

Brand Story Tellers



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Plot:

Media, Messages, Context & Emotions--
Leveraging licensing across integrated consumer touch points

We need a new dictionary. Something to help us understand the meaning and merit of Hollywood's, or was that Madison Avenue's, new-business-word couplings?

We'll call it the *new* "Hollywood" dictionary. That makes it sound like it's been around awhile.

With success and a little help from those folks who create words for a living, we could spin the dictionary into a "reality-game show." Think of it, Alec Trebek meets The Donald in "Jeopardy-Apprentice Squares." We'd sell T-shirts on the website and license the board game rights... sponsored by Merriam-Webster. Yea, the next... monopoly. But, I'm getting ahead of myself.

The first word I'd look up is, "Branded-Entertainment." It's everywhere; overused and ill-defined.

The second word I'd look up, just for fun, is "Net-participation." No one ever seems to agree on its meaning. But, I'd like to know how much money I'm going to make from my new dictionary venture, just in case I get invited to a meeting with Mark Burnett or CAA or WMA.

Having a common understanding, much less any agreement, on the meaning of Branded Entertainment, is like trying to find a pattern of thought or intention in two or more Hollywood films, which is as foolhardy, mused Charles Champlin, former Arts

Editor of the Los Angeles Times, "as looking for deliberate designs in the sesame seeds on a roll."

What is Branded Entertainment? Isn't that the same as Branded Content? Ah, and is that much different than Product Integration? Or was that Product Placement?

Of course, that's different than Product Sponsorship and Promotions done for media dollars or was that a licensing deal? Does that mean I'm not too far away from Integrated Marketing?

Hmm, I wonder?

The words all sound so big and important. They've become passwords to a *club* of *au courant* chatter; confusing even those who so glibly uttering them in an interchangeable babble, like industry acronyms, in a new context.

The simple fact is this: Different people, from different industries, have different agendas. They might be saying the same thing but the words and results have different meaning.

Consumer brand marketers like the heat, visibility and the pop-culture promise from entertainment properties, hoping their consumer may see and hopefully remember something beyond the film, video game or television experience. In exchange, the studio, network and video game marketers covet the fees or more importantly, the media dollars the brand marketers throw on the table. Film, game and television producers like both the money and marketing muscle, because more is always more. Production teams and development executives tolerate the experience and think it's a pain in the ass, because the story is the star.

Everyone is trading something.

Trying to explain what's what and what you want, in the context of an evolving creative-business model, even to those in the same business, affords everyone some liberty to "make it up" as they go and in the end call the business whatever they want.

However, one thing is for sure: Business models across all media platforms, from movies to games and television to cable are being rewritten as quickly as script revisions.

Projections, based upon the *Jack Myers Report* of thirty years of study and ongoing research indicate that traditional media dollars will account for sixty percent of a brand's total investment, while sponsorships will increase a staggering 20 to 25 percent (of media revenues) and alliances and partnerships splitting the remaining 15 to 20 percent.

But the reality beyond the fanfare and seamless slight-of-hand fusion of content and messaging is this: "Did you move the needle?"

We need a business model, not for measuring the value of the brand exposure but for the results...hopefully at retail.

At Mattel, "success seems to come," says Steve Ross, Mattel senior vice president of worldwide entertainment and business development, "when

you're able to penetrate popular culture with branded entertainment that inspires (kids') imaginations that resonates with (their own) lifestyle interests and pursuits."

Emotions runs deep.

"We win big by forging a deeper sense of brand loyalty," Ross continues, "and by triggering an emotional connection with kids through the entertainment we create. It manifests in the course of movies, television, DVDs, video games, books, music, live events, the Internet and, obviously, within the underlying toy products themselves." And, here is the kicker. "Ultimately, our success is best measured at retail. That is where we win or lose."

It's about sales, not impressions, awareness or eyeballs. Or is it?

Connecting commerce with content is calculated magic.

It happened, almost by accident. The notion of a promotion, a prop manager's need for product, and retail sales beyond the box office was a connection no one had ever made on such a grand scale. These were, after all, three vastly different businesses.

Then came "E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial," in 1982. He was a loveable character; the movie was a huge success story and the product, by design, was a central *plot point*. Instantly, the business as we knew it, changed. Steven Spielberg had "E.T." not only flying across the moon but gobbling up Reese's Pieces.

Perfect.

It's been reported that the result had an enormous impact on the brand. Sales of the candy were up 40% the week after the movie opened, according to Hershey's spokesman Judy Hogarth.

It demonstrated, "that a brand that was practically unheard-of could have a huge sales increase," says Mary Lou Galician, head of media analysis and criticism at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University and editor of "The Handbook of Product Placement in the Mass Media.

We took another step or two with the James Bond franchise "GoldenEye" in 1995 and "Tomorrow Never Dies" in 1997. Suddenly, finding ourselves in a new business, opportunities turned into strategies and brands became partners.

Marketing meetings had new agendas. "How can we 'place' the product, create a consumer friendly promotion, extract media dollars from the partner (maybe even a fee), drive retail sales to make it

worth the effort and as a result, deliver the biggest movie opening, ever?"

Hmm?

The task was huge. Everyone went to school. Everyone wanted something.

The education process was endless and the rules were invented as quickly as the deals could be made.

"GoldenEye," leveraged BMW, who paid \$3 million in media promotions for the right to replace Bond's famed Aston Martin with its new Z3 Roadster model. They would use the film to introduce the new model vehicle internationally. However, "Tomorrow Never Dies," which reportedly earned a record \$160 million in fees and marketing support from 20 different brand advertisers, was sharply criticized for being too commercial. The backlash told all of us that marketing was overtaking the movie and the industry, as a result, has taken a position that fewer, larger deals are the key to success.

But, this is Hollywood and too much is never enough.

Branded Entertainment is about branding; it's also about money. It was reported that Ford spent \$35 million on promotions and fees to return Bond to an Aston Martin and feature other Ford cars in 2002's "Die Another Day," but the most any brand is believed to have spent on media buys and promotions in exchange for a film placement is \$100 million, which Samsung spent to be in 2003's "The Matrix Reloaded."

So, is it about money, the brand or the movie?

Oh, yea, did we forget about the movie-goer?

Stripping away the variables influencing a consumer's purchase is a complex business. I guess we could stand outside in the parking lot and ask everyone why they bought Bud-Lite, their new Cadillac or used their Visa card...but experience tells me the consumer wouldn't be able to tell us, exactly.

That's the problem.

"There is no silver bullet," declares Howard Ballon, Co-Chief Operating Officer of Neilson NRG, in Hollywood. There are so many variables. "Cause and effect," is a shading of "values, likeability and relevance."

Relevance?

"Attitudes and behavior," Ballon says, "are statistically difficult to measure in a fragmented universe." These are intuitive relationships and

inseparable influences. They shape an infinite array of disparate experiences. They define product expectations. They're our DNA. Ultimately, the big idea...is to get emotionally attached. How simple is that?

Fashion and fragrance brands have always traded on this linkage. You buy with your heart, not your pocketbook.

Ralph Lauren isn't just clothing; "He's" a lifestyle." He knows this better than anyone, he's everywhere. Coca-Cola has it mastered, too. Coca-Cola isn't brown fizzy water, "It's the real thing."

It has to make you wonder, was it the movie or the coke that made the experience memorable or relevant? Was it both?

Brands that rub up against entertainment suspend disbelief and for many of us, the real measure of success is intangible. It's in our gut.

"Making the emotional connection is critical," says Lori Sale, Executive Vice President of Worldwide Licensing and Promotions for MIRAMAX. "You know it instantly; it's believable; it makes sense." Fusing a brand with entertainment isn't so much a science as much as it is an art.

So, how do we calculate an emotional connection?

The answer appears, according to Sale, "when the brand and its content take on a life of their own...when the content lives in other spaces."

"Jurassic Park" is no longer a movie, a time or place; it's a collection of moving images, of real dinosaurs, that live in every kid's head. Entertainment does that. It's explosive, intoxicating, life-changing and ultimately, transcendent.

John Wayne isn't an actor as much as he's a symbol of an American ideal: the cowboy; an image he personified, that was created by the industry that invented the image. It defined a genre, a man, a country.

And so it goes...choose your favorites.

What we know is this: Great brands that are successful have one common, intangible, amorphous measure for success: *they transcend their origin*. "They live in space over time," says Anthony White, Ph.D., president of Media Twister. "Content and its connection with the consumer create the context for a brand."

That's the magic.

The result is an instantaneous, unexplainable, transference of image to idea to mythology. It happens, in the best of cases, unknowingly. The emotional connection is a real commitment. But, that's as difficult to measure as it is to predict. When it happens though, it's a beautiful thing.

Is branded entertainment more about branding than advertising? Or, is it more about both; an alchemy in search of a definition and a measure for success?

Entertaining your consumer and selling them product, at the same time, is a bad idea...but let's face it, that's exactly what we're doing. I've heard it said that we are "Brand Story tellers."

We've been here before. We've been doing it a long time; from barnstorming, radio celebrities, television sponsors to fabled motion picture showman.

Do you remember watching the Ford Model T in the Keystone Kops series, Owl cigars in the 1932 version of "Scarface," Bogie and Gordon's gin in "African Queen, Tom Hanks in "Cast Away" delivering a FedEx package, the talent of "American Idol" drink Coca-Cola or the cast on "The Apprentice" pitch products from Crest toothpaste to Burger King?

The hits just keep coming...as we witness a dizzying array of connections explode across our (television, movie and electronic game) screens.

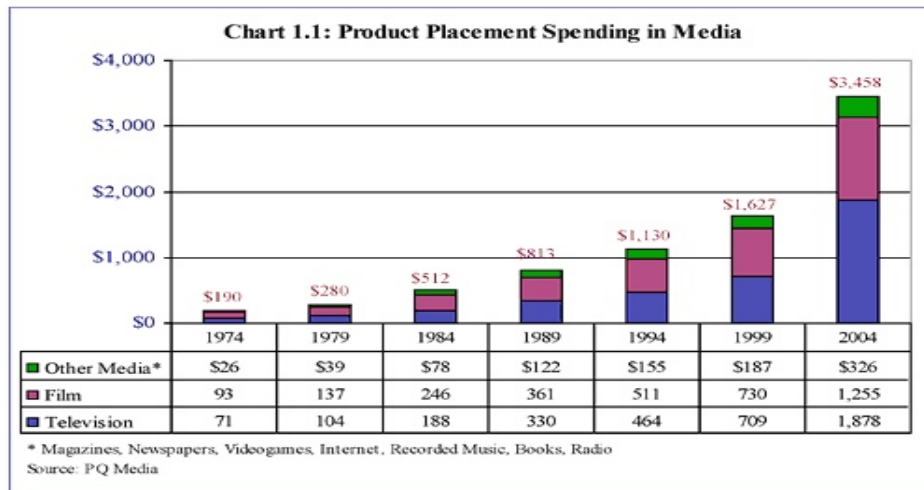
It's a slippery slope but Amazon Theater has created an intriguing archetype. It's a series of five original short films shown exclusively at Amazon.com. Each film features interactive end-title credits with links to products you can purchase at Amazon.

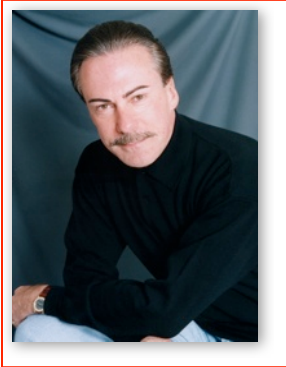
Recommending that we stay to the end of a movie in a theatre, pull out our Blackberry or pen and paper and jot down product information is not what is suggested or even implied here...but, there is a need and plenty of room for a compelling connection to be made with the consumer (*should they want one*) that goes beyond the conventional awareness strategy and the practice of promotion.

Creating the connection is not a function of clever creative, subtle and seamless integration or use of technology. This hybrid conduit of content-to-consumer-ism (*I call it C2C*) is not just about evolving business models but the extension of both a consumer's behavior and their social experience.

Art as commerce! What a business.

So, if we can't yet predict or measure success beyond a feeling, let's at least begin to agree upon what this newly-reinvented-business is supposed to do, so we'll know what to call it. After all, that seems like the right branding thing to do.





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Ken is currently writing the book, **BrandCulture: How motion pictures create poplar culture...From Batman to Bond and Beyond**, and may be contacted at (310) 573 1211 or by e-mail at globocom@aol.com