediately with as much material as possible. Posters meeting industry standards should be created as quickly as possible, due to considerable lead-time within theater space. These posters include door panels, lobby cards, one-sheet posters, reissues, six-sheet posters, three-sheet posters, and window cards (Marich, 2009, p. 9).

- Door panel: a poster of 20x60 medium stock paper, rare size
- Lobby card: a poster of 11x14 heavy stock paper
- One-sheet poster: standard size poster, which is 27x41 thin paper stock  
Typically multiple iterations of posters are made (different art or scenes)
- Reissue: a poster printed for the release of a movie subsequent to its original release
- Six-sheet poster: a poster of 81x81 thin stock paper, typically in three to four pieces that fit together
- Three-sheet poster: a poster of 41x81 thin stock paper, usually in two or three different pieces that fit together
- Window card: a poster of 14x22 heavy stock paper, leaving four to six inches available for theaters to print its name and play dates

\*All sizes are in inches

\*\* Marich, R. (2009). *Marketing to moviegoers: A handbook of strategies and tactics*

\*\*\*Refer to the Appendix to view *Whacking 101*'s one-sheet poster. (three iterations)

On the other hand, the audio/visual tactics are more commonly used for television and film marketing. These tactics include satellite media tours, media interviews, press parties and junkets, video news releases, and web pages (Eastman, 2000, p. 240). Telecommunications technology, such as satellite video chats and phone calls, allows engaging content to be created remotely. These are low cost and

extremely feasible, however these tactics are also the least engaging. Having the stars make appearances in person is more engaging and effective. According to Eastman (2000),

Stars often make the talk-show circuit as a way of promoting a movie, and such traveling appearances are written into some actors' contracts. A press party or junket reverses the process, bringing the reporters to a location to interact with a movie's cast or crew in a more-or-less social setting. Often as part of the junket, stars are made available to reporters for one-on-one interviews. The usual pattern is that individual reporters are brought into video-equipped room to conduct a short, carefully timed interview with one star, and each reporter is handed a tape of the interview as he or she leaves (or the tape is sent back to the reporter's station). One star can do up to 100 of these seemingly "personal" interviews in a weekend. (p. 241)

These junkets are important for film exposure and can last up to three days, accommodating hundreds of journalists. Distributors, due to the efficiency of junkets, typically promote several films in one junket (Marich, 2009, p. 226). Unit publicists must plan acting talent appearances in a logical, efficient way to promote the film while maintaining strict guidelines. These include arranging and following through with exclusive interviews, coordinating with personal publicists, and remaining in accordance to contract or union rules. For example, according to Marich, "actors covered by Screen Actors Guild (SAG) rules. . . require first-class transportation and reasonable expenses paid to all performers on tours and personal appearances" (226). These stipulations may seem trivial, but

SAG rules and contractual agreements must be accommodated to the letter, else risking the actor's pursuant of a contract breach.

On the other side of legality, actors can also cause issues and crises from *their* end. Talent occasionally draw public backlash for questionable behavior or controversial statements. It is the publicist's job to address these concerns for the sake of the film, and the personal publicist's job to perform damage control for the actor's personal brand. While these may be addressed by two different publicists or departments, each affects the other's brand, and therefore should be coordinated as such (Marich). A common strategy is to avoid hiding talent mistakes and owning up to the media directly in an open manner, despite the risk for bad press (Marich, 2009, p. 227).

Video news releases (VNRs) are effective today as well, especially with the growing number of entertainment video news sources. These VNRs are promotional packages offering "full-video news stories featuring aspects of production as innovations in special effects, the difficulties of filming in exotic locations, and so on" (Eastman, 2000, p. 241). VNRs can also take the form of a promotional documentary. "These mini-documentaries many times begin *The Making of...or Featurette*" to be distributed digitally or as an add-on for post-release content (Marich, 2009, p. 231). These stories should be crafted during production under the direction of the unit publicist. Additional video content



The digital age has also affected marketing, with web pages and social media becoming dedicated promotional outlets as well. The web is particularly effective because it reaches target demographics, such as college students (Eastman, 2000, p. 241). However, effective websites and social media take planning, and oftentimes, the public relations or communications team does not see proper access to necessary tools (S. Olivas, personal communication, 2013).

Thankfully, social media provides an opportunity to reach audiences and moviegoers with quick and direct access. While social media should be timed just in front of the film's premiere, pages on Facebook, Twitter handles and YouTube channels should be prepared and set up as soon as production stills and trailers are made available (Marich, 2009, p. 122). These accounts should include a balance of paid promotion and non-paid promotion, including promoted Tweets and Facebook posts, and other sponsored messaging. Arranged endorsements from celebrities also are effective. "According to Nielsen Company research in 2011, celebrity endorsements are valuable because the celebrity is an attention-getter who cuts through media clutter, and consumers who follow celebrities are opinion leaders with peers" (Marich, 2009, p. 124).

While all of these initiatives are important during the production process, one of the main marketing tools used (and exposed to viewers) is the trailer. Digital mediums have only increased the exposure of trailers, since they are still shown across theaters. "Major studio films churn out two teasers and two separate final

trailers for wide release” (Marich, 2009, p. 125). Each trailer presents an opportunity to inject the market with buzz and hype, increasing audience excitement. For one of these trailers, it may be beneficial to treat it as an exclusive, giving an online outlet restricted access before distributing it as a wide release. Choosing an appropriate platform affects the success of the trailer release as well. Posting the trailer on YouTube ensures accessibility to general audiences. Posting it on iTunes gives viewers a possible opportunity for downloadable content and accompanying extras for fee. Regardless, the digital landscape has changed the way trailers must be treated. Now, the viewer is in control of the trailer, having the ability to pause, rewind, and dissect shots to make inferences about the film and potentially reveal spoiler information (Johnston, 2009, p. 137). With the advent of mobile devices becoming more and more capable of higher quality streaming, exclusive mobile trailers are even beginning to rise in popularity (Johnston).

*Whacking 101*'s trailer was filmed at the beginning phases of production. Principal photography and filming were planned ahead of time, resulting in a trailer being cut together before the movie was shot in its entirety. With the trailer focusing on a speedy release and building awareness and discussion for the movie well in advance, the trailer is aimed at easy access and provocative storytelling. The trailer uses unexpected plot drivers to craft the story within the trailer, in hopes to maintain viewer interest through curiosity. The trailer is formatted to accommodate social media and mobile devices. It will not be treated as an

exclusive release with specific outlets due to its priority of reaching the most viewers as possible, as fast as possible.

#### **Chapter 4: Promotion and Publicity in Post-production**

In addition to traditional promotional techniques, movie-specific techniques can provide a unique boost to a film's campaign. These special techniques include screenings, premieres, award shows, festivals and critic reviews.

Screenings serve as a wonderful research tool for films to test the waters of their audience. However, once the film has entered or even finished post-production, screenings for media outlets is critical for a successful box office opening. These screenings serve as the gateway to critic reviews and recommendations, which are one of the most influential factors to viewers when deciding to see a movie.

“Newspaper and magazine reviews are critical for the box office of up-market films aimed at sophisticated audiences. Television and radio reviews are influential to a lesser extent” (Marich, 2009, p. 218). Lead times must be considered in accordance to the type of media being screened. Typically, multiple screenings are staggered before premiere dates to accommodate longer lead times in media. These reviews can be considered validation processes.

“Social media has transformed this validation process and a number of companies have sprung up that are seeking to build platforms for a new age of film marketing,” such as TrailerPop, FilmBot, and Qloo (McGlade, 2013). These new applications try to connect viewers and moviegoers, gain a new social experience and discover new ways to evaluate movies. Sites like Rottentomatoes.com give a rating out of 100% to give viewers a feel for quality. Reviews are aggregated and

streamlined for the public to read and compare, allowing for more informed decisions.

In light of the effects of critic reviews, there are instances that fall at different ends of the spectrum. “Reviews in prestige print publications tend not to influence action-adventure, horror, and youth audiences, for which television reviews showing clips are [more] influential. However, prestige films and films aimed at sophisticated, adult audiences live or die by reviews” (Marich, 2009, p. 218).

*Whacking 101* will be dependent on critic reviews. Since its target demographic is college-aged viewers, reviews will hold a significant effect on initial release results. Due to its lean budget, the film will most likely avoid holding a premiere event. However, the film will be submitted to festivals, which will act as a premiere for *Whacking 101* in its own right. Lead times must be considered even earlier with the festival process, as media contacts need to proceed through additional permissions before gaining access to the screening.

Because of these abnormal effects for these specific movie genres, some films avoid screening prior to release all together. This is called a cold opening. While cold openings may have their merit, they should typically be avoided. “A cold opening is always a sign to media outlets that the distributor is worried about the critics’ response” (Marich, 2009, p. 219). Blockbuster films almost always have pre-screenings.

In addition to screenings for media, festivals are also a common venue to show post-production work. Here, festivals such as the Sundance Film Festival or Tribeca Film Festival hold critical acclaim for discovering and awarding quality films, mostly from an independent studio or distributor. There are countless festivals domestically and internationally, so finding the right festival depends on the intended audience. It can still be beneficial to screen films in advance of festivals, however (Reiss, 2009, p. 139). These festivals can act as the theatrical premiere or as a marketing tool to hype the upcoming theatrical premiere.

A premiere is an example of a pseudo-event – an event created to attract media attention. The publicist orchestrates the event to showcase the stars, hoping that the resulting publicity will help to persuade individuals to see a movie. At a premiere, stars are often led through a line of reporters to be photographed and to answer questions. Another method is to have stars field questions in the format of a news conference in hopes of increasing the number of stories about the movie. (Eastman, 2000, p. 242)

After any screening, critic reviews must be controlled by the public relations team to optimize timing. Embargoes and holds are put on reviews until specific dates to help generate coordinated awareness and excitement for films. This also levels the playing field, allowing critics to review movies without worrying about losing the story to rivals publishing before them (Marich, 2009, p. 220). Placing a specific

release date for reviews also addresses other media habits. If a critic sees a preemptive screening, either at an event or a festival, they will typically only run a review once. It is more beneficial for the film to have the review run closer to theatrical release than months prior, but if appropriate, the public relations team can coordinate staggered (restricted) reviews (Reiss, 2010, p. 215). Regardless of the nature of the review, critical response through the media builds film awareness.

Award shows generate a lot of attention and provide a level of validity to films fortunate enough to be nominated. For example, the Academy Awards (Oscars) or the Golden Globe Awards are highly known for their nominations of high quality films. As mentioned before, awards from festivals, such as the Cannes Film Festival and Sundance Film Festival, are used as qualifiers before films reach theatrical release. Winners from these festivals often receive increased awareness and a level of prestige (Eastman, 2000, p. 243).

Sometimes, films strive specifically to earn these awards. These films require a different campaign tactic, and the public relations team must be prepared for the additional requirements. Academy Award campaigns, for example, contain large paid-media components including advertising in film trade newspapers and online trade websites. These campaigns target professionals in the industry over the general public (Marich, 2009, p. 235). In addition, they may also include additional private screenings for judges, events, or discussion panels. Publicists

must be sure to anticipate necessary lead time for these publications. At the same time, publicists must follow the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' (AMPAS) rules that limit overt campaigning, meant to keep the awards process to a high standard. Films striving for awards must meet specific requirements, with some directly falling under the publicists' responsibility:

- The film must have a normal theatrical run, which means the film “must be advertised in each of its runs in major newspapers.” (AMPAS rules)
- “All advertisements must have minimum dimensions of one inch by two inches and must include theater, film title, and the dates and screening times of the qualifying run.” (Film festival screenings do not impact eligibility)
- The film must not be distributed or initially exhibited in any manner other than as a theatrical motion picture. If necessary, ten minutes of the medium may be distributed as stated. (Broadcast, cable television and home video marketing disqualify the film)
- Submissions must be exact copies of the theatrical release.
- The film must not be exhibited publicly in non-theatrical forms for 90 days following its theatrical premiere.

\* Marich, R. (2009). *Marketing to moviegoers: A handbook of strategies and tactics*

By following these rules and planning campaigns around the restrictions, publicists can avoid issues with award eligibility for their films. Oscar campaigns are almost always planned out a year in advance (Marich, 2009, p. 238).



These awards have the potential to drive box office sales higher (if still in theaters) and give a film a halo effect, elevating the film into a higher class of quality. By winning awards from major organizations, post-theatrical run campaigns are made much easier. DVD, Internet Video on Demand (VOD), and international releases benefit greatly from these awards.

In general, DVDs are the next step for a film after its theatrical run. These products provide an opportunity to include the exclusive footage, features, and extra production stories used during pre-production and production phases to increase audience incentives to buy. While public relations tactics focused on content and talent presentation, DVD campaigns require a focus on packaging and retail marketing (Reiss, 2009, p. 252).

In addition to traditional retail outlets, films also are now expected to be released digitally, via Internet VOD. “Services like Netflix, Hulu and iTunes have revolutionized the way people watch movies” (The Debut, 2014). With these newer outlets, campaigns must target each one specifically, choosing either exclusivity or broad accessibility. Each service has unique restrictions and benefits, so public relations teams need to evaluate each and decide which is best for the film’s longevity.

Films may also see a global release or international screening before, during or after its domestic theatrical run. Typically, film marketers work with foreign sales

agents for foreign screening rights. In the past, these foreign sales agents focused on territorial theatrical distribution. More recently, these agents focus more on film distribution via television. This market has proven to be much more lucrative (Reiss, 2010, p. 331). In general, negotiating these deals requires careful legal procedures. These procedures include negotiating term of sale/film distribution rights, the territories allowable/restricted, sales fees, expenditure limits, legal protection for failed/refused payments, and on rare occasion, advances. Advances are not as common as they were in the past, but they continue to hold merit in some circumstances. Advances can motivate foreign sales representatives to work harder to earn their advance back, due to their commission-based revenue structure (Reiss, 2010).

In addition to these precautions, there are barriers accompanying foreign distribution. These barriers include different languages, access to foreign markets, video standards, and regional coding, which significantly affects DVD distribution (Reiss, 2010). Occasionally, international magazines or newspapers allow for opportunities to distribute films as a free accompaniment (Filmmaking guide). However, a much more common and accessible opportunity to market films abroad is through international film festivals. These festivals usually have a clear, straightforward process that brings foreign films into the home country's market standards, simultaneously giving an audience and access to key demographics (Marich, 2009).

*Whacking 101* is not a typical movie to be marketed abroad due to its reliance on American philosophy and pop culture references. However, if marketed abroad, the film would do best in international film festivals. These festivals would provide an environment where the audience expects unusual references and foreign concepts. Categories within the festival can also facilitate this viewer openness, addressing a barrier that is usually frustrating to identify and overcome.

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Appendix A

Standard Posters:





# WHACKING 101

This doesn't count as work study.

SUNNY ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS A SUNNYSIDE STUDIOS PRODUCTION A FILM BY TIM CHENG JEFF JEFF WUCHER JON JON CORTON  
 JAKE KORELL BRYCE GARCIA MUSIC BY ALEX SHENKMAN AND MEGHAN FLAIM PRODUCED BY CASEY KULK CARLINE DESIGNER JISU PANG  
 EDITED BY GREG BOILARD PRODUCTION DESIGNER MARIA DELL'ANNO DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ELIZABETH BRYDGES DIRECTOR OF ARTS ANDREW COLAPRETE AND JEN LEE  
 EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JANINE HALSEY STORY BY STEF ALESSI AND JOELLE STEEVES SCREENPLAY BY JAKE KORELL AND BRYCE GARCIA DIRECTED BY TIM CHENG  
 WHACKING101.COM COMING SOON

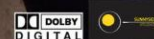




# WHACKING 101

Not quite what you think.

SUNNY ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS A SUNNYSIDE STUDIOS PRODUCTION A FILM BY TIM CHENG 'JEFF' JEFF WUCHER 'JON' JON CORTON  
 JAKE KORELL BRYCE GARCIA MUSIC BY ALEX SHENKMAN AND MEGHAN FLAM PRODUCED BY CASEY KULIK COSTUME DESIGNER JUSU PANG  
 EDITED BY GREG BOILARD PRODUCTION DESIGNER MARIA DELL'ANNO DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ELIZABETH BRYCES DIRECTOR OF GRAPHICS ANDREW COLAPATE AND JEN LE  
 EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JANINE HALSLEY WRITTEN BY STEF ALESSI AND JOELLE STEEVES SCREENPLAY BY JAKE KORELL AND BRYCE GARCIA DIRECTED BY TIM CHENG  
 WHACKING101.COM COMING SOON





Appendix B

Production Stills:





