Hollywood Online: Movie Marketing Practices

in the Dial-Up and Broadband-Eras of the Internet

1994-2009

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Film Studies

in the

Department of Media Arts

of

Royal Holloway, University of London

June 2012

Statement of Original Authorship

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. To the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference to literature and acknowledgement of private discussions with industry members is made.

This work was produced with the supervision of Dr. Barry Langford at the Royal Holloway University of London. The thesis has not been submitted for another degree at this institution or elsewhere.

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Date:………………………………………………………………….

Acknowledgements

Abstract

My thesis provides a historical account of online film marketing practices in the dial-up (1994 – 2001) and broadband (2002 – 2009) eras of the internet. Theatrical exhibition was crucial for the long-term life cycle of a film in the 1990s. It fostered demand in the marketplace and raised public awareness in preparation for film's subsequent exploitation in a range of ancillary markets where the majority of a film's profits were made. The growing home entertainment market remained the most important site for generating these revenues, combining television, satellite, home-video and DVD, personal computer, videogame console, and internet technologies. I argue that online marketing represented the culmination of a range of marketing techniques which were developed in the last half century to sustain these revenue streams and to increase film consumption in the US household. I argue that the internet offered the opportunity to bring together these marketing techniques and connect them directly with the developing world of electronic commerce (or "e-commerce").

I outline in the introduction the importance of film marketing in contemporary Hollywood and explain my methodological approach. Chapter One provides an overview of how film marketing is understood in Film Studies and Marketing literature. Chapters Two and Three focus on the major Hollywood studios' use of the internet as a platform for shaping brand loyalties and for increasing the consumers' long-term engagement with film. It also considers the changing function of the website as an interactive forum, promotional metanarrative and navigation experience. Chapter Four takes four case studies and examines them for broad

developments in the industry. The Conclusion posits that motion picture websites played a crucial role in domesticating and personalising the marketing message for mass audiences, and that internet advertising has found a critical place in the home.

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Introduction

This study examines the role that official motion picture websites have played in the marketing of films produced by the major Hollywood studios. For nearly two decades, the six major studios (Warner Bros., Columbia Pictures, Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures, 20th Century Fox and Walt Disney Pictures) have used movie websites in their marketing to support the theatrical and DVD/home-video releases of their films. Scholars have studied the internet's impact on the American film industry in relation to Intellectual Property litigation (Bresser, 1999; Sandefur, 2000), digital rights management technologies (Currah, 2007), fan management policy (Murray, 2004), fan resistance to IP policy (Jenkins, 1992; Pullen, 2004; Tulloch, 1995) and the industry's ongoing struggle with industrialised piracy (Miller et al., 2005). But the studios' official websites have been often largely overlooked. This has limited our understanding of the history of motion picture websites, their strategic role in the marketing programme, the involvement of filmmakers in website production, and ultimately the commercial, brand value placed upon these sites by film companies themselves. This study therefore builds upon and extends the literature on motion picture websites in Film Studies, and the related Marketing field, by providing a historical account of their development and application in the Dial-Up and Broadband eras of the internet.

I suggest that the immediate goal of the studios was to explore and test the internet as a potential site for the sale and distribution of home-video and other merchandise in ancillary markets. Those that moved most quickly to establish presences on the internet in 1994 did so for some of the year's biggest blockbusters. This experimentation enabled the speculative production of websites which were intended as one-stop locations, where consumers stopped to browse for information on a forthcoming event film and possibly considered making

home-video purchases for other film titles released by the same studio. The production of these early websites shaped the direction of future motion picture website design. *Star Trek: Generations* (David Carson, Paramount Pictures, 1994), *Stargate* (Roland Emmerich, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1994, France/US), *Junior* (Ivan Reitman, Universal Pictures, 1994) and *Batman Forever* (Joel Schumacher, Warner Bros., 1995, US/UK) enhanced the ways in which potential consumers and committed fans could interact with blockbuster film. These websites moved the filmgoer/consumer beyond the conventions of offline fanzines, or the collecting of soundtracks and other promotional media, into a new area of experiential engagement within the home. Experiential engagement, which will be considered in Chapter Two, combined the unique attractions of cyberspace navigation with the more traditional pleasures of goal-directed (i.e., shopping for film-related CD's and videogames) and community-based (online fandoms) fan interaction (Heath, 1976; Hoffman and Novak, 1996).

Film websites therefore helped to foster and sustain internet-surfing as an accepted although not totalising practice. This was critical for the major studios who needed to establish the internet as another viable film delivery system. As early as 1994 Paramount Pictures conducted home-video sales of its extensive *Star Trek* library via a telephone order line and catalogue which the design team, Paramount Media Kitchen, promoted in detail on the *Star Trek: Generations* website. When Digital Versatile Disc (DVD) was introduced onto the consumer market in 1997, the websites for *Spawn* (Mark A.Z. Dippé, New Line Cinema, 1997), *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (Jay Roach, New Line Cinema, 1997, US/Germany) and *Boogie Nights* (Paul Thomas Anderson, New Line Cinema, 1997) all featured prominent links to the New Line Store, an e-commerce initiative which was heavily promoting at the time the letterbox, widescreen and DVD versions of a film franchise which

existed long before movie websites: *The Nightmare On Elm Street* series (New Line Cinema, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1991 and 1994). New Line strategically kept many of its motion picture websites online and accessible for net-surfers well into the millennium hoping to drive prospective consumers to its online Store. It was the major studios' long-term aim therefore to support and sustain film's extensive "afterlife" by controlling the digital distribution and exhibition of film titles online (Currah, 2007). I suggest, in this study, that internet marketing was an essential economic strategy, one which supported this aim from the first year of the web's commercialisation.

Since the 1980s, network and cable television, Video Home System (VHS) and personal computers have heightened the presence of Hollywood film in the home. Barbara Klinger (2006) has argued that the Hollywood majors fought tirelessly to "weave" film viewing as well as film culture into our everyday routines and practices (7). Her *Beyond the multiplex: cinema, new technologies and the home* describes in detail the effect of new technologies on Hollywood cinema's presentation and reception both in the home and multiplex. Klinger argues that cable television and analogue video, introduced to the consumer market in 1975, extended the "textual afterlife" of film beyond theatrical exhibition and transformed Hollywood cinema into a more intimate and valued "pastime"—one now firmly integrated into our everyday routines and experiences (2006: 4-8). I propose that the internet, more than being just another technological component in our homes, brought together marketing approaches associated with film, television, video and gaming, allowing consumers to spend significantly more time both with film and with film advertising. As Jonathan Gray argues in his *Show Sold Separately* (2010) film advertising works textually, helping to frame a film before its release and continuing to create meanings for film long after theatrical exhibition. In this respect, film advertising is, for Gray, largely paratextual, which is to say that it

necessarily surrounds a film, forming our first impressions and shaping our expectations. Although advertising exists outside of film it is nonetheless a vital entryway, embellishing the movie narrative in order to generate meaning in an advertising world which is perceived to be inauthentic and largely synthetic. Gray attributes the term "paratextuality" to Gerard Genette, who originally described a range of elements (such as the author's name, covers, title pages) stemming from a single unit, the literary text (Genette, 1997; Gray, 2010: 6). Posters, trailers, television spots and videogames all create textuality, as do video blog diaries (vlogs), Flash games, application software (app), podcasts, widgets, websites and microblogs.

For marketing executives speaking publicly about the web, movie websites were one component in an integrated marketing programme, but they remained resolute about the strategic need for a motion picture website. A key reason for this seems to be a belief held by marketing executives and other studio representatives that the websites of the new century—and increasingly the decentralised web campaigns surrounding them—were expected to support a major motion picture in ways that television and print advertising could not. Two of the Hollywood majors succeeded on these terms with Broadband-era Alternate Reality Games for *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, Paramount Pictures, 2008) and *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, Warner Bros., 2008, US/UK). These seamlessly integrated advertising campaigns were aimed at mobilising and orchestrating net-"natives," dedicated fans of films and gaming for whom the internet and cyberspace had always been a permanent fixture, an ever-present resource in the living room (Macdonald and Uncles, 2007: 498). These successes remind us of similar events in the early years of web marketing when the majors experimented with new techniques, technologies and practices to raise awareness of a film's opening weekend.

However, for the best part of a decade the majors could not fully exploit the synergy between internet technologies and the public sphere, the world outside. The majors best understood motion picture websites as advertising for home entertainment. Through its links to e-commerce, the movie website became a powerful marketing tool for ancillary channels, and its place in the US household is therefore of significant import.

Definitions of Dial-Up and Broadband era internet

For the purposes of this study I have chosen to separate the period 1994-2009 into two phases: the Dial-Up and Broadband eras of the internet. In Chapter Two I examine the Dial-Up era (1994 to 2001) of internet marketing which began in the year of the internet's full commercialisation for businesses and organisations worldwide, and closed approximately in 2001 after the stock market crash in March (Kliesen, 2003). The second period, which I have labelled the Broadband era (approximately 2001 to the present), charts the growth of internet marketing as it developed in concurrence with a new range of broadband-related technologies, the popularisation of social media and the maturation of the DVD market, and this is explored in Chapter Three. This decision was influenced by several factors: Dial-Up era connection speeds were too slow to carry sound or video files of significant quality, but a variety of technological advances introduced in the Broadband-era, such as TV-quality video, gave rise to an industry-wide house style which served Hollywood's commercial needs far more effectively; these same broadband technologies gave internet users many more opportunities to extend their long-term involvement with a film brand online; public confidence in online commerce was originally low in the Dial-Up period but grew in the late 1990s with the commercial development of online companies such as Amazon and Yahoo! (Swire, 2003); the shift to broadband technologies involved the adoption of new business

models and strategies for developing firm-customer relations; and the major film studios established certain ground rules for dealing with online audiences in the Dial-Up period which served them well in the Broadband era.

The different organisational and social practices which shaped internet marketing in these two periods will be examined in Chapters One, Two and Three. The following section begins with a discussion of Dial-Up era website production: who made them, who designed them, and who determined their exact specifications. It then identifies aesthetic issues arising from the production process which influence the way internet users relate film websites to their source text. As described above, this research argues that movie websites in the Dial-Up and Broadband eras created added value for the home entertainment market and the section briefly provides some examples. Finally, I outline my methodology and define the main research questions for this study.

Motion Picture Websites: Attractions and Limitations

Strategy and creative direction were largely organised by the interactive divisions of the studios' marketing departments, whilst design direction, innovation and continuity were managed by the design agency subcontracted by the studio. The majors were dependent on this collaborative partnership, relying for many years in the Dial-Up era on the ingenuity, ambition and imagination of design teams who operated outside of the Hollywood industry but who were geographically local in Los Angeles. Partnerships were cultivated through business relations in the mid-nineties, and in many cases the studios relied on these partnerships for long periods until the design firms were appropriated into larger technology companies, or dissolved altogether. Digital Planet, for example, the Los Angeles-based firm which created the websites for *Species* (Roger Donaldson, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1995)

and *Waterworld* (Kevin Reynolds, Universal Pictures, 1995), brought its client list (which included Universal Pictures and Warner Bros.) to iXL-Los Angeles when it was acquired by the larger agency in May 1998 (Maddox, 1998). DNA Studio, another Los Angeles firm which was founded in 1995, was acquired after eleven years of business by the Chicago-based agency WhittmanHart Interactive (Advertising Age, 2006). Thus, websites were not produced by the filmmakers themselves—at least, not to the extent that a director, star or producer shared their input on such design duties as concepting, development, illustration 3D or animation. Marketing executives did not seem to encourage this level of collaboration, arguing justifiably that filmmakers were not technologically capable and did not know how to marketise a film.

The studios, however, claimed a vital role in creative innovation which balanced this equation. They maintained a real-time dialogue with the design agency throughout the development service process until inauguration. I discovered in my interviews that studio marketing executives and producers were regularly the original authors of character journals, create-your-own-trailer/poster features, first person shooter game concept ideas (FPS), and numerous other applications that will be explored further in this study. More importantly, they took into account the constantly-evolving nature of the internet and were adept at exploiting competitive shifts in the marketplace. This competitive edge was reinforced by their established partnerships with media publishers and innovative content developers.

However, the software and website interface were created by a group of computer artists who worked from a range of existing promotional materials produced by the studios and often with a high degree of latitude. Typically, the Art Director and Project Manager developed a design architecture which was then passed on to a core team of individual

designers who extended the design and composed the interface in general accordance with the house style. Movie websites were, therefore, the result of a collaborative partnership between the major studios and outside firms, or vendors. This meant that the vendor had an influence on the branding of the film for internet audiences, and this had implications for brand authenticity and for brand continuity across the different marketing channels. In his capacity as producer for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, New Line Cinema, 2003) and *The Amityville Horror* (Andrew Douglas, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2005), Michael Bay personally selected the design agency and the key artists who would work on their websites (though he did not collaborate in the making of these websites himself). Alternatively, some commercial filmmakers, notably Ted Demme, were active participants in the process, enabling the creation of multi-faceted, sometimes profound, websites that invited and rewarded closer inspection, deepened personal "affiliations" with the filmmakers and which helped to naturalise the industrial characteristics of movie marketing. The involvement of filmmakers was dependent on the filmmakers' interest themselves, and on the nature of the partnership between the studio and the vendor.

A second factor is the website's ability to reflect (in broad terms) the aesthetic style of the film. The provision of hundreds of still photographs in high and low resolutions to the designers did not, in itself, guarantee an understanding of a film's "potent visual representation," often resulting in standardised websites with a minimal set of aesthetic reference points to the movie (Wyatt, 1994: 17). But a film like *Twelve Monkeys* (Terry Gilliam, Universal Pictures, 1995), which Universal Pictures screened for the website's Lead Designer Mark Tapio Kines, directly benefited from the collaborative nature of the partnership, such that the film and the website's depictions of an industrial, apocalyptic wasteland were not so dissimilar. These issues were compounded by the promotional

rhetoric of gaming executives. Don Mattrick of Electronic Arts, for instance, claimed that his company's official *The Lord Of The Rings* (Peter Jackson, New Line Cinema, 2001, 2002 and 2003, US/Germany/New Zealand) videogame was not "our interpretation of the movie" but "*is* the movie," simply by virtue of the fact that the firm had "all of Peter Jackson's computer drawings and images to base our work on" (Mattrick, 2003 cited in Thompson, 2003, p.59). Similarly, the designers of movie websites were sometimes inundated with publicity stills, behind-the-scenes production photos, concept art and high-resolution screenshots taken from the film.

Film websites are not, however, movies in Mattrick's sense (this "*is* the movie"). As a starting point, it is helpful to think of websites as an extension of Lisa Kernan's (2004) formulation of a cinematic set of attractions. In her influential study of classical and post-classical Hollywood era film trailers, *Coming Attractions*, Kernan's reference to a "cinema of (coming) attractions," made in the context of film reception and processes of interpretation, conceived the film trailer as being in the vaudevillian tradition a pictorial representation of cinematic spectacle and promise (2004: 2). For this concept Kernan drew on Tom Gunning's theory of spectacle-driven cinema prior to 1906, which posited that film "directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle" (Gunning, 1989: 58-59). Gunning's work was connected to the notion of excess in the emerging marketing aesthetics of the eighties, and more broadly, to the high impact visual culture of contemporary Hollywood (Wyatt, 1994).

Kernan extended the discussion of cinematic attractions to her critical treatment of the theatrical film trailer not as advertising but as a narrative text, a metanarrative which she argued was simultaneously an extrafilmic promotional text, a genre, and a cinema in and of

itself: "Trailers are a cinema—of (coming) attractions," Kernan argued (2004: 2). "As nostalgic texts that paradoxically appeal to audiences' idealised memories of films they haven't seen yet, they attract audiences not only to themselves (as attractions), nor even only to the attractions within the individual films they promote, but to an ever renewed and renewable desire for cinematic attraction per se" (2004: 208). Kernan, thus, posited that trailers played on "anticipatory consciousness," or rather, the hope that an attraction will "deliver," knowing historically that it would likely disappoint. For Kernan, film trailers played a significant role in our decision making processes as filmgoers at the box office, not for what they showed us but for what they promised us. In his discussion of blockbusters, Thomas Elsaesser pithily referred to this exchange as "an act of faith." He suggested that filmgoers waiting at the box office paid neither for the film, nor "the commodified experience" it represented (that is to say, as a sociable evening with friends in a packed theatre), but instead for "the possibility that such a transubstantiation of experience into commodity might take place" (Elsaesser, 2001: 16).

Movie websites modified this play on anticipatory consciousness, making the issue a central concern in relation to the marketing plan. As a brief example, we might consider Palace Chat. For the websites of the most anticipated movie blockbusters, the studios incorporated discussion boards and chat rooms in order to encourage speculative chat in the week prior to theatrical release. The Palace was a modern variant of the chat room: developed in 1994 and then released in November 1995 for Time Warner Interactive by the division's lead programmer, Jim Bumgardner, Palace was a two-dimensional image-based chat room which enabled users to see and interact with each other in avatar form (Bumgardner, 2002). In its application for the studios, The Palace enabled film fans to watch or participate in special events organised around a forthcoming film (PalacePlanet, 2011). These graphical chats

were sometimes incorporated as features on the blockbuster websites of the Dial-Up era. Although primitive and slow to run The Palace gave consumers the chance to discuss eagerly awaited movies together (in special circumstances fans could chat months before a theatrical release) in an essentially studio-sanctioned networked environment. The quality of chat room interaction on sites for *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, TriStar Pictures, 1996) and *The Cable Guy* (Ben Stiller, Columbia Pictures, 1996), or the tentpole event movie *Godzilla* (Roland Emmerich, TriStar Pictures, 1998, US/Japan) did not meet the expectations or requirements of the marketers or the chat room organisers. Nevertheless, these features were requested by the studios in order to facilitate public discussion about these major films. Chat rooms of this kind provided the means by which it was possible to trace argumentative behaviour, fan appreciation, interaction with the filmmakers, virtual immersion in a simulated film environment, and the reciprocal exchange of information (Weger and Aakhus, 2003).

One aim of this study therefore is to elaborate critically upon the ways in which film websites differed from trailers and other forms of marketing. The studio websites of the Dial-Up and Broadband eras, including those removed now from online circulation, offered more of an understanding than theatrical trailers of a film's narrative, its genre or its wider fictional world. In some cases, studio websites helped to close the gap between the physical film property itself and the imaginary film created in the minds of hopeful filmgoers. The number of marketing items and story-based elements included in the site hierarchy for a major blockbuster movie combined to create a more complete idea of the film and its production before many filmgoers reached the box-office. This suggested that some forms of online marketing sold films more authentically than, for instance, theatrical trailers. In many instances, websites expanded the textual universe and produced new meanings by supplying

unique information; moreover, they renewed our desire to see the films being promoted via the production of unseen extrafilmic materials, narratives and narrative images.

The point of these appeals was to make more accessible for audiences an already broadly "open" film text, to cite Barbara Klinger's classic work *Digressions At The Cinema: Reception And Mass Culture* (Klinger, 1989: 15). Extending their historical willingness "to be self-reflexive" in the service of capitalism, the majors took online audiences behind-the-scenes to watch the director rehearsing his crew live, presented opportunities to design movie posters for use in the official campaign, prompted mass gatherings in major cities in support of the film during its pre-release phase and inserted viewers into movie trailers stored on a dedicated webpage. In addition, websites provided new depth to the simplified narratives that proliferated in popular Hollywood. They did so by embellishing the storyworld beyond its existing parameters, realising the environments depicted within the filmworld anew, and refashioning a user's identity to permit their entry into its multiple fantasies (Beck, 2004; Brooker, 2001; Gray, 2010). Some film websites therefore re-narrativised film via inter- and extra-textual devices. In this regard, film websites supported Klinger's claim that popular cinema was a "source" for "a constellation of other narratives" (Klinger, 1989: 15).

The emphasis here was on *long-term* patronage but as the studios adjusted to this position throughout the Dial-Up era numerous mistakes were made. The development of websites problematised the harmony—the co-operative relation—between film and its intertext. Two significant questions are raised here which I intend to explore. The first relates to the purpose of online marketing and the potential blurring of the advertising message. If encouraged or otherwise largely left unchecked, websites had the potential to challenge the

films they promoted by usurping the conventional measures of film promotion and becoming in and of themselves commodities. Websites demonstrated the potential to accumulate more cultural meanings than the actual movies they promoted, such that science-fiction movies like *Starship Troopers* (Paul Verhoeven, TriStar Pictures, 1997) and *Godzilla* could, theoretically, be found wanting against the immersive capabilities of their own highly publicised and very popular websites.

In another example, criticism was directed at film websites that did not declare themselves as advertisements. In a study on hypertext fiction, Paul Booth (2008) indicated that the website for *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, Newmarket Films, 2001) was "incomprehensible" to anyone who had not already seen the film (411). Booth suggested that the website existed for those who had already seen the movie theatrically and returned to the internet in order to make some sense of its complex narrative. He suggested that the *Donnie Darko* website failed as advertising insofar as it could "not necessarily attract new viewers" and there the relationship with the consumer ended (411).

These tendencies raised questions about the techniques which website producers used, and which marketing executives authorised and ultimately accepted as satisfactory, in order to leverage casual audiences. I shall examine these questions by looking more closely at the campaigns for specific blockbuster films and questioning the applicability of practices and marketing strategies that seamlessly integrated advertising with the "everyday" realities of cyberspace. This provides a counterpoint to studies (discussed in the Literature Review section, Chapter One) which have only explored the paratextual value of websites for non-mainstream independent films, like *Donnie Darko* and *Requiem for a Dream* (Darren Aronofsky, Artisan Entertainment, 2000).

A second further point of study, therefore, is the idea that the website—for blockbuster and corporate franchises especially—has been "contained," or at least deliberately limited, in terms of its intertextual scope by the studios as a defensive measure to protect against some of these mistakes, or perhaps to protect against a potential scaling of negative and unwanted textual responses. The overt sense of dissatisfaction, and increasingly disenchantment, felt amongst website designers (but also marketing analysts and entertainment journalists who reported on internet promotions across varying industries) relates directly to this question. Web users who discussed film in numerous messageboards (the JoBlo Movie Network, Superhero Hype!, Chud, and Rudius Media) also criticised the limited scope of movie websites for several years; in addition, statements made by marketing executives like Ira Rubenstein and Don Buckley emphasised a need to find new ways of motivating audiences online to look past websites. While the "openness" of the films has yet to be scaled down or directly influenced, the ways in which film websites were allowed to interface with consumers—the ways in which they were, by 2010, so closely monitored by a room of between thirty and forty people instead of a group of five—did change historically. This was a result of improved audience measurement systems, increased publicity and review of online promotions, and the institutionalisation of website production as a marketing practice. At one level, film websites became even more consumption-oriented than interactive, and I will show this by charting some of the key trends in website design and production over the Dial-Up and Broadband eras.

One such example, examined in detail in Chapter Four, was the website for *Capote* (Bennett Miller, Sony Pictures Classics, 2005, US/Canada). The marketing team for Sony Pictures Classics wished to convey important information about the real-life murder incident on

which the film was based and the Southern author, Truman Capote, who investigated the crime while the perpetrators were still on trial. The website's producers requested a comprehensive links page which enabled audiences to return over time in order to explore various details about the Kansas setting, Capote's working relationship with *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) author Nelle Harper Lee, and the book *In Cold Blood* (Capote, 1966), which Capote published after the murderers were executed. To this end, the production team formed a partnership with *The New York Times* in order to acquire premium archival content which was displayed for interested viewers free of charge in the website's permanent digital database. Films like *Capote* therefore had this advantage. Rather than advertise itself to new viewers as a film which must be seen on its opening weekend in a theatre, *Capote* was perfectly suited for home consumption and thus equally suited to the long-term aims of the studios. At the time of writing this study, the website for *Capote* was still operational, six years after its initial activation in 2005. More than just a relic or digital keepsake, the website created added value for home-video, television broadcast and digital download. I hope therefore to show in this study that the complex websites Hollywood studios produced in both the Dial-Up and Broadband eras played a similar continuing role in the service of these ancillary revenue streams.

Towards the close of the Dial-Up era, then, websites increasingly took the form which the studios retained ten years later. In their efforts to sustain a sense of equilibrium with the internet and with internet-surfers, the major studios were compelled to extend and modify the original template first proposed in the early nineties in order to fully exploit film's "textual afterlife" on DVD (Klinger, 2006: 8). This is not to say that past concepts or conventions were supplanted but, rather, the web—specifically broadband-enabled internet—has taken film advertising beyond the simple provision of rudimentary materials,

the circulation of trailers and the use of iconographic high impact imagery. Such a shift has made possible new relationships between advertising and its consumers, and these changes should be fully explored in film studies to take the significance of the internet beyond the particularities of the documented web campaigns for extraordinary successes, such as *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, Artisan Entertainment, 1999) and *The Lord of the Rings* films.

Research Questions and Methodology

It is my intention to present here a comprehensive overview of the corporate marketing of commercial Hollywood cinema on the web. The first task of this study, therefore, is to acknowledge that interactive movie marketing has a past and a history. I hope to show via systematic research on the development of motion picture websites, in addition to other studio-sanctioned advertising techniques such as the Expandable banner in display advertising (defined in Chapter Three), how web marketing as the latest promotional form in New Hollywood history might ultimately contribute to an understanding of the marketing practices of the modern blockbuster. I hope to answer the following research questions: Why did the studios promote their films online? Were motion picture websites an effective form of internet advertising? Does the studio paradigm for website promotion support the marketing programme? For whom are websites intended? How did the studios leverage the internet for films that were less ideally suited to a digitally networked environment? This study finally rests on a key question, albeit one that is framed throughout in different ways: did websites bring any benefits to the multimedia life-cycle of film?

The research does not include empirical research on the effects of websites on their different users. As this study gives a historical context to website promotions and examines their

conceptual development over the two internet eras discussed, it uses important information that I have gathered from personal interviews and correspondences with industry figures which provide some clarification regarding the producer's original intention. The study is concerned more, therefore, with content producers and with the various ways that film ideas are promoted online and made sense of by their marketers. For this reason, I do not compare the websites to the source texts they promote; I textually analyse them for the narratives and meanings they encode.

I have limited this study to the promotions of mainstream films produced by the filmed entertainment divisions of the media conglomerates TimeWarner, Sony Corporation, Viacom, General Electric-Comcast, News Corporation and the Walt Disney Company. My study includes films created by their subsidiaries: Columbia Tri-Star, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/United Artists, Sony Pictures Classics, Castle Rock Entertainment, Fox Searchlight, Touchstone Pictures, Miramax, the now dissolved Fine Line Features and its former mini-major parent New Line Cinema. Where appropriate, I also include the major independent production companies of this period (Wyatt, 1998): DreamWorks Animation SKG, Lionsgate Entertainment, and before their various changes of ownership in 2005, The Weinstein Company, Dimension Films and DreamWorks SKG. My primary focus in this study is the studio-sanctioned, studio-funded website conceived specifically for the domestic, North-American market. This "domestic, North-American" distinction helps to reduce the risk of sample contamination.

For clarification, I include in parenthesis the name of the director and the year of the film's theatrical release. Unless otherwise noted, the country of origin is the United States; however, where appropriate I include information on the country of origin for films

produced either entirely by non-US countries, or by non-US countries in co-production deals with United States companies. The most significant piece of information included in parenthesis is the distribution company. Since my study examines the official websites of the major Hollywood studios, their subsidiaries and a select number of independent companies as they were intended for North American audiences in both eras, the distribution information provided will indicate the company that was originally responsible for providing both distribution and marketing services in the United States during the theatrical run. Blockbuster films such as *Batman Begins* appear as *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, Warner Bros., 2005, US/UK), and foreign imports such as *Hero* appear as *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, Miramax Films, 2002, Hong Kong/China).

"The studio," unless clarified elsewhere in this study, means the distributor's dedicated interactive marketing department whose personnel are directly responsible for the business strategy and management of the interactive marketing plan. Digital marketing is a key division of the theatrical marketing department, but its operations are typically integrated as a corporate unit with the much larger "Interactive" division. These divisions are powerful companies, with strong brand identities within the industry and are responsible for numerous, mostly commercial, digital initiatives. These include digital feature film production, licensing and publishing for digital hardware platforms, digital entertainment programming and commercial online services. I limit my focus to the marketing campaigns for motion pictures, specifically to matters of website conception, design, production and management/maintenance. I will not therefore investigate the extension of film properties and brands across current platforms, which include interactive television, wireless applications, PC-based videogaming and PSP and PS3 consoles.

The studios, like any business in the United States during the Dial-Up era, relied on the Domain Name System of classification. In 1994, the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) was responsible for the organisation and management of IP addresses and domain names. It determined, within the Domain Name System, a top level structure which is still used in the States today (the hierarchy remains, but its system of classification is not a standard). This structure included seven top-level domains (TLDs): .edu, .com, .net, .org, .gov, .mil, and .int (*Internet Assigned Numbers Authority*, 1994). Of the seven TLDs, four were intended for non-commercial purposes: .edu denoted educational institutions, .org non-government organisations such as charities, .gov government offices, and .mil denoted the US military. The suffix .int was assigned to international organisations. The two extensions which appear in this study are .com and .net. The .com extension was intended for commercial entities in 1994, and accordingly the Hollywood studios registered for this extension almost exclusively on their film websites. Consequently, the majority of sites used in my Dial-Up and Broadband era samples appeared with the global ".com" suffix (for example www.batman-forever.com). This was part of the studios' strategic response to the internet, and it helped to organise, although it could not control, the release of film-related images and video in the networked environment. Towards the end of the Dial-Up era, as fan management became an increasingly sensitive issue, some Hollywood studios experimented with the .net domain. This TLD was originally intended for network operators and their administrative computers, but it was instead used for more general purposes. Studios, such as New Line, have even oriented web campaigns around the .net extension in order to make a film part of the digital environment, rather than a commercial property (as Simone Murray indicates in her 2004 paper on *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* franchises).

Finally, this study has used a variety of sources. I consulted and interviewed in the digital design industry Development Designers, Lead Designers, Art and Creative Directors, Lead Programmers, Graphic Artists and Scriptwriters. I interviewed the founders of Project C and One Ten Design, two of the leading interactive design companies in film-based marketing in the Broadband and Dial-Up eras. Digital Domain also confirmed some information for this research regarding its digital work with director David Fincher. Within the studios' interactive marketing divisions I have interviewed former Project Managers who still maintain senior positions in the filmmaking industry, and the former EVP of New Line Cinema's New Media Gordon Paddison. These industry representatives were necessarily approached for their current views about the "business" of marketing motion pictures online, as well as for their invaluable insight on the studios' original design proposals, resource management operations and specific web-based case studies. They were directly responsible for planning, implementing, designing, programming for web publication, testing, maintaining and updating many of the websites discussed in this study for the major blockbuster releases of the period (1994-2009). Naturally, each representative is highly accomplished in their respective fields, and at the time of writing they continue either to produce blockbuster websites for the major studios (Gordon Paddison works with high-profile filmmakers including Peter Jackson at the strategic marketing company Stradella Road), or alternatively, produce websites for brand marketers in other industries, such as Electronic Arts and MTV. The six major studios and the production companies of some filmmaking teams (including Centropolis Entertainment) were approached for the research but, customarily, they declined/ignored requests for interview.

In addition, I have used the key trade journals *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*, the two most dedicated and reliable resources for historical information on structural changes and

trends within the Hollywood film industry. The study also references material drawn from a wide range of key publications, which have included: marketing trade journals (*Advertising Age, ClickZ, Brandweek, iMedia Connection*), entertainment magazines (*Rolling Stone, Premiere, Entertainment Weekly*), newspapers (*The New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, USA Today*), technology magazines (*Wired, Technology Review*) and business periodicals (*Forbes, E-Commerce Times, Business Week, Business Wire, The Economist*). Furthermore, metrics organisations such as *Forrester* and *Nielsen//NetRatings*, and interactive trade associations like the *Internet Advertising Bureau* were also valuable resources for web-based data and regulatory guidelines.

My study therefore follows a similar methodology to that of Justin Wyatt (1994), Lisa Kernan (2004) and Jonathan Gray (2010) in the sense that it provides a critical exploration of film history (evaluating the industry's organisational practices and market changes) and film textuality together. The research moves beyond the study of novelty or idiosyncratic internet marketing approaches to provide a detailed account of Hollywood's industrial response to emerging web technologies, and its attempts in the Dial-Up and Broadband eras to incorporate web advertising through the creation of motion picture websites into the marketing programme. It thus contributes to the existing literature on internet marketing which has not been advanced in film studies since the mid-2000s and aims to offer a more complete picture of the history of web-based film marketing.

Chapter One: Literature Review

This chapter will focus on the evolving role of marketing in the contemporary Hollywood film industry. Since the mid-1970s, the major studios—Warner Bros. Entertainment, Sony Pictures, Paramount Pictures Corporation, Universal Studios, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation and Walt Disney Motion Pictures Group—have turned increasingly to high-visibility advertising to sell a film in theatrical exhibition. As the home-video market matured in the 1980s, with Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) ownership reaching 70% in US households by 1990, theatrical marketing and exhibition became more important (MPAA, 2003). The theatrical marketing campaign generated the brand value and media exposure to continue selling film downstream on other non-theatrical platforms, where the majority of profit was made after the film's negative cost (the cumulative spend on a production and its distribution) was recouped. Before the internet, marketers established brand awareness by harnessing different media (television, print media, etc.) and establishing sponsored partnerships with retailers to organise events, competitions, and film premieres. When the majors embraced the internet in the 1990s it became a vital tool in the marketing programme, combining the benefits of television, print and radio. This development marked an important shift in the business relationship between the film's makers and the consumer. Like television and radio, the internet addressed filmgoers in their living rooms, bringing them showtime information, soundbite interviews and trailer clips in accordance with the established conventions of traditional marketing. But uniquely, the internet offered viewers unprecedented access to film from the comforts of their living room and offices. More than hyping the release of the latest blockbuster in multiplexes nationwide, the internet reinforced our status as consumers of film within the home.

In this chapter I first examine the key components of the marketing programme as it developed in the 1970s and 1980s, and I consider some of the industrial and organisational changes which shaped marketing during this time. This involves a consideration of the strategic value of television and internet advertising in the home specifically. In the second section I turn to online marketing and review the most relevant works on the subject in Film Studies literature to date. The main literature addressed several related issues: how the internet influenced the consumption of film texts in the home (Kirsten Pullen), how traditional marketing practices and modes of thought were adapted for new media (Kristin Thompson), how negative word-of-mouth publicity on the internet influenced corporate policy (Simone Murray) and how the internet's role in marketing affected the ways in which consumers constructed their own entertainment experiences (J P Telotte). The chapter then reviews the relevant literature in Marketing Studies which has in recent years enhanced the body of knowledge on marketing in the Film Studies field. It examines definitions of word-of-mouth/word-of-mouse, change agents, brand authenticity, brand community and brand revival. These contributions establish a theoretical framework for developments in marketing practice described in Chapters Two and Three.

The importance of value creation

The history of the American film industry has been well documented by numerous scholars who have provided systematic and highly authoritative accounts of the global entertainment market. Balio (1985), Holt (2001), Litman (1998), Maltby (1995) and Scott (2004) have examined the effects of divorcement on the old studio system; Balio (1998), Gomery (1998), Prince (2000), Wasko (1995), and Wyatt (1998) have documented the aggressive acquisition activities of multimedia companies which purchased the majors to exploit synergies across

their entertainment software and hardware divisions. These developments reconfigured the majors' marketing campaigns, which adjusted to satisfy the economic demands of the studios' much larger corporate owners. Consequently, film marketing has become an integral part of the Hollywood film industry.

In advertising terms, theatrical exhibition was the value creator for the many release windows that followed downstream and it is not surprising that this system cost the majors tens of millions of dollars per film. In the advertising industry, marketers have used the term "value creation" to describe the business process of brand investment; this encapsulates the full allocation of resources "across different marketing options in a way that maximises" consumer interest in a brand, otherwise referred to as "brand value" (Hofmeyr and Parton, 2006: 7). In the contemporary Hollywood system, value creation is difficult to define, but it can encompass the entire production process for a motion picture, including decisions made in the pre- and post-production stages. In film marketing terms, however, value creation encapsulates the different elements used in the marketing programme. These are broken into three categories by the industry's trade association the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA): media (TV, internet, radio, print, trailers), other media (cable TV, radio, magazines and billboards), and non-media (production and creative services, exhibitor services, promotions and publicity, market research) (McClintock, 2008; MPAA, 2006; Wasko, 2003: 188-200). Historically, the majors studios have used their own in-house distribution companies to determine precisely where and for how long a film should be distributed and how it can be advertised (Wasko, 2003). These decisions are crucial for generating brand value on other more lucrative platforms (Epstein, 2005; Kimmel, 2006). As Bob Levin, the President of Worldwide Marketing and Distribution for MGM, has stated: "Sales to television, home-video, DVD and other revenue strings on a global basis are

driven by that success or failure in the box-office. It becomes critical for the entire life of the movie" (Levin, 2001).

For two decades, the growing home entertainment market has been the most important site for generating revenues from film and this remains the case. Consumer spending on rental and sell-through home-video reached its highest level in the history of home entertainment in 2004, when revenues totalled $21.8 billion dollars (DEG, 2011). In the same year, filmgoers spent barely half this amount at the domestic box-office. According to the MPAA theatrical revenues for the States and Canada accounted for $9.2 billion in revenues (MPAA, 2008). The next platform after home-video was video-on-demand (VOD) and pay-per-view (PPV) television. By 2004, 16.9 million US households used pay-per-view programming, generating $337 million in revenues (MPAA, 2004). After PPV, the studios collected revenues for premium subscription television. In 2004, 35 million US households subscribed to premium channels such as Home Box Office (HBO), Cinemax and Showtime (MPAA, 2004). Traditionally, the final platforms in the home entertainment cycle included network television and basic cable television. In 2004, 73.9 million households had basic cable compared to 17.6 million in 1980 (MPAA, 2004). Since 1990, however, the penetration rate for personal computers (PC) has risen from 23.5% (21 million households) to 64.8% (72.1 million households) in 2004 (MPAA 2003; MPAA 2004). By 2007, the MPAA claimed that broadband penetration in US households had outpaced DVD penetration for the first time. In the same report, it also estimated that 73 million people already accessed the internet on a monthly basis using a mobile device like a smartphone (MPAA, 2007). The studios responded by adjusting their practices to incorporate online and mobile distribution. Paul McDonald (2007) has shown that by the mid-2000s online subscription schemes were the most viable model of video rental; by 2005, 5.5 million online subscriptions with services

such as Netflix and 2 million in-store subscriptions generated revenues of $1.4 billion (164).

Thus taken together, the revenues generated from television, video and digital downloads

were (and remain today) far more important to the major studios and their transnational

media conglomerate owners than the revenues generated by films in their theatrical run

(Epstein, 2005: 209-224; Gomery, 2003: 77-78; McDonald, 125-135; Wasko, 2003: 125-

143).[1]

These revenues alleviated a considerable amount of risk associated with blockbuster movie

production. In the 1970s, *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, Paramount Pictures, 1972),

The Exorcist (William Friedkin, Warner Bros., 1973), *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, Universal

Pictures, 1975) and *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* (George Lucas, Twentieth

Century-Fox, 1977) radically changed the film industry's patterns of success, but the failure

of the prestigious epic *Heaven's Gate* (Michael Cimino, United Artists, 1980) exposed the

studios' dependency on a volatile and unpredictable theatrical market (Cook, 2000, 25-65;

Schatz, 2008: 16-29). The terms "blockbuster formula," "blockbuster phenomenon" and

"blockbuster syndrome" have been used in relation to this particular hit-driven economic

dilemma (King, 2009a: 6; Maltby, 1995: 74; Maltby, 2003: 160; Wasser, 2008: 125). The

studios countermanded this risk in the 1970s through cross-collaterisation. This meant that

the box-office rentals on blockbuster successes were used to secure (i.e., to write off) the

investments lost in box-office failures (Schatz, 1993; Cook, 2000: 25-65; Wasser, 2008).

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[1] By 2008, consumer spending on DVD sell-through and rentals in the States was $18.4 billion (Rocha, 2008; DEG, 2011). Home-video continued to diversify after 2008 with the advancement of the Blu-ray Disc (developed by Sony), video-on-demand available in 22 million U.S. households, digital video recorders in about 7 million U.S. homes (VSDA, 2005), and the digital distribution of popular mainstream films on the internet for consumption on handheld entertainment systems like the Xbox and PlayStation Portable (PSP). Taken together, consumer spend on DVD, Blu-ray and digital downloads/streaming was $18.8 billion in 2010 (DEG, 2011). This was nearly twice the amount that the Hollywood studios collected at the box-office in 2010—approximately $10.6 billion according to the MPAA (2010). This made the domestic, privatized space of the home the ideal setting for advertising.

Blockbuster film production on the scale of *Jaws* and *Star Wars* demanded high levels of investment in production, distribution and marketing, however, the returns on investment at the domestic and international box-office on these feature and blockbuster films was unprecedented (Prince, 2000: 90-111; Krämer, 2005: 89-104; Bordwell, 2006: 1-4). By 1985, the home entertainment market was so profitable that the studios now prepared movie blockbusters and A-class films for repurposing across multiple media platforms in a strategy known as "synergy" or "cross-media marketing" (Schatz, 2008: 22; Wasser, 2008: 126).

The advertising expenditure, therefore, required to market films (the "awareness mission" as Epstein defines it) rose considerably and consistently after the mid-1970s (Epstein, 2005: 177). In 1979, the average advertising budget per film was $2.5 million against an average negative cost of $8.91 million (Cook, 2000: 2). The estimate for total advertising expenditure in 1979 was $514 million, the equivalent to 23% of total domestic rentals for that same year (61). This itself represented a 5% increase over advertising expenditure for 1978. By 1989, advertising and print costs averaged $9 million per film (Prince, 2000: 20). In 2001, advertising expenditure averaged $27.28 million (MPAA, 2002: 20). Statistics published for the year 2007 bring this study as close to date as possible using official MPAA data. The average marketing costs of a feature film developed by a major totalled $32.17 million; films developed by specialty divisions, such as Sony Pictures Classics or New Line Cinema (owned by Warner Bros.), spent $22.97 million on advertising. The MPAA broke this spending down further into different forms of media but only for films developed by a subsidiary. 29.8% of this budget was allocated to network and spot television advertising, 12.9% was spent on print advertising in newspapers, 5.3% went into the internet and online promotions, and 4.9% to the production of film trailers; the remaining expenditure was divided into two surplus categories: "other media" (24.5%)—cable television, radio,

magazines and outdoor billboard advertising—and "other non-media" (22.6%)—market research, publicity, and other services related to the production of promotional materials used in exhibition (MPAA, 2007: 15). This report marked a small watershed in the history of the MPAA in that the organisation has since refused to publish production and marketing budgets data for 2008, 2009, and 2010 (Verrier, 2009). The reports were also ambiguous about the considerable size of the studios' overall promotional outlay.

In summary, industrial and technological developments in the 1970s and 1980s led to the formation of a new business strategy which dominated the American film industry: the repurposing of film for distribution in all delivery systems, the majority centred in the home. The marketing programme has been adjusted to support this strategy. The next section addresses some of these changes by focusing on the traditional methods used by the studios in their campaigns prior to the internet.

The marketing programme

Perhaps the most important element in the marketing programmes of the 1970s and 1980s was television advertising. According to Hayes and Bing (2004), spot TV advertising was used as a part of the local marketing programme by exploitation filmmakers as early as the 1950s (158-159). Wyatt (1994) attributed the first successful large-scale use of this strategy to the marketer Max Youngstein and director/producer Tom Laughlin who re-distributed *Billy Jack* (Tom Laughlin, Warner Bros., 1971) in 1973. Youngstein and Laughlin bought 30-second commercials for a flat fee to run on local television and in a technique called four-walling rented the theatres within the broadcast area to play only his movie. Progressing with this strategy on a regional basis, Laughlin demonstrated that he could target different audience segments with carefully designed television advertising and create

considerable interest around a single film (Lewis, 1998). In his detailed study, Gomery (2003) argued that Universal Pictures executive Lew Wasserman innovated the practice on a nationwide scale with the saturation release of *Jaws* two years later. The nationwide prime-time television spots which Wasserman purchased for $1 million ran on the main networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) three days before the film's premiere and were strategically deployed as drivers to build the film's event status at a national level (Cook, 2000: 40-43; Gomery, 2003: 72-75). The success of this strategy marked a reversal of fortunes for the majors who henceforth incorporated television into their marketing programmes as standard practice. These advertisements ensured the delivery of the marketing message directly into the home and increased the film's exposure to as many people as possible. However, the costs were excessive. When the majors launched their first websites a 30-second spot advertisement on a network during prime time cost $1 million (Fitzpatrick, 1995). In 2003, the film industry spent $29.3 billion on broadcast and cable network advertising (MPAA, 2003). By 2006, the majors spent an average of $30.71 million per film on theatrical advertising; $10.8 million of this went to network television and spot advertising (MPAA, 2006).

The next important aspect of the campaign is not an element but a distribution strategy. Borrowing from techniques developed by again exploitation producers the major studios adjusted the release patterns of their films to capitalise on the effects of TV advertising. Here, the distributor leased theatres on a regional or citywide basis. This enabled them to exploit a short theatrical run and recoup the costs before negative word-of-mouth countermanded the success of that run. Hayes and Bing (2004) and Heffernan (2002) have shown that the studios appropriated saturation release strategies from 1950s science-fiction and 1970s exploitation. Wyatt (1994) cited the regional saturation campaigns of *Billy Jack*, *Magnum Force* (Ted Post, Warner Bros., 1973), and *Breakout* (Tom Gries, Columbia

Pictures, 1975) which opened on 1,500 screens (Acland, 2005: 160). Hayes and Bing

(2004), again, argued that the so-called saturation release for *Jaws* was more accurately a

modified wide release: in order to artificially stimulate demand Wasserman restricted the

opening run to 409 US theatres rather than the pre-booked 600. The costs associated with

saturation booking were substantial. To obtain the best results distributors ordered hundreds

of prints to play on as many screens as possible within the first two weeks of the run. The

expenses associated with printing, and dubbing for international territories, increased the

importance of marketing, to the extent that the marketing campaigns for some 1980s films

were determined as early as the pre-production stage. This brings us to the third revision in

the marketing mix.

Market research, though used by the studios to assess the commercial prospects of films well

before the 1980s,[2] became a chief component of the marketing programme after the majors

were acquired by non-media conglomerates in the 1960s. Company executives who were

largely unfamiliar with the entertainment industry demanded that a significant portion of the

advertising budget be devoted to market research; the need to establish potential

blockbusters as pre-sold events in the public consciousness helped to institutionalise the

practice throughout the late 1970s (Cook, 2000: 15). Market research involved a system of

tracking surveys, feature film previews and market analysis to determine the most

marketable elements of a film. Wasko (2003) notes that these test screenings were often

used to develop a marketing strategy—tests were also performed on marketing materials to

determine their efficacy with certain demographics (Drake, 2008: 73). Among others, Wyatt

(1994) has criticised the market research model on methodological and analytical grounds:

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[2] Market research was originally conducted by independent companies such as Leo Handel's Motion
Picture Research Bureau and George Gallup's Audience Research Inc., in the late 1930s (Austin,
1989).

post-production research, he argued, allowed marketers to take a new film and align it mechanically with previous successes. In the process, narrative originality and aesthetic innovation were formally overlooked or rejected in favour of "the familiar" (1994: 160). Accordingly, market research techniques came under heavy scrutiny from industry analysts who criticised "marketing's growing presence in contemporary storytelling" (Miller, et al. 2005: 267).

The most desirable (and hence visible) elements used in the marketing programme are typically the promotional materials themselves. The film trailer is the most expensive of these items. For a movie blockbuster trailers can cost approximately $250,000 and the studios required between 20,000 and 30,000 print copies for theatrical exhibition (Drake, 2008: 71). Once quite simple to define as an exclusively theatrical advertisement designed for cinema audiences, the word *trailer* is now used in relation to a variety of video-based materials which are designed by specialist agencies to increase audience awareness across a range of media platforms: cinema, television, internet and videogames. Film trailers are still cited in audience polls as having the biggest influence on moviegoing choices, although recent studies suggest that websites are superseding theatres as the main delivery system for these trailers (Godley, 2012; Wasko, 2003: 198). Making-of videos, interviews and photographs (handled by the unit publicist) are key elements of the campaign, as are billboard purchases (handled by advertising agencies) and advertisements placed in newspapers and magazines. A film's key art—the signature graphic that forms the centre of a campaign according to Drake (2008)—is also critically important. The studios use advertising agencies, such as The Cimarron Group and BLT Communications, to develop their key art and these costs have ranged between $5,000 and $200,000 (Marich, 2004: 9). The Electronic Press Kit (EPK), though rarely seen by the general public, is a standard

industry item which the studios use to promote their films on local television and radio.

Organised by a small team of producers and cameramen, EPKs contained video interviews

and behind the scenes footage and were significant investments. The kit which publicised

the release of *Boyz N the Hood* (John Singleton, Columbia Pictures, 1991) cost $25,000 to

produce (Frook, 1993). The EPK projects for Hollywood blockbusters, such as *ET: The

Extra-Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures, 1982) and *Conan the Barbarian*

(John Milius, Universal Pictures, 1982), were given to established multimedia firms such as

Prime Time Video. In the Dial-Up and Broadband eras, the provision of film clips in the

form of EPKs to the press would evolve into an industrywide practice whereby the studios

released film clips to non-journalistic audiences online for free. The EPK is discussed in

more detail in Chapter Two.

Finally, the cinema itself has become a vital location for different marketing practices. The

transformation of cinema sites in the mid-1980s into multiplexes (multiple-screen sites with

large auditoriums and concession counters) and in the 1990s into megaplexes (entertainment

amusement parks which were modelled on the shopping mall) permitted new leisure

activities around filmgoing such as videogaming and food consumption (Acland, 2005).

Traditional cinema advertising involved a range of marketing media, from posters, counter

cards and coupons to popcorn bag and soft drinks advertising. New entertainment

technologies also linked the consumption space of the auditorium to the promotional site of

the lobby/foyer (Wasko, 2003). Charles R. Acland offered a comprehensive overview of this

transformation in his book *Screen Traffic* (2005). In terms of advertising, video-

programming in the multiplex foyer was a significant addition for exhibitors. In the mid-

nineties, televisions suspended from the ceilings played a variety of film trailers and

extended clips to filmgoers on loop as they entered the foyer, bought tickets and ordered

food at the concession stands (Donahue, 2003). These various additions helped to make film a more "central" aspect of our daily lives, in the public spaces beyond the multiplex, in the privatized spaces of our homes.

The following section will show how modern internet promotions mark a new phase in the development of the studios' marketing programme. It examines the main Film Studies literature on online marketing and introduces a number of key approaches. These involve the creation of websites that allow their users to explore the film's storyworld as gamers, websites that encourage their users to join a community of like-minded blockbuster fans and share information about the film, and websites that invite filmgoers to become active participants in the marketing campaign.

Film Criticism: Responses to the Development of Online Marketing

For J. P. Telotte (2001) one of the characteristics of movie websites in the Dial-Up era was the use of pre-internet marketing practices to sell film online. Citing a small number of websites for loosely connected genre films, he argued that one strategy was to associate the horror and science-fiction picture with a legacy, a historical tradition, of cinematic horror. The common denominator for the websites of remakes like *The Mummy* (Stephen Sommers, Universal Pictures, 1999) and *House on Haunted Hill* (William Malone, Warner Bros., 1999), and original works like *Lake Placid* (Steve Miner, Twentieth Century Fox, 1999)*, Deep Blue Sea* (Renny Harlin, Warner Bros., 1999, US/Australia) and *Urban Legend* (Jamie Blanks, TriStar Pictures, 1998, France/US), was their focus on the allure of mainstream Hollywood filmmaking. Promotional devices (video interviews, photo galleries) about skilled personnel in the industry (stars, prestigious directors) were commonplace and were not intended to encourage participatory engagement with a film's story or with a film's

world. Contemporary websites, therefore in Telotte's estimation, directed their energies more towards advertising the "hierarchical entertainment value of the movie itself" than to "the particular characteristics" of the storyworld (35). The examples included in his sample gestured towards a classical model for horror and science-fiction film websites. Electronic poster sites offered basic data about story, release dates and ticket-ordering; electronic press kit sites offered more detailed information on the film (credits, interviews, showtimes, further reading material), downloads (images) and competitions (sweepstakes contest); and teaser sites provided the features of the electronic press kit in addition to cast lists, filmmaker's backgrounds, clips, screensavers, electronic postcards, chat rooms and games (34).

Telotte proposed that *The Blair Witch Project* website necessarily modified these classical approaches in order to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. It achieved this by foregrounding an online narrative and de-emphasising the film's status as filmed entertainment. Furthermore, the site was showcased as a historical artefact in an authentic real-world context. Citing Janet Murray (1997), he found a correlation between the technological framing of reality, which was key to the film text, and the three aesthetic principles (immersion, agency, transformation) which gave electronic narrative forms, specifically videogames, their lure. According to Murray, videogame environments gave users the freedoms to shift identities and to role play (transformation), to participate in the narrative (agency), and to submit control to the environment itself, letting it subsume users (immersion). Each principle, Telotte noted, could also be observed in the website itself. Unlike the websites for *The Mummy, Lake Placid* or *Deep Blue Sea,* where the cinematic context was habitually restated on many pages, *The Blair Witch* site suppressed this information. It emulated the film's technologically assisted, aesthetic distance on storyworld

events by giving visitors access to fictional documents, found footage clips and puzzle pieces with little or no guidance on how to make sense of them, either in relation to the promoted film or to an electronic reality.

This implied, although it was not stated by Telotte, that the marketing departments for the major Hollywood studios either resisted new marketing models that explored the characteristics of the storyworld, or that they were not yet convinced that such approaches benefited a film in exhibition. This is significant because, still today, independent films are often said to go beyond the conventional marketing activities of the majors in order to attract an audience; Thompson (2007) has stated the same (135). It is, however, far from clear if *The Blair Witch's* idea of a real-world context in a computerised form constituted a dramatic shift away from any of the practices already deployed by the majors. The websites for *Species* (Roger Donaldson, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1995), *Anaconda* (Luis Llosa, TriStar Pictures, 1997, US/Brazil/Peru) and *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures, 1997)*,* to name three pictures which fall under the same generic classification (i.e., horror and science-fiction), also transported users into their storyworlds by masking the film experience, by immersing viewers in their respective mythologies, and by constantly determining and switching the identities of viewers. The strategy, though not strictly "conventional," was a popular one by 1999, which means that the different interactive teams working for the online marketing departments of Twentieth Century Fox, Warner Bros., Universal, MGM, and Columbia TriStar were already familiar with this strategy for having seen, tested and finally authorised its use in some of their campaigns. Secondly, the technological framing of events in *The Blair Witch Project* may have been crucial to limiting the spectator's field of vision in the cinema, however, it is less plausible to suggest that the higher than usual "systemic instability" which this created in aesthetic

terms somehow prepared the film for the marketing environment of the internet, or its "more sceptical" audiences (37-38). *The Lost World* website traded successfully on many of the same pleasures of immersion, agency and transformation, but it cannot be said that this film also reflects the nature of the electronic document, the hypertext. In fact, *The Lost World* conforms to the classical conventions of mainstream, blockbuster cinema, from story causality and narrative motivation to composition and continuity editing; it is debatable if *The Blair Witch's* "raw human experience framed by technology" represents much of a departure from these same classical Hollywood lines (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985; Telotte, 2001: 38). I suggest that, in this regard specifically, the website for *The Blair Witch Project* has gained disproportionate attention. Finally, Telotte's article examined the official theatrical website during and after the film's release, but it did not assess either the influence of fake postings on the web, or indeed the official website in its original form, when authored by the staff of the production company Haxan Films (and on occasion the film's directors). In comparison to these practices, the "found footage" and "evidence" updates, which for Telotte offered "a reality far stranger than that found in any classic old-style horror film," were conventional promotion devices, similar in function to the hidden audio clips on *The Lost World* website (35). The "different context" it offered visitors for viewing the film, therefore, was not dissimilar to the internet strategies used in other campaigns.

The academic focus during this period subsequently turned to two global brands—or more specifically one blockbuster, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Chris Columbus, Warner Bros., 2001, US/UK), and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Peter Jackson, New Line Cinema, 2001, New Zealand/US), *The Two Towers* (Peter Jackson, New Line Cinema, 2002, New Zealand/Germany/US), and *Return of the King* (Peter Jackson, New Line Cinema, 2003, New Zealand/Germany/US). The scholars who

examined *Harry Potter* for aspects of its online marketing were few, and although *The Lord of the Rings* inspired many in the field to investigate its success, the literature which exists on the trilogy's online marketing has to date focused overwhelmingly on fan responses, fan websites and other fan creations. Within film studies, therefore, only Murray (2004), Pullen (2006) and Thompson (2003, 2007) have analysed the films' significant contribution to the development of online marketing practices. Each scholar has made differing claims for the novelty of *The Lord of the Rings* and the marketing approach of its production and distribution company, New Line Cinema.

Scholars such as Henry Jenkins (1992), John Tulloch (1995) and Martin Barker and Kate Brooks (1998) have analysed the often antagonistic relationship between media corporations, as the institutions of cultural production, and fan communities, as either powerless moral guardians or consumer activists. Their lines of argument failed, however, to directly incorporate corporate management and legal studies perspectives, a shortcoming which several scholars (McGuigan, 1992; Garnham, 1995; Harms and Dickens, 1996), including Simone Murray (2004), saw as a critical weakness in the study of fan agency. Murray's account of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* online marketing was, therefore, framed largely in the context of intellectual property (IP). She examined Warner Bros.' tracking of *Harry Potter* fans for copyright infringement and compared this to New Line Cinema's pioneering management of *The Lord of the Rings* fans for the period 2000 to 2002. She found that both approaches differed markedly. In the first case study, Warner Bros. was viewed to have taken an unfair and aggressive stance against many fan friendly communities whose interests overlapped directly or indirectly with the *Harry Potter* books, its forthcoming film, and global merchandising (Jenkins, 2006: 185-187; McCarthy, 2000; Weise, 2001). This area of internet history and fan culture has been examined in detail by

Henry Jenkins (2006), but it is sufficient to note that Warner Bros. defended its position by identifying two aspects of rights ownership with regard to the internet: the widespread distribution of infringing materials and the acquisition of branded domain names. Fan interference in each of these areas translated into a loss of IP property rights and "dilution" of the *Harry Potter* brand. By issuing cease-and-desist notices to 107 domain name owners, and suspending a number of sites in order to separate inauthentic from authentic fans, Warner Bros. succeeded in legally enforcing copyright law to protect its ownership rights and the integrity of the brand (Nelsen cited in Jenkins, 2006: 186). Murray ascribed these actions to "a corporate culture of IP policing more attuned to theoretical legal rights than to the practical need to secure the allegiance of core fan audiences" (15). It is in this context, Murray suggested, that Warner Bros.' fan friendly website for the film—which incorporated closely monitored forums for conversation and an official Webmaster Community for dedicated fans—should be understood. In her second case study, Murray proposed that New Line Cinema's mishandling in January 2000 of two high-profile incidents of possible IP infringement (which occurred on *The Lord of the Rings* set during the early stages of principal photography), precipitated an internal reconsideration of its approach. Prior to this, the core *Lord of the Rings* fans were originally conceived of as "IP-flouting textual obsessives" positioned outside of the production (15). After New Line's policy shift, they were treated more appropriately as a privileged group of creators and contributors. This was significant because it indicated that New Line might not have departed from the traditional "contestatory mode of fan management" which defined many earlier campaigns (and which importantly defined Time Warner's own campaign for the first *Harry Potter* film) had it not been undermined by the prospect of a "potential PR disaster" (18-19). In another study, Thompson (2007) has cited the important influence of director Peter Jackson in this particular management decision. Alternatively, Murray has alluded to the personal

inclinations of several New Line executives, the success of *The Blair Witch Project's* viral marketing campaign, and its impact on the then senior vice-president of worldwide interactive marketing Gordon Paddison. Murray concluded that in both case studies, the traditional fan/producer relationship had not been overturned: New Line's "selective appropriation" of fan audiences was "merely a conditional agreement not to enforce its IP interests for the precise period during which fan activities further its commercial interests" (21); and Warner Bros.' approach, though publicly opposed by *Harry Potter* fans and generating negative publicity, was consistent with copyright laws.

Similar claims about the establishment of alliances with *The Lord of the Rings* fans were made by Kirsten Pullen (2006), although her line of argument proposed more radically that the trilogy and its marketing *created* the contemporary "blockbuster fan" (177). Pullen imagined a different kind of film fan, one who shared similar characteristics with the "traditional" fan described by Jenkins (1992), but who was also distinct in several ways— primarily, for being already predisposed towards the internet as a marketing tool and a forum for creative expression. Jenkins originally identified five key characteristics that were shared by all fan communities: fans were avid and active consumers; they found inspiration in the narrative complexities or ambiguities of "producerly" texts (Fiske, 1992: 42); they envisioned a grand master text, a meta-text, which was consistent with the favoured programme but which also expanded on characters' states of mind as well as plot lines; fans regularly contributed to the creation of fan literature, programme dossiers, or personalised artworks; and lastly, the traditional fan combined their knowledge with the group, creating a valuable and alternative knowledge community. Jenkins' later work (2002), which acknowledged some of the criticisms made by scholars such as Murray about cultural studies, saw the internet as an extension of traditional fan communication—the internet did

not extinguish traditional fans in an abstract sense, removing them from this new knowledge culture, but rather it facilitated easier communication between them, removing limitations as well as a sense of disconnection, increasing intimacy via support networks as well as visibility of works and artworks, and privileging collective intelligence as well as increasing fan productivity. To this, Pullen added her version of internet fandom: the blockbuster fan. Pullen was interested in accounting for a number of developments in the fan/producer relationship: the base community's new sense of involvement with and influence on various aspects of production, the fans' general fidelity to an original source text, the presence of a ready and active niche audience, and the appropriation of "fans' creative work" by the online marketing team (2006: 177). For Pullen, *The Lord of the Rings* was uniquely able to show how the fans shared directly in a blockbuster film's global success. Pullen theorised a mutual exchange at work here: the privileged fans who benefited from New Line's early community building initiatives first turned behind the scenes information into advertising revenue and later leveraged their positions as insider fans "into several business opportunities" (184).

I agree that New Line's close co-ordination with fan websites engendered a strong sense of faith in the core audience as regards the integrity of the production, but Pullen argued this in relation to how fan/producer relationships appeared in 1999 with the advent of *The Blair Witch Project,* and not how it was developed historically over the course of the Dial-Up era. Gordon Paddison is often revered by scholars like Pullen, Thompson and Murray for "pioneering" contemporary fan/producer relations, but as Chapters Two and Three of this study will demonstrate, he was competing with equally successful, and arguably more powerful, marketers in the field. For example, Jim Moloshok, who served as Warner Bros.' senior vice president of marketing (1989-1999) and president of Warner Bros. Online (1999-

2000), provided television programme stills and information to *Babylon 5* (J Michael Straczynski, Warner Bros. Television, 1994-1998) fan communities using moderated newsgroups in 1994. Ira Rubenstein, who served as vice president of marketing at Columbia TriStar Interactive before becoming executive vice president of Sony Pictures Digital, installed into the *Starship Troopers* (Paul Verhoeven, TriStar Pictures, 1997) website a custom facility for downloading film logos and images for non-commercial use. These practices were established on blockbuster websites before the launch of *The Lord of the Rings*. It is also debatable how different the blockbuster fan's involvement with *The Lord of the Rings* films was from, for example, fan support for the science-fiction series *Babylon 5* and its creator J Michael Straczynski (Oppenheim and Turner, 1999), or even from the way film fans and aspiring filmmakers ultimately engaged with the website for *The Claim* (Michael Winterbottom, United Artists, 2000, UK/France/Canada). An independent film made outside of the Hollywood system with international stars, *The Claim's* production was comprehensively tracked through the official website (created by Resolve Media), from concept in January 2000 to principal photography and finally release in December 2000. The campaigns discussed in Chapter Two of this study, therefore, laid the ground for the fan/producer relationship eventually celebrated by Pullen and others. This negates the suggestion that *The Lord of the Rings* internet marketing created a new fan *category*.

These arguments rested to some degree on claims that fan activity influenced the production. Pullen's assertion that some fan creations were "harnessed by the marketing campaign" (181) drew on the work of Kristin Thompson, whose 2003 article on the trilogy seemed to indicate the boundaries of the fan/producer relationship. Thompson related the film's internet plan to the concerns of the core *Lord of the Rings* fan group, who desired more than broad reassurances that the filmmakers honoured the integrity of the original works authored

by J. R. R. Tolkien. Thompson rightly argued that the development of internet technologies (email, Instant Messaging, personal web journals, mailing lists, newsgroups) and the determination of fan "spies" acting in their capacity as "participatory journalists" for online networks (Gillmor, 2004: 25), diminished the *need* for a traditional mode of news management. This did not mean, for example, that online marketing practices changed— Chapter Two will show that important components of the campaign like producer-to-fan communications were often used throughout New Line's online history—but rather, "the lure of access" to filming locations and stars, which was traditionally exploited to build relationships with journalists, was leveraged more broadly in support of fan-generated publicity (Drake, 2008: 75). In examining this development, Thompson (and similarly, Pullen) moved away from the interactive marketing plan, and hence the strategic objectives of the official website, to evaluate the impact of film publicity on fans and their websites. The most successful of these websites blurred the line between orthodox fan activities and participatory journalism, but rather than compromise the films' marketing (for example, by challenging New Line's promotions with AOL, which depended on editorial content), the presence of amateur news magazines created by and for fans worked to New Line's advantage. The interactive unit leveraged strategic partnerships with the webmasters of these sites, and supplied promotional content to sustain positive online publicity. However, where Paddison has helped to explain the precise nature of these partnerships in his own report on the marketing (Mohammed, 2003: 580), Thompson referred to abstract processes of marketing and publicity. She argued that some fan-generated publicity was viewed by crew and cast members, but that no such material *influenced* the filmmakers. It was also Thompson's assertion that some poll topics and questions which featured on *TheOneRing* fan site may have been submitted by "people clearly connected with the films" (56)—this

may amount to a strengthening of fan relations with a media division or company associated with the film, but left unspecified in this way it may also amount to nothing.

The works cited focused on the changing relationship between audience and copyright holder-producer. Such emphasis has led film theorists to abandon the movie website itself. Consequently, factual errors or inconsistencies have emerged in the work of some theorists and have even been used to support broad conclusions about the direction of marketing. Pullen (2004) has stated that "*The Blair Witch's* techniques have been copied and revised … for Steven Spielberg's *AI* (2001)," and that the success of this campaign was an indicator of the blurring of the line between official and fan-produced websites (89). In the same passage, Pullen claimed that "official sites borrow the conventions of fansites" (89). Citing *The Lord of the Rings* as an example, Pullen argued that the commercial imperative to mimic "traditional fan activities" accounted for the presence of message boards on the site. Both statements were misleading and inaccurate as I will demonstrate in Chapter Two, but the conclusions they supported were also questionable. For example, the high level of fan-produced *The Lord of the Rings* websites and engagement with the films online may have led to an emphasis on email marketing (a process which was conducted off-site, which is to say independently of the website itself), but this was obviously not the same as borrowing fansite conventions. This study, therefore, attempts to correct some of these misperceptions.

Marketing Theory

Film Studies is often constrained by the need to address film marketing on a textual, economic or industrial/organisational level. The relative lack of interdisciplinary cross-referencing between the two disciplines has been noted most recently by Finola Kerrigan in her book *Film Marketing* (2010). Although a full and comprehensive examination of

marketing theory is beyond the scope of this chapter and this study (which is primarily concerned with film textuality and industry), it is important to identify influential studies and key recommendations made by researchers for marketers working with online consumers to provide a more balanced overview of film marketing. The scholars in this section have studied consumer activities and responses to a range of branded products (these have included films and television shows but no internet properties). Importantly, they have considered definitions of brand authenticity, word-of-mouth and other important aspects of marketing which will be drawn upon again in this study. The rest of this section will, therefore, cover definitions of marketing, viral marketing and word-of-mouse. It also examines the issue of authenticity and the significance of brand community marketing, areas which are of relevance for Chapters Two and Three.

For the American Marketing Association, marketing encapsulates the "activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers and society at large" (2007). In the marketing literature, it has been defined more concisely as "paid, non-personal communication from an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade or influence an audience" (Wells, Moriarty and Burnett, 2000: 6).

In the last half century, marketing has shifted from a product-oriented, unified, mass market system to a more segmented customer orientation focusing on consumer markets (as opposed to solely offering product) (Sheth et al., 2000; Smith, 1956; Tadajewski, 2009). This resulted in the concept of market orientation (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990; Webster, 1988; Webster, 1992). Market orientation is the process by which businesses reach a sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) through the resources at their

disposal; the objective is to achieve and sustain above-normal market performance through the creation of unique customer value (Lado et al., 1998). There are many definitions (Anderson, 1982; Kotler, 1977; Levitt, 1980; Porter, 1980), but Narver and Slater (1990) found (based on existing literature) that market orientation is composed of behavioural components (based on customer and competitor information, the co-ordinated efforts of the company to give customers value for money) and business criteria (profitability and a long-term focus on generating and sustaining profits) (21-22). This is, hence, a complex and multidimensional operation, unified by the need to produce customer satisfaction, and requiring close co-ordination across all company departments (Kotler, 2002; Lado et al., 1998; Narver and Slater, 1990: 22; Tadajewski, 2009).

The significance of word of mouth (WOM) is indicated in the works of Godes and Mayzlin (2004) and Herr, Kades and Kim (1991) who found, through empirical study, that WOM was more persuasive than print media and television networks. WOM can be broadly defined as an honest person-to-person communication between consumers in which a perceived non-commercial message is passed on to others (Anderson, 1998; Cheema and Kaikati, 2010). Johan Arndt (1960), in his early studies on favourable WOM, concluded that "word of mouth may best be explained as seeking social support for adoption and non-adoption and as risk reduction by group action" (295). More recently, the academic focus has shifted to the study of motivations and behaviour. Berger and Schwartz (2011) challenged perceptions that WOM was stimulated by interesting and arresting products (Sernovitz, 2006), instead finding that effective WOM was driven largely by good accessibility to the brand and visible cues in environment. They identified two types of WOM (immediate and ongoing) and found that increasing the visibility and frequency of product cues in the market after a product's release improved the quality of ongoing WOM

which led to more sales (877-878). This was called customer retention (Vavra, 1992) and involved "interactive, individualised and value-added" one-to-one relationships with customers (Shani and Chalasani, 1992: 44).

The internet modified WOM considerably, bringing marketers and firms into closer proximity with their customers. Bates (2005) divided word of mouth into three useful categories: viral, buzz and word of mouth marketing (WOMM). The first of these, viral marketing, was specific to the internet. Defined originally by Jurvetson (2000) as "network-enhanced word of mouth," viral marketing referred to the process of consumers using the internet to relay marketing messages to other consumers via email and electronic mailing lists (O'Guinn et al., 2009: 540; Phelps et al., 2004). Porter and Golan (2006) have since defined it more precisely as "unpaid, peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originating from an identified sponsor to influence an audience to pass along content to others" (33). As this definition made clear, viral marketing was facilitated by marketing companies to achieve a marketing objective. Rather than an end in and of itself, viral marketing was used as an "integrated part of a brand's overall marketing strategy" and helped to maximise the brand company's advertising reach on the internet (Kirby cited in Brown, 2005: 4). An example was the campaign for the *Year Zero* concept album which used an old media strategy to generate online speculation and debate amongst fans of industrial band Nine Inch Nails. Buzz marketing was originally defined more broadly as a newsworthy event designed to generate media coverage and deliver product information to enthusiastic consumers (Freeman and Chapman, 2008). However, since buzz marketing practices have been used extensively with the internet, email and smartphones for almost two decades the emphasis in buzz marketing has shifted marginally from media coverage onto the quality and credibility of consumer communications (Kraus, Harms and Fink,

2009). Trust was critical in all forms of word of mouth marketing (Shirky, 2000). Unlike viral marketing, buzz marketing arguably used unethical marketing practices to begin with (a commercial message presented as non-commercial is targeted at consumers) but became dependent on the general public spreading the message in an enthusiastic, voluntary and honest manner (Rosenbloom, 2000). Although WOMM was defined by Bates as a third marketing form, in marketing literature the term WOMM has been used to encapsulate viral and buzz marketing together. In his emphasis, Bates noted that WOMM leveraged social networks specifically to exploit personal profile information and spread commercial advertisements. Others have defined social network marketing as a component of WOMM (Freeman and Chapman, 2008).

For several years the *Word of Mouth Marketing Association* website (2011) has highlighted the dangers of WOMM mismanagement on its introductory webpage. It has warned against unethical marketing practices (used to deceive, infiltrate and manipulate consumer groups) and urged marketers to be transparent in communications with consumers. As these potential pitfalls suggest, WOMM was not a system without risk. For Sun, Youn, Wu and Kuntaraporn (2006), "compared to face-to-face communicators, online communicators demonstrate fewer inhibitions, display less social anxiety and exhibit less public self-awareness." Bernoff and Li (2008) argued that the growing popularity of social networks like Friendster, MySpace and Facebook with children and teenagers intensified "the growing groundswell of customer power" in the Broadband era and this important balance shift has facilitated organisational changes in the traditional functions of brand companies (Bernoff and Li, 2008: 37; Livingstone and Brake, 2010). These changes contributed to the customercentric approach to marketing which has taken a foothold in the Dial-Up and Broadband eras (Sheth et al., 2000).

Researchers have produced varying theories based on the role and motivations of two types of consumer change agents: opinion leaders and innovators/early adopters. Opinion leaders spread WOM based on specialist knowledge of a product and a desire to talk about their experiences with products; early adopters were younger, well-integrated in social groups and more influential in increasing the immediate visibility of a product (Baumgarten, 1975). Product involvement was largely the dominant explanation for motivating both types of agent (Dichter, 1966; Engel and Blackwell, 1969; Summers, 1970), and this was further defined by Bloch and Richins (1983), who suggested two categories of product involvement: product nurturance, in which consumers dedicated time to enhancing the product, and product recreation, in which consumers used products recreationally and socially for their own satisfaction (77).

Ultimately, the different forms of word of mouth marketing discussed involve honest communication with social groups or community hubs on a large scale. Chapters Two and Three will examine how websites grew as forums for these marketing activities. This section now introduces the issue of authenticity.

Historically, the most successful online film campaigns, certainly those of the Dial-Up era, have combined credible word of mouth with authentic motion picture websites. How do we form assessments of authenticity when it comes to a film or a brand? For Kent Grayson and Radan Martinec (2004), consumers were influenced fundamentally by cues in the advertising and by their "associated phenomenological experiences" (297). Drawing on terminology as well as concepts used by Peirce (1998), they claimed that advertisements communicate values, styles and attitudes in the form of indexical and iconic advertising

cues. Indexical cues called for indexical interpretations, which is to say that advertisers who offered substantive cues or additional information in an advertisement expected consumers to make objective connections between these cues and the product—thus helping to verify its authenticity. Alternatively, iconic cues were more symbolic and perceptual: an icon was "perceived as being similar to something else," thus consumers relied on their "sensory experience" of an icon in order to determine its iconic authenticity (297-298). The writers used different examples in their own study, but it seems fair to say that we can form the same assessment of authenticity in regard to internet marketing. Official movie websites are not designed and created by the filmmakers themselves, but some websites attempted to suggest the direct involvement or creative input of the filmmakers in order to accrue certain benefits. For example, clear indexical and iconic cues were in evidence throughout the website for *Punch Drunk Love* (Paul Thomas Anderson, Columbia Pictures, 2002). The MP3's page contained essential music samples used in the film (indexical authenticity); and the rest of the site was imitative of the digital artwork also contained in the film (iconic authenticity). We might say, therefore, that when combined these cues created a sense that the original filmmakers were involved in the website's production, thus authenticating it both as an official promotion (by the marketers) and an officially-sanctioned (by the filmmakers) impression of the film. But Grayson and Martinec also noted that perceptions of iconicity and indexicality offered no objective certainty—objectivity was offset by the subjectivity of the consumer, by their "personal predilections and perceptual imperfections," and this helped to explain disparities in consumer responses (p.299). In addition, "graded" perceptions of indexicality accounted for certain imperfections in the advertising (299). Thus to extend my example further, the key art image used on the *Punch Drunk Love* homepage was less indexical than the publicity still used in the print campaign (itself airbrushed and manipulated) because some "authentic" elements present in the print

campaign image were edited out and substituted with colourful animation. This fusion of original, true imagery with computer-generated, false imagery invites an obvious question—in mainstream advertising can anything be defined as authentic?

Michael B. Beverland, Adam Lindgreen and Michiel W Vink (2008) addressed this and other questions in a study of consumer responses to beer advertising. They identified three types of authenticity from the consumer's perspective: pure, approximate and moral. Their study showed that brands reinforcing perceptions of pure, approximate, or moral authenticity drew to varying degrees on cues in their advertising, thus consumers seeking authenticity in a product responded to indexical and iconic (factual and emotional) cues communicating a range of meanings, values and styles (Beverland et al., 2008: 7-12). They found that advertisements communicating pure authenticity linked products explicitly to historical traditions using primarily indexical cues; approximate authenticity cued iconic links to both historic and modern processes of production; and moral authenticity cued iconic links which reflected the consumer's personal moral values and differentiated the product from impersonal mass-production.

But how did these writers account for the blurring of distinctions between the authentic and the inauthentic, between the real and fiction? For Beverland and Francis J. Farrelly (2010), consumers possessed highly personalised standards and goals which enabled them to authenticate products in unique ways from other consumers. They argued that consumers "take personal ownership of experiences, giving objects and brands an indexical character" (2010: 854). These findings referred back to Grayson and Martinec's study. They proposed that imagination, or more accurately the consumer's "suspension of disbelief," played a significant role in this blurring of distinctions between the real and fiction, or rephrased the

"blending process" (Grayson and Martinec, 2004: 307; Stern, 1994). They found that in several case study scenarios respondents imagined connections between an indexical object and a fictional or historic person (300-307). In response, they used the term "hypothetical indexicality," which in this context referred to the creation of indexical associations with a person or product when no actual indexical association existed (300). In the fantasy settings of reality television, Randall L Rose and Stacy L Wood (2005) found that certain paradoxes of production, identification and situation were similarly navigated and overcome by viewers who blended indexical elements with the objects of imagination—that is, with the fantasy and simulation (294). For Rose and Wood, paradoxes were the fantastical/inauthentic elements which challenged the factitious elements of reality television programming. Their study showed that viewers became co-creators of authenticity in this blending process: they were active participants who "endow their reality television viewing experience with authenticity through a reflexive process of paradox negotiation" (295). Negotiation, in this regard, became a "creative play space" in which consumers used lived experience as a point of identification with indexical, factitious, elements of the programming; the blending of these factitious elements with paradoxical elements created "hyperauthenticity"—an authentic, but nevertheless constructed experience (295). According to Rose and Wood, therefore, it was possible to speak of a hyperauthentic product—reality television lacked authentic elements, but viewers were still able to extract "self-authenticating meanings" despite this (295). The outcomes of Beverland and Farrelly's (2010) study supported this line of argument. These findings are of some significance, therefore, to Chapter Two which later examines the role that fantasy has played in the construction of alternate reality marketing campaigns (ARGs) and the development of hyperauthentic website projects, such as *The Truman Show's* (Peter Weir, Paramount Pictures, 1998) Truman Liberation Front and *The Blair Witch Project*.

The literature has introduced key concepts such as "word-of-mouth," "change agents" and "brand authenticity." It now develops the concept of "brand revival" (retro-branded products) and "brand community" which is a crucial element in marketing studies.

The revival of brands already linked to past events or historical periods forced a re-thinking, a revision, of the brand in the marketing department. In marketing studies, the practice of reviving existing brands for the contemporary marketplace was called retro branding. Defined by Brown et al., as "the revival or re-launch of a product or service brand from a prior historical period," retro brands were distinguishable from other forms of nostalgic advertising for being "brand new old-fashioned offerings" (Brown, et al., 2003: 19-20). The major studios revived a broad range of media franchises after the commercialisation of the web in 1994 and the websites for many of these films will be discussed in Chapters Two and Three. A few examples of modern retro brands included for the Dial-Up era: *GoldenEye* (Martin Campbell, United Artists, 1995, UK/US), *Mission: Impossible* (Brian De Palma, Paramount Pictures, 1996), *Halloween H:20* (Steve Milner, Dimension Films, 1998), *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (George Lucas, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1999) and *The Mummy* (Stephen Sommers, Universal Pictures, 1999); and for the Broadband era: *Alien vs. Predator* (Paul W. S. Anderson, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2004, US/Germany/Czech Republic/UK), *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, Warner Bros., 2005, UK/US), *Superman Returns* (Bryan Singer, Warner Bros., 2006), *Die Hard 4.0* (Len Wiseman, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2007, UK/US), *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (Steven Spielberg, Paramount Pictures, 2008) and *Star Trek* (J. J. Abrams, Paramount Pictures, 2009, US/Germany). Historically, the majors have traded on existing brand heritage and nostalgia for years (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003). In 1978, for example, the vertically

integrated media conglomerate Warner Communications rebranded the comic-book hero

Superman and produced the popular blockbuster *Superman: the Movie* (Richard Donner,

Warner Bros., 1978, US/UK), a soundtrack album, a pinball table, eight books, spin-off toys

and other merchandise released through and licensed by Warners' various software and

hardware divisions (Cook, 2000: 59-60; Epstein, 2005: 227; Langford, 2010: 193).

Superman was a model for the new economic logic governing Hollywood for it

demonstrated the potential value of successfully retro branding films and other

entertainment for the global marketplace.

Brown, Kozinets and Sherry Jr. (2003) drew concepts from literary critic and philosopher

Walter Benjamin (they cited specifically The Arcades Project, 1999) to identify four

conceptual elements influencing retro branded products: brand story (allegory), idealised

brand community (arcadia), brand essence (aura), and brand paradox (antimony). The

writers distinguished each theme as being a key element in retro branding, and using the

release of *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* as an exemplar their study showed

how the four elements influenced aspects of the film's reception. They began by examining

brand story and brand community. The writers defined the *Star Wars* brand story (which

encompassed the original trilogy of films only before the release of *The Phantom Menace*)

as "a myth of good versus evil" and provided numerous examples of consumers discussing

the trilogy as one text, one "brand story." This discussion made clear that for some fans the

original films carried "rich associations of childhood delight" and this accounted for, at least

in part, the "strong sense of affiliation and belonging" felt towards the *Star Wars* films (28).

The writers linked the existence of these brand stories in the "collective memory" to the idea

of consumer storytelling: "As consumers decode George Lucas's cosmology … they

inevitably are also defining and processing moral characteristics and the meaning of morals

for themselves" (26). This notion of consumer storytelling arguably overlapped with Rose and Wood's conceptualisation of creative play space in their study of authenticity: by blending brand heritage with "morality tales" consumers personalised both the brand and its commercial "redefinition" (or "restyling") in the form of the retro brand (21-23).

The idea of brand community was defined in 2001 by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) as a "bound community based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (412). Brand community was a variant of the Electronic tribe, a term partially derived from Marshall McLuhan's work on retribalisation (McLuhan, 1970). E-tribes were defined by Kozinets in 1999 as non-geographically bound social groups that shared information and experiences within a "common, computer-mediated cyber-space" (1999: 253-4). E-tribes were of significance for uniting net-surfers and consumers with shared "consumption-related" interests (254), and were alternatively termed "communities of interest" by Armstrong and Hagel (1996). Brand communities, however, were differentiated by their specialist knowledge of and loyalty to a product or brand. Community members possessed a commercial, mass-media sensibility and traditionally played a part in the brand's life cycle with little or no share of the profit in return for their activities (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001: 413-429). Brand communities were similarly non-geographically bound (making it easier to express brand loyalties in the computer-mediated environment of the internet) but generally accepted the meanings attached to their favoured brands by the surrounding culture (414).

For Brown et al., the brand community behind the *Star Wars* films was an active, involved social force, and it was dominated by a core fanbase whose members shared unique investments as "stakeholders" (2003: 29). The writers observed that the rebranding of *Star Wars*, in the form of *The Phantom Menace* (a lavish production featuring cutting-edge

computer-generated imagery and a new cast of actors), caused anger in the brand community because the film did not emulate the production styles or even the vernacular of the original films (which were less well financed and less technologically sophisticated films in comparison, but nonetheless cutting-edge products of the 1970s and 1980s). The reaction of the core fanbase highlighted the potential dangers of retro branding. Members of the existing *Star Wars* community denounced the new film online in dedicated newsgroups and argued that Lucasfilm's latest retrobranding attempt had undermined the aura of the original *Star Wars* trilogy, that is, its brand essence. This encapsulated, for Brown et al., the fourth and final element influencing retro brands: the brand paradox. Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) identified this identical problem, and found that empowered brand communities were both a threat to the life cycle of the brand and susceptible to infiltration by third-parties seeking to create "rumour control problems" (2001: 427). In a variety of ways, the major film studios struggled with this brand paradox throughout the entire Dial-Up era as fan communities first fought with their legal and publicity departments for a more proactive relationship, and then took advantage of the studios' "turning of the gamekeeper's blind eye" (Murray, 2004: 14).

Muñiz and O'Guinn's concept of brand community, though helpful, drew criticism. McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) offered their own perspective that brand communities were held together by the experience of ownership and consumption rather than simply the brand itself (38-40). In his work on alternative subcultures and consumption, Kozinets (2001) found that highly devoted members of the *Star Trek* brand community were continually drawn into "dialectical interplay with producers, subcultures, microcultures and wider cultural practices in order to legitimate" their loyalties and interest, and defend against social stigma (84). More than simply hooking themselves to a commercial brand, the *Star Trek* fans Kozinets described felt a need to "cleanse the product of its commercial

meanings" and take proper ownership of the utopian vision—its egalitarian philosophy, scientific references and progressive politics—developed by the show's creators (82). This act of taking ownership required a counterbalancing process of decommodification which Kozinets connects to a broader cultural discomfort with the "distant corporate actors who own the things that matter to us" (Belk, et al., 1989; Kozinets, 2001: 82; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). Contrary to Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) findings, Schau, Muñiz and Arnould (2009) also showed that social networking practices within brand communities were not constrained by the brand boundaries imposed by corporate owners. Long-time brand devotees developed friendships with other community members, moving them "beyond brand boundaries," and in exploring non-brand topics of conversation some community members were able to "dispossess themselves of the focal brand" altogether (Schau, et al., 2009: 34).

Schau, Muñiz and Arnould's (2009) findings were used to support three "emerging perspectives" in marketing which are worth mentioning at the close of this discussion. Connected communities, or networks, generated greater value than traditional one-to-one (firm-consumer) advertising when the marketing company established a connection, and through the provision of interacting practices fostered healthier community engagement (41). Secondly, brand communities disseminated information more quickly on the internet than traditional advertising channels, so marketers who ceded ownership of the brand and cultivated these communities enhanced the quality of consumer engagement and activities on the web. Lastly, marketing teams that have co-opted brand community members into the marketing campaign benefited from collaborative value creation, that is, the practice of knowledge sharing, social networking and event organising.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided the theoretical foundation for the research through a review of the main literature in Film and Marketing studies. It demonstrated that the home entertainment market has, since the 1970s, become the most important site for generating revenues from film across multiple platforms and has introduced concepts such as the "blockbuster syndrome," "cross-collaterisation" and "synergy." It identified the characteristics of the studios' marketing programmes for movie blockbusters before the 1990s. These included television advertising, saturation release patterns, market research, promotional materials (trailers, key art, EPKs) and cinema advertising. The main literature review showed how internet promotion marked a new phase in the development of the marketing programme. Film marketers used movie websites to connect viewers with like-minded film fans in community groups, invite internet commentators and filmgoers to participate in the marketing process itself, and involve interested viewers in the storyworld surrounding specific films. The Marketing literature introduced and provided definitions for a range of concepts which establish the theoretical ground for further discussion on internet practices and use. These are "word-of-mouth," "change agents," "E-tribes," "brand community," "brand authenticity" and "brand revival." The literature defined marketing as consumers utilising communications and offerings that an identified sponsor provides, often unsolicited, using mass media. This discussion provides the foundation for Chapters Two and Three which investigate the research questions through a historical account of the industrial and technological changes that have shaped online marketing in the Dial-Up and Broadband eras of the internet.

Chapter Two: The Dial-up Era 1994 to 2001

In the Introduction I identified the following research questions: How have the major Hollywood studios used websites to promote their films online? For what reasons? For whom are motion picture websites intended? In Chapter One I described the active interest which the Hollywood companies have taken in the growing home entertainment market, and posited that internet marketing as a practice evolved to support film's lucrative, post-theatrical life cycle. This chapter explores the studios' attempts in the Dial-Up era to achieve this, in relation to the research questions.

Launched in the Fall of 1994, the first motion picture websites, which I term kit sites, generated online buzz for their genuine novelty value. But despite publicists' claims that the internet increased ticket sales at the theatrical box-office, the lack of statistical data or empirical independent study from this period makes it difficult to evaluate their precise contribution in the marketing campaign. Ultimately, the kit sites satisfied the majors' need to have an online web presence for all of their theatrically released films, but although the kit site model did not disappear entirely from circulation (many companies were satisfied with kit sites until the late 1990s) a new approach to web marketing in the Fall of 1995 rendered them antiquated in branding terms. The launch of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's home-video site and the relaunch of Warner Bros.' theatrical website for the home-video release of *Batman Forever* (Joel Schumacher, Warner Bros., 1995) confirmed that the Hollywood majors were looking for a direct way to use the internet as an additional outlet for their films. This marked the beginning of an innovative phase in website production which established a familiar, industry-wide style for the period.

This chapter examines the migration of traditional press kit practices to the internet and the majors' decision to create websites of their own. It then examines the studios' interactions with early-adopter groups which culminated in the setting up online of the film companies' home video Word Wide Web sites. This opened up the internet as an additional outlet for merchandise, sell-through video, and significantly the new Digital Versatile Disc format (DVD), for which the major studios, represented by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), had been making preparations since 1994. Once these online shops were established, the majors showed interest in developing a range of motion picture websites which supported its revenues from video rental, video retail, soundtrack albums, licensed videogames and other related merchandise. The website's role in the marketing campaign was, therefore, quite familiar: its impact on theatrical box-office performance was largely secondary to the goal of generating and sustaining long-term, online awareness, and this became a crucial factor in the post-theatrical life-cycle of a film.

Migrating Press Kit Practices to the Web

The major studios did not pioneer internet marketing for film but they were well placed to take advantage of the internet in its first commercial year. In 1994, driven by the lucrative market for interactive, game-based entertainment—computer games alone generated $6 billion in 1993—the majors' parent companies moved into videogames publishing. Viacom, Sony, Disney, Time Warner, Fox and MCA/Universal established their own interactive divisions (Harmon, 1994a) and intended to become more active participants in the business of interactive entertainment.

During the 1980s, George Lucas established a games division for his production company Lucasfilm and released titles initially through the games manufacturer Atari, which was owned by Warner Communications. This early partnership lay the foundations for the company's long-term evolution into a global interactive entertainment company. By the early 1990s it had developed and self-published new brands like the adventure game *The Secret of Monkey Island* to complement its developing portfolio of *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* videogames. The parent companies of the major studios envisaged similar operations of their own. Brand icons such as Viacom's *Beavis and Butt-Head* (Mike Judge, MTV, 1993 –) and News Corporation's *The Simpsons* (Matt Groening, Fox Network, 1989 –) grew more in value as the software market itself expanded, but through their licensing agreements with developer-publishers such as Electronic Arts and Psygnosis the big corporations feared they were losing out on vital revenues for their brands. The Walt Disney Company, MCA/Universal, Viacom and News Corporation reasoned that they could triple or perhaps quadruple revenues by self-publishing and in 1994 they invested heavily in their own games divisions (Harmon, 1994b). Interactive arms were set up across California: Viacom New Media's Paramount Interactive in Palo Alto; Sony Electronic Publishing's Sony Imagesoft in Santa Monica (which then relocated to Foster City, California, becoming Sony Interactive Studios America); Disney Software, a division of Disney's Consumer Products, which was rebranded as Disney Interactive at the end of 1994; Time Warner Interactive in Burbank, of which Atari was a subsidiary; Universal Interactive set up business operations in Universal City; and Fox Interactive began digital operations in Beverly Hills where it set up in late December. By June, four of the interactive divisions had established themselves in the market for game development with new releases for personal computer (PC) Compact Disc Read-Only Memory (CD-ROM) and Sega CD platforms (Hope, 1993; Waldman, 1994).

Games publishing became the most important part of these divisions. Although licensing was still common, the high costs of development and the short life-cycle of videogames dissuaded the majors from taking an active role in production (Nichols, 2008). They benefited in financial terms from joint ventures with independent multimedia firms like Imagination Pilots Entertainment, Bits Studios, Probe Entertainment and Radical Entertainment. MGM Interactive, for example, partnered with Imagination Pilots to release a game based on the action thriller *Blown Away* (Stephen Hopkins, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1994) (Mannes, 1994; Burr, 1994a). Other games in development during 1994 included *The Pagemaster* (Pixote Hunt and Joe Johnston, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1994), *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (Kenneth Branagh, TriStar Pictures, 1994, US/Japan) and *Beavis and Butt-Head* (Pitta, 1995). To protect the revenues of lucrative blockbuster franchises, however, attempts were made to produce videogames independently of third-party firms. Universal's first self-made, self-published release was "*Jurassic Park* Interactive," a multiplayer game based on the multimillion dollar blockbuster *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures, 1993) which integrated the John Williams score and scenes from the film with a strategy-based survival story (Software Industry Report, 1994; Meston, 1994). Lucas Entertainment Company also continued to produce a range of videogames for personal computers (PC) and games consoles, using the success of "X-Wing" and "Super *Star Wars*" to launch new CD-ROMs and Sega CDs for "Rebel Assault" (Variety, 1993; Strauss, 1994). Taken together, these videogame titles were the result of an industry-wide development trend to create games for films and films for games, a process called cross-industry licensing (Nichols, 2008). By reorganising their entertainment divisions to include interactive units, the majors now held a strategically better position than in the 1980s to profit from the revenues generated through videogame licensing and publishing. They had also extended their reach, once again, into US households and increased their influence on the

consumption practices of consumers. As David Bishop, MGM's executive VP for Home Entertainment, said of the company's multimedia businesses at this time: "We've seen new home entertainment systems develop in the past without adversely affecting the core [movie] business. If anything, this new medium adds a unique dimension to leisure-time activity" (Bishop cited in Gillen, 1994a).

The majors' interactive units made inroads into other types of digital media at this time, enriching the home entertainment market further. In an attempt to maximise profits from their film libraries, the majors distributed multimedia CD-ROM titles in a variety of formats. These were aimed at home consumers with CD-ROM players installed on their computers. Between 1994 and 1996 the costs were very high, ranging from $30-35 to $59.99 (Atwood, 1996; Gillen, 1994b). The market, however, was growing and by the end of the first quarter in 1994 market analysts estimated hardware (for CD-ROM players) sales of 11 million (Business Week, 1994). Between 1994 and 1996 the majors distributed a range of titles. Disney Interactive's multimedia lines included videogames, but its most high-profile releases were in education and entertainment (edutainment). Its most successful title in the Animated Storybooks series was the "*Lion King* Animated Storybook," an interactive CD-ROM aimed at 4-9 year olds (Kim, 1994a, 1994b; Manes, 1994; Variety, 1994c). It featured a welcome menu, with an animated character entreating users to pick an option from the menu ("PLAY," "READ," "PICK A PAGE," "EXIT"), and full-screen animations supported by small read-along text blocks. It followed these titles with *Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree* (Wolfgang Reitherman, Buena Vista Pictures, 1966), and *Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, Buena Vista Pictures, 1996). It also produced an Activity Centre series aimed at children aged 5. Its *Aladdin* (Ron Clements and John Musker, Buena Vista Pictures, 1992) CD-ROM released in 1994 used many of the film's

set-piece locations (the Royal Palace, the Agrabah Marketplace) as gaming zones to hold the attention of their youngest viewers.

Perhaps the most salient example from this early period was Time Warner Interactive's (TWI) *Woodstock: 25th Anniversary* (Michael Wadleigh, Warner Bros., 1970). Its CD-ROM was used to cross-market the theatrical re-release of the film, the home-video, a four CD/cassette boxed set containing the original three-LP set, a remastered highlights album, and a disc with unreleased documentary material from the director (Burr, 1994c; Gillen, 1994b). The CD-ROM included five sections. Music (songs, lyrics, discographies), Performers (biographies), Backstage (thumbnail movie clips), People (black & white and colour stills, biographies) and Time and Place (trailers) (Washington Post, 1994).

Most importantly, the majors were also actively involved in the migration of traditional press kit materials to CD-ROM. In 1994, ACES Entertainment and Compton's NewMedia produced two items for the science-fiction movie *Stargate* (Roland Emmerich, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1994, France/US). The electronic press kit was released simultaneously with the film in a practice known as day and date, the first of its kind for EPKs. This strategy was repeated later with *ID4 - Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1996), *Men in Black* (Barry Sonnenfeld, Columbia Pictures, 1997) and *Starship Troopers* (Paul Verhoeven, TriStar Pictures, 1997). The second item "Secrets of *Stargate:* the Making of an Epic" CD-ROM repurposed many materials but in the form of an interactive game designed specifically for the home consumer. It retailed for $24.95 (Burr, 1994e). Motivated by a need to promote their film as aggressively as possible across multiple platforms, the producers of the film supplied a vast amount of material to the vendor, Compton's NewMedia. The finished game integrated nearly every element of the

press kit with over 200 stills, 60 minutes of video interview produced by ACES

Entertainment, 700 storyboard panels, 400 production sketches, film star biographies and

story information.

The cumulative impact of these new titles on the home entertainment market was

significant. In addition to extending the amount of time consumers spent with a film—this

typically involved children and families interacting with high-profile brand characters like

Simba from *The Lion King* on their home computers—techniques which had been developed

for other media were now employed in the creation of new titles aimed at related audiences.

The *Woodstock: 25th Anniversary* CD-ROM, for example, borrowed conventions from the

edutainment market, which combined art activities and puzzle games for a young audience.

The paintbox feature included on the CD gave younger users brightly coloured designs and

effects to create videos, while key music taken from the film played in the background.

Techniques similar to this would later be employed on an industrial level for the studios'

movie websites, where art activities and puzzle games became the common features on

many family-oriented websites and at no cost to the consumer. This did not negatively

impact the market for film-based CD-ROM because the puzzle games and activities were

developed at lower cost and typically lower design standards by different design agencies; in

addition, Disney, the largest entertainment company to trade on games and other additional

website extras aimed at young children, scaled down many of its bigger websites for Dial-

Up era blockbusters like *A Bug's Life* (John Lasseter and Andrew Stanton, Buena Vista

Pictures, 1998), often removing its premium games and relocating them to its central

website.

At the same time as a lot of these developments, a few independent companies were working on ideas for the internet. They planned to upload movie information and extras such as film trailers for online audiences in a practice which mirrored the migration of press kit materials to CD-ROM. Two main companies were involved in this area: Hollywood Online and eDRIVE.

For a fee, third-party firms digitised the studios' press kits and uploaded them to an online service in the form of new "interactive" webkits. Stuart Halperin and Steve Katinsky's newly developed Hollywood Online repurposed studio materials for users of America Online, CompuServe and eWorld (Spring, 1994), and it was broadly credited for initiating the practice with its promotion of the Academy Award-nominated thriller *In the Line of Fire* (Wolfgang Petersen, Columbia Pictures, 1993) (Cerone, 1994; Variety, 1994b). In the summer of 1993, it posted a short clip from the movie on America Online which was visited by a surprising 25,000 users (Rothman, 1993b). The Interactive Kits which Hollywood Online later specialised in resembled small CD-ROM menu screens. Users who downloaded the kits successfully could click on low-quality images to activate Production Team, Characters or Story information areas, often with no content other than text or images. The kits it produced for *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, Paramount Pictures, 1994) and *The Mask* (Chuck Russell, New Line Cinema, 1994) combined short animations with extras for young audiences, such as a timeline, a game of Concentration and multiple-choice trivia (Levine, 1994). MGM, Paramount Pictures and Twentieth Century-Fox showed interest in this emerging practice and used the company for its blockbusters, dramas and romance films. The firm created sixteen such kits in twelve months.

Entertainment Drive (eDRIVE), another developing company, used a different method but provided similar extras. It partnered with Warner Bros., Walt Disney Company and Universal Pictures to host press information, images and a variety of 40-120 second film trailers on its CompuServe forum. It offered a subscription service and charged premium members $4.80 an hour to view the more exclusive content. Using this model, eDRIVE attracted 100,000 subscribers and promoted some of the top grossing films of 1994. Its *Lion King* (Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, Buena Vista Pictures, 1994) download page, which included digitised movie scenes from the movie, garnered 3,000 CompuServe hits in eleven days (Silverman, 1994). Within two years, both firms had profited greatly from their work with the majors. Hollywood Online became the leading provider of online entertainment information and was acquired by the Times-Mirror Company, which owned the *Los Angeles Times* (Harmon, 1996; Los Angeles Times, 1996). By July 1995, eDRIVE had expanded its workforce to thirty, and its dedicated forums, where fan groups discussed their favourite television programmes and films, received half a million hits per month (Lohr, 1995). The possibilities existed, therefore, for dedicated motion picture websites with their own message boards and chat features to attract potential consumers. The successful launches of Hollywood Online and eDRIVE illustrated that this could be done quickly, economically and with relative ease.

The major studios realised, therefore, that they could do the same, with more content from their own publicity departments and better involvement from the actual filmmakers. Neither Hollywood Online nor eDRIVE lost business due to this development. However, to remain competitive, Hollywood Online extended its expertise in interactive multimedia kits and electronic magazines to website production. During 1995-6, the firm partnered with Columbia Pictures and Warner Bros.' subsidiary Castle Rock Entertainment on a collection

of sites. These websites, which included *The American President* (Rob Reiner, Columbia

Pictures, 1995), *Alaska* (Fraser Clarke Heston, Columbia Pictures, 1996) and *Mulholland

Falls* (Lee Tamahori, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1996), shared many similarities with the kit

sites that were developed by the majors, but for the Kevin Costner comedy *Tin Cup* (Ron

Shelton, Warner Bros., 1996) the company advanced developing techniques to try and

enthuse consumers about their ideas. One such initiative was the use of a blank landing page

which contained no information other than a humorous excerpt from the screenplay. The

emphasis on banter between the two main characters promoted the film's satirical approach

to golf as a sport, but it also served to reinforce a broad perception that on the internet all

films could be regarded as products of an industrial system. Ultimately, Hollywood Online

and eDRIVE turned away from production services and focused their resources on

entertainment information. Hollywood Online partnered with the National Association of

Theatre Owners (NATO) to promote, according to its CEO Michael Rollens, "the movie and

moviegoing" (Rollens cited in CNN, 1998). This theatrical side of film marketing, however,

was not the majors' concern. Their focus was on selling home entertainment and using the

web to sustain the long-term awareness of film.

Finding film audiences online

Lost sight of now, due to its convergence with the mainstream, a vast communications

network of discussion groups known collectively as Usenet played a major role in defining

an early commercial audience. Usenet News is a communications system used primarily to

discuss a broad range of topics that encompassed computer technologies, business, science

and research biology, music, environmental politics, movies, cartoons, even "deviant sex"

(Rheingold, 1993). Some of these users embraced the newsgroups system to share

extrafilmic materials about media properties (television and film). Science-fiction fans

discussed film franchises and television series, as well as other fan (or "speculative")

fictions listed in the rec.arts.sf-creative (i.e., recreation-arts-science-fiction) group. In

perhaps the earliest analysis of a Usenet discussion group for screen studies, Henry Jenkins

(1992, 1995) conducted research focusing on the development of reading practices of fans

interested in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* series (David Lynch, Mark Frost, ABC, 1990-1991)

(a group listed as, alt.tv.twinpeaks). He helpfully suggests that "highly visible" fan

community groups in 1990 "tend to be college-educated, professionally-oriented,

technologically-inclined men, most involved either with the academy or the computer

industry" (1995: 53). The privileging of the more highly visible science-fiction audience,

whose public, global deliberations included *Star Trek* (NBC, 1966-1969) and *Doctor Who*

(BBC, 1963-1989, UK) but also Japanese animation, has led to the pernicious slighting of all

web users in this period as "geeks" (Geirland and Sonesh-Keder, 1999: 22).

These online chat groups were familiar to many of the film companies. In August 1994, the

president of Fine Line Features, Ira Deutchman, identified those who were engaged in online

fan discussions as being the key opinion leaders for modern film and indicated that it was

his intention to use them to gain a competitive advantage with the larger studios (Variety,

1994b). For Arthur Cohen, Paramount's president of worldwide marketing, the same key

consumer change agents were online but they also carried with them impressionable

consumers who joined the internet for fear of being left behind (Levine, 1994).

This perception was conditioned by the reinforcement of negative attributes of the

technology. After the work of Howard Rheingold (1993), who examined the changing

nature of public deliberation and social involvement as it evolved in this virtual space,

researchers and social critics such as Stoll (1995) drew on a range of current arguments to

show the web's effects on social involvement. Anderson et al., (1995) and King & Kraemer (1995) noted that an increasing dependence on the internet could have consequences for economic and social life. These perceptions changed with extensive research. In 1998, Kraut et al. claimed that computer-mediated communication caused "too much disengagement from real life" and recommended corrective intervention at the level of government and particularly in technology companies themselves. In 2002, these findings were partially revised. Kraut et al. (2002) found that regular internet use was broadly associated with positive outcomes in terms of social involvement and psychological well-being. They suggested that in the period 1995-1998 the internet changed substantially, providing better integration and communication services to the benefit of a more mainstream audience, typically of families and their friends. Some of these developments will be discussed in this chapter.

Concrete evidence of interest in experimental interactive advertising is shown by Jim Moloshok's research at Warner Bros. on *Babylon 5* (Warner Bros. Television, 1994-1998) television audiences (Variety, 1994f). Responding to a perceived slump in viewer disinterest regarding television commercial advertising, Moloshok—who was then senior marketing/advertising VP at Warners—sent promotional materials for the show to 160 local television stations with instructions to upload them via the CompuServe Information Service (CIS) to fan community networks. The strategy was founded on research Moloshok conducted into existing online science-fiction fan communities. He observed users and viewers of the pilot programme exchange technical information, about the show's content, and the ways in which it was promoted locally. This audience was, hence, motivated, technically competent, and predominantly male.

Thus conceived, the image of the web as a space for mediation, and for active communication between various social networks, defined its potential as a developing mass medium. We can, therefore, draw the following conclusions. Subscribers used the CIS and other services as a means to form social networks founded on public deliberation; CIS and other information networks were valuable for marketers in the study of taste preferences, home-video purchases, and consumption of film advertising; lastly, CIS was a cost-efficient means of disseminating information and promotional material directly to interested audiences.

The First Online Kit Sites

The last sections have shown how the Hollywood film companies exploited their existing film libraries to profit from interactive entertainment. During 1993/1994 the studios' partnerships with Hollywood Online and eDRIVE resulted in a new marketing practice which involved uploading press kit materials to the internet for public consumption. In the past, these materials were traditionally passed to exhibitors and the press 6-8 weeks prior to a film's release in order to generate hype for a forthcoming film (Wasko, 2003). The studios now used them in the service of promotional webpages which gave early adopter internet users the opportunity to sample a film trailer online. By October 1994, the Hollywood majors were working on their own content areas, or "kit" sites, and the first of these served as an exhibition window for home entertainment.

Sherry Lansing, Chairman and CEO of Paramount Pictures Motion Picture Group, officially sanctioned production of the first movie website for the corporation's science-fiction blockbuster *Star Trek: Generations* (David Carson, Paramount Pictures, 1994). The site—the first motion picture online—was published on the parent company's website (at the

subdomain, *http://www.generations.viacom.com*) and was launched in October, several days before its highly ambitious competitor *Stargate*. Until recently, the site was archived in a "time capsule" at the official *Star Trek* website but this has since been removed. The website was highly interactive for its day, accessible via a standardised landing page and offered a range of links and materials related to the film. The website was organised into six divisions: press kit background (cast and crew biographies, production notes, credits, commentary on the film series), digital give-aways (screensavers, wallpapers, low resolution images), movie previews (short film trailers available in a variety of file sizes, compressed sound clips), interactive multimedia kit (all website features available for download in one file, interactive extras, puzzle-solving game), online shop (eleven *Trek* products), and outreach (TrekTalk feedback form, TrekTalk email, and a gift incentive).

Paramount's goal for *Generations* was to contemporise the *Star Trek* motion picture brand for all *Star Trek* audiences, particularly "smarter, Generation-X, over-twenty" niches (Arnold, 1997 cited in Lukk, 1997: 229). Since the film involved characters from the original motion picture series and the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* television series (CBS Paramount Television, 1987-1994), this slide between old and new provided rich opportunities to harden the loyalties of pre-existing audiences in both commitment "camps," such as they might be perceived. The benefits of incorporating the web into the theatrical marketing programme were not yet clear. However, the studio wished to actively engage users of the many *Star Trek*-dedicated newsgroups that had arisen around the World Wide Web and gauge their interest in the eleven *Star Trek* products which were advertised on its website. Marc Wade, the online producer for the website, referred to this project as "our opportunity to showcase this technology," adding that "it also gave Paramount a moment in the sun as an innovator in the use of new media for reaching the *Star Trek* audience" (2009).

Paramount was uniquely positioned to launch web promotions in 1994. Its interactive technology firm, formed in 1992 as the Paramount Media Kitchen in Palo Alto, California, developed digital media projects (interactive CD-ROMs) and product areas (interactive television (ITV) and personal digital assistant (PDAs)) for Paramount television and motion picture divisions (Garner, 1994). This included the creation of content for AOL, with whom the company would partner on a range of 1995 film promotions. The initial approach was made by members of the Media Kitchen to Paramount's Motion Picture Marketing group, and this led to a formal presentation—a demonstration of the marketing plan and the *Generations* prototype site using a different hypertext technology to the standardised protocols which we use to view the World Wide Web—with Lansing, who approved the project (Wade, 2009). The theatrical marketing division and the interactive wing co-ordinated their marketing plans, but with the power firmly tipped still in the favour of television advertising within the former—unlike today's interactive divisions, which are strategically integrated with the theatrical marketing unit and are arguably superseding television. This means that, although design, content selection and implementation was solely the preserve of the website production team, there was close synchronisation between the two departments. However, at this particular phase of the internet's development, neither the film nor the *Star Trek: Next Generation* television series production teams were involved in the web development process.

This had implications, most obviously, at the design level. As will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, technological restrictions influence website aesthetics but also the associative logic of blockbuster websites, their organisation, their information architecture. In the case of *Star Trek: Generations*, technological constraints and the lack of

interdepartmental collaboration (from film production departments to the Media Kitchen) mutually affected the website's presentation style and information architecture (i.e., the conceptual organisation of data and their interrelationships). Perfected in 1998 with Paramount's *Star Trek: Insurrection* (Jonathan Frakes, Paramount Pictures, 1998) website— at which point it is clear that relationships between the new division Paramount Digital Entertainment (PDE), filmmakers and production teams were firmly established—the visual representation of the generically familiar "Starship" console, digitally created in the two-dimensional world of the internet, broke continuities with its "real," three-dimensional referent in the television series and film.

Of most significance at this stage of the web's development are the site's microtargeting initiatives. The first was an electronic feedback form. This was critical if the studio was to begin creating—as many online companies did—an email database system as a means to gather detailed information about its visitors. Such "usage information," which enabled marketers to understand their customers' video preferences and cinemagoing habits, would then be studied and exploited for the company's own cross-promotional purposes. The second initiative was the *Star Trek* shop. At this early stage, the model was not fully adapted for e-commerce. It, instead, showcased official memorabilia and videotape gift sets using full-colour images, serving as a brochure for consumer browsing. Transactions were conducted offline via the toll-free telephone number provided.

At this early stage, therefore, the website's commercial potential for home entertainment was of more significance than either its information-provision or presentation style. Firstly, the request for web access data reflected the studio's desire to keep pace with market change. It wished to know the size of the web audience, and the best delivery platform for

reaching the majority. Thus, 4 of the 10 survey questions concerned the user's connection

speed, operating system, monitor screen size and internet service. Data of this kind gave

marketers the opportunity to provide a more attractive promotional area to meet the needs of

web users and hence a more efficient e-commerce structure for online merchandising

opportunities. Secondly, most crucially, the attempt to learn more about its online audience

with a goal-directed questionnaire suggested that the Motion Picture Marketing group was

interested in extending the brand's retail line—six films, a new TV series, computer games,

books, magazines, toy phasers and other merchandise—directly to the web and was,

therefore, undertaking a marketing orientated approach to learn about the web's e-commerce

potential. In fact, the benefits must have been clear for Paramount within months. According

to Sueann Ambron, the executive vice president of Viacom Online Services, the website

attracted 17,000 hits in ten days. Most significantly, 3,600 users bought merchandise using

information provided on the website (Advertising Age, 1994).

We can usefully consider the website created for the science-fiction fantasy *Stargate* as the

second studio authorised movie website. Because of the difficulty of fixing in concrete terms

the precise marketing arrangement between Centropolis (production company), Le Studio

Canal+ (financier), Digital Planet (website vendor) and MGM/UA (distributor),

misunderstandings have taken root and details about the business relationship have blurred.

However, some specifics are clear. First, the site was created by Digital Planet, a website

development and content creation company which was established in October 1994 by Paul

M. Grand and Joshua Greer; in the same month, it launched the *Stargate* website at the

address, *www.digiplanet.com/STARGATE* (Business Wire, 1997a). Second, Dean Devlin, the

film's producer and web project's originator, confirms that he took full control of interactive

marketing once it became clear the MGM/UA marketing team was committed to traditional

media only: "I said, "Can I have the Internet?" They said, "The *what*? Sure, it's yours""

(Devlin 2006).

Perhaps the most important reason why Devlin chose the internet was that he could use it to

position his website as a "member" of the Usenet community (specifically, within the

grouping of science-fiction readers and film enthusiasts). The policy of his campaign was to

create positive word of mouth, to foster low-level interactions in dedicated *Stargate*

discussion threads which Devlin's team created and sustained via the provision of

inducements. The website itself—a conventional repurposing of the "Secrets of *Stargate*:

The Making of an Epic Adventure Film" EPK discussed above—was not effectively well

managed (precise site objectives remained unclear) and its applications were tailored less

towards consumers than the press. Devlin's profile on the Electric Entertainment website

(*www.electricentertainment.com*) originally tied customer response at the box-office ($71.6

million) directly with the website's effectiveness, however the lack of measurement data for

the period problematises this claim. Certainly in 1994 *Stargate* was unique in its grassroots

appeal. The film—an original property with no evangelical support—made its connection

directly with a young cult audience who embraced the film as a topic for speculative

discussion and passed along favourable word-of-mouth through the newsgroup. Together

with Moloshok's promotional strategies for the *Babylon 5* television series, it demonstrated

that brand communication and adoption could be achieved on generic appeals.

Three further promotions were launched at the close of 1994. Universal Pictures' website for

the Arnold Schwarzenegger comedy *Junior* (Ivan Reitman, Universal Pictures, 1994)

emphasised an audience interest in star appeal as its touchstone. The site was clearly

intended to promote the film's premiere, which took place on 23rd November, in

superficially "global" terms. Like *Stargate*, it repeated the "database" model of CD-ROMs, providing approximately 200 pictures and 30 video clips in its three "Premiere," "Celebrity Arrivals," and "Previews" sections. This predominantly image-based campaign—an early attempt to show digital's potential for Hollywood promotions—was impractical, even for early adopters, and the studios quickly downscaled similar approaches for future campaigns. For its suspense thriller *Disclosure* (Barry Levinson, Warner Bros., 1994)—a film which hinges on the impact (positive and negative) of internet communication services such as email—Warner Bros. followed a similar database logic albeit framed less hyperbolically around its stars, Demi Moore and Michael Douglas. Finally, a website for Disney's *The Lion King* re-release was designed to overlap with its other cross-promotional efforts offline.

Early movie web promotion, though of itself innovative for the major studios, was, hence, categorised and contextualised in orthodox terms: the *Star Trek* site was created to make sense of the web's commercial potential, *Stargate* appealed to niche audience interest in science-fiction, *The Lion King* became a small component in Disney's multiplatform cross-promotions, and *Junior* and *Disclosure* exemplified a particularly modern, "global" fascination with stars as social phenomena. Since these websites were launched online within the same November/December period it took several months for Hollywood to redefine its approach.

Website production

The chapter now examines more closely the website production process on the eve of its standardisation in 1995. Two overlapping systems existed at this time: in-house development, and contracted and subcontracted productions. Few studios had the personnel to design a website concept within the corporation (or, "in-house") without the assistance of

external developers. An exception was Paramount Media Kitchen, the interactive wing of

Paramount Technology Group which was dedicated to interactive TV. The Media Kitchen

produced and developed multimedia (CD-ROM) and campaign content for commercial

internet services like AOL and the Microsoft Network. In May 1995 the lab became

Paramount Digital Entertainment and was re-dedicated to the development of online

products. Its personnel fully designed, developed and maintained the websites for *Clueless,*

Braveheart, *The Indian in the Cupboard* (Frank Oz, Paramount Pictures, 1995), *Virtuosity*

(Brett Leonard, Paramount Pictures, 1995) and *Congo* using in-house staff who originally

initiated and conceived the *Star Trek* kit website.

When an in-house team produced a website and campaign content (referred to collectively

as "creative"), the project typically drew on the help of an Online Producer, lead Art

Director, a Technical Producer, internet consultants, production assistants and the

Technology Director. After presenting an idea to the theatrical marketing unit for project

feedback and greenlight approval, the production assistant compiled materials drawn from

the in-house ad agency and marketing group. This included the press kit, screenplay, images

and drawings. This team was responsible for installing the website to the web server (housed

at the parent company's headquarters and not, therefore, necessarily in California), for

carrying out testing on the website, and for using database management engines.

Although my example of Paramount is emblematic of the autonomous "in-house" interactive

unit—the exception, rather than the rule—there is strictly no such entity. For example,

Paramount used external software engineers and technical consultants to program software

components and provide website interface solutions that were beyond the in-house team's

expertise. For example, W3-Design provided such services on the *Clueless* website. Many of

the studios adapted immediately to a client-to-vendor partnership as a signal of quality presentation. According to Gordon Paddison, former EVP of New Line Cinema's New Media Marketing division (decommissioned fully in 2008), "the best creative is by those who are innovating on a continual basis and are in the wild." His view that "creative should not be in-house" was shared by many of the studios (Paddison, 2009).

In most cases, the studios developed ongoing partnerships with multimedia production and development companies based in California, primarily Hollywood (Canned Interactive), Culver City (Bleu22 Studios) and Santa Monica (Media Revolution, Big Gun Project, Pacific Ocean Digital, Click Active Media). Firms outside of CA, such as Magnet Interactive (Washington) and Pyro Advertising (Missouri), were occasionally hired in the early nineties, but website production was largely centralised to West and Central LA. After contracting a new media company (in the majority of cases the vendor, but in some cases, the general contractor) to create a website, the theatrical marketing team assembled key materials in various media for the firm. These varied from film to film, but typically include the shooting script, the film trailer, a finished poster, a title treatment, and press kit; production and publicity photographs compiled by the unit publicist were supplied on Photo CD. Studios rarely previewed the film for marketers, but rough assemblies were sometimes prepared for website campaigns that lacked stars directly in their advertising, or in cases where the advertising was dependent on interactive games. For instance, Disney screened an early cut of *George of the Jungle* (Sam Weisman, Buena Vista Pictures, 1997) for marketers. Although the assembly did not feature special effects at the time, it clearly provided valuable information on which several decisions about the design of interactive elements could be based (Johnson, 2009).

New media companies developed ongoing strategic partnerships of their own with subcontractors (i.e., freelance designers and programmers). Typically, the Senior Creative Director handled the assembly of a small team (a designer, production artist and programmer), met with studio personnel to discuss the project's design direction and function, and then charged the team with the conception, design, content creation, engineering and management of the website. For instance, the Big Gun Project's senior creative director Jim Evans designed with studio executives the specifications and oversaw the production of numerous studio projects, ranging from *Cutthroat Island* (Renny Harlin, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1995, US/France/Italy/Germany) to *The Birdcage* (Mike Nichols, United Artists, 1996) and *Tomorrow Never Dies* (Roger Spottiswoode, United Artists, 1997, UK/US). At this early stage of movie marketing, a Creative Director sometimes took lead design duties and was personally responsible for production and programming.

This team ensured that the studio's marketing message was translated appropriately for the web, and if necessary, conceptualised related marketing initiatives (for example, the design of content areas for AOL). The website's visual design was typically based on the film's promotional poster only. In a small minority of cases the designers would interact with the film's producers and director. For instance, Castle Rock Entertainment was keen for director Rob Reiner to liase with the lead designer, Ted Johnson, who created the website for *The American President*. Once the website was successfully installed on the web server, the HTML files, software components, graphics, and other information and documentation was then delivered to the studio (Chang, 2009; Johnson, 2009; Shaw, 2009; Wade, 2009).

Due to the partnerships formed between the Hollywood studios and new media development and production firms in the mid-nineties little has changed in the media landscape. Some

firms, such as Digital Planet, evolved to become digital entertainment content companies, but throughout the mid-nineties, websites (some, arguably, homogenised) were largely produced in conjunction with a small group of established new media firms and the freelance design teams they contracted. Production personnel who established a new media development studio, such as the highly accomplished One Ten Design Inc., carried their relationships with the studios, filmmakers and corporate marketers across to the new company, where they were valued as high-end clients in the hope of retaining their business.

Internet statistics and growth

The emergence of websites for *Star Trek: Generations, Stargate, Junior, Disclosure* and *The Lion King* in 1994 excited a reaction in the majors that escalated their web activities the following year. Paramount recorded 5 million site visits in the month before *Star Trek: Generations'* nationwide release; this elicited an enthusiastic response from Motion Picture Marketing, whose executives suggested (taking the Media Kitchen managers by surprise) website promotions for at least five other major releases in the ensuing months, as well as a site for the new television series *Star Trek: Voyager* (Rick Berman, Michael Piller, Jeri Taylor, CBS Paramount Television, 1995-2001). In this sense, the response of the online community helped many popular films of 1995 make the transition to cyberspace. Throughout the year, the studios' "experimentations" with standardised kit sites took their place alongside early market research. According to an internet users study conducted by The Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press (1995), 20% of online subscribers and 14% of Americans without subscriptions went online everyday, while 19% of the 32% that admitted to going online "yesterday" said they did so from a home computer. Despite the influx of new home users over the year, men continued to go online more often (59% at least 3 days a week) than women (47%). Men aged between 30 and 49 were the most

frequent internet users; while women under 30 were less likely to go online everyday than any other demographic group. It is interesting that the average online user with a home computer at this time was, therefore, understood to be a college educated, middle-aged male professional with a higher than average disposable income, and possibly family.

With a higher user population, estimated to be 16 million by mid-1995, the internet spurred its own growth as a commercialised network, further legitimating technological developments and network bandwidth expansion for users, vendors and organisations. User friendly dial-up services, such as CompuServe, Prodigy and America Online, provided more reliable internet access for a wider range of home users with personal computers. This enabled the expansion of the global information infrastructure, broadening basic community growth. The providers controlled a 20%, 15% and 14% market share of internet subscribers respectively. Early web browsers supplied free of charge by Netscape and Internet Explorer integrated web services including email and newsgroups as a means of gathering media content in a single ready-made application. Although new users (who accessed the internet from home, from work, and from school) did not go online as frequently as experienced users, many went online to browse for recreation as opposed to looking for specific information. Marketers who closely monitored the web's evolving demographics to predict future trends would begin to develop messaging plans specifically for these audiences (Pew Research, 1996).

In Hollywood, the celebration of Paramount's *Star Trek: Generations* website at the second annual Interactive Media and Marketing Awards, held in Los Angeles in March 1995, elevated the cultural significance of the movie website. It won the top prize in the consumer online/wireless media category, an accomplishment which was reported in *Advertising Age*

on 20 March, and impressed studio management. Paramount subsequently formed PDE in May to promote the studio's film properties and those of the Paramount Television Group. Warner Bros., meanwhile, speculated that new demographic niches could possibly be opened over time, broadening the potential for corporate branding. Its first major web-branding project was for the third instalment in its comic-book blockbuster franchise *Batman Forever*, which was a landmark in online movie marketing designed to engage the loyal teen fanbase.

For a major movie studio with heavy financial commitments, however, the web remained largely untested and uncharted ground. Research and speculative e-commerce initiatives were greatly anticipated. It was believed, for example, that 19% of internet users surveyed for the aforementioned Pew Research study went online in 1995 to get entertainment-related information on a weekly basis (this included ticket price information and release dates for movies, as well as theatre and television news) (1996). This data does not tell us who used film promotion websites or for what purpose (or even who might have been exposed to film websites whilst browsing), and this lack of empirical data for advertising underlines the industry's ambiguous relationship to the web in its formative years. (The number of hits received by the *Batman Forever* website (discussed below) on a weekly basis cannot be used empirically because there is confusion regarding page request data.) These factors notwithstanding, the nature of the changing relationship between the web and other sectors and industries—such as banking, publishing, insurance, discount merchandising, sports, and entrepreneurship (key areas in which certain companies were already developing pilot schemes to engage with web customers, if not actual connections via commercial online services)—served to sustain and enhance the internet's importance as a commercial medium (Liss, 1995). In July 1995, Nielsen Media Research announced its intentions to join existing

audience measurement companies Internet Profiles (I/Pro), WebTrack, Next Century Media, and NPD, although it was still at this time "trying to create consistent ways of determining exposure to advertising online" (Berniker, 1995). Blockbuster Entertainment, conceived as an online advertising vehicle to boost retail sales of its library of offline video titles, launched in August (Gillen, 1995c). The pressure to be an internet (indeed, a "cyber") pioneer was significant. On this foundation, the internet functioned as an accompaniment to the marketing campaign—superficial at this stage as a two-way communications medium, but a necessary adjunct nonetheless.

The number of adults online nearly doubled in 1996, from 17.5 million in 1995 to over 33 million (Harris Poll, 2003), taking the web far beyond its niche origins. Of this number, 30% logged on to find entertainment-related information (from, amongst others, *Premiere* magazine). In the few surveys available to online advertisers in this period, the internet was referred to as a democratised, multi-service medium, growing in terms of businesses, levels of investment and in its reliability. More users went online on a weekly basis to retrieve information and news about current affairs, politics, movies and other entertainment, travel and finance. The most relevant publications for the trajectory of online movie promotion include: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, each with an established web presence by 1996; of the trade journals, *The Hollywood Reporter* was first to go online in 1995; *Variety* would later combine *Daily Variety* and *Variety* content on its website which launched online in 1998; and the popular entertainment magazine *Entertainment Weekly*, a subsidiary of Time-Warner, was also online by 1996. The significance of an electronic *Variety* publication would not filter down in the media and into Hollywood for two more years, but publications like *The Hollywood*

Reporter and *Entertainment Weekly* (already incorporating film website overviews by the Fall of 1995) gained a wide appeal, giving the studios highly sought after publicity.

The growing commercial interest in the internet as a site for short-term investment was mitigated by three key factors: insufficient web response times; insufficient data about audience size ("who," as *The New York Times* put it in a February article on internet advertising, was "going to pay for it?"); and a lack of proper research and development (Elsworth, 1997). With an estimated 16% of American households online in 1997 and still no credible third-party measurement services the web was not an accountable business for advertisers. Search engines like Yahoo!, Lycos and Excite were demonstrably successful advertising hubs, attracting revenue from the automotive, travel and financial service industries, but motion picture websites, which were intended to direct internet users to their local multiplex but more importantly to maintain their long-term interest in film and its related commodities, were largely at the mercy of the web's technological limitations. For Bill Bass, a Forrester Research senior analyst in 1997, "a critical mass of consumers will be loath to spend a lot of time online until it gets to the point where moving from site to site is like changing channels on TV" (Elsworth, 1997).

As the number of households with web access in 1997 increased and demand for faster home networks gained momentum, internet connection speed and overall line stability took on greater emphasis as concerns. According to a Harris Interactive survey, the number of American adults online in September 1997 had risen from 17.5 million (9%) in 1995 to 58 million (30%). Of this percentage of adults, an estimated 16% now had internet access at home, with 18% using an online service at work (Variety, 1998; Gromov, 2002; Harris Poll, 2003). The customer's (typically analogue) modem speed, phone line quality, and basic

quality of the connection to the ISP were all contributory factors in the staggering of connection speeds and would be addressed with the entry of modified hardware onto the market; secondly, the ISP and server's connection to the web were themselves often susceptible to congestion issues. As internet penetration escalated, sending and receiving data over a traditional 28.8kbps (kilobits per second) modem became increasingly frustrating, leading many in the business and media industries to embrace Ron Higgins's use of the pejorative term "the World Wide Wait," initially coined in his 1997 article, "Internet May Suffer as US Telephone Companies Eye Global Markets" (Higgins, 1997; Wildstrom, 1997; Pelline, 1997a; Stern and Graser, 1999).

The arrival of two competing 56kbps modem systems on the market in March 1997 offered download speeds far superior to the 33.6k modem (up to 65% faster), or 28.8k in use in average households, but was still susceptible to interference on poor telephone lines resulting in a slippage of download speed or typically disconnection; cable internet in 1997 was available in just 27,000 US households, the service being modestly priced but bandwidth slippage, again caused by traffic volume, remained an issue (Savetz, 1997).

Audience measurement companies approached interactive advertising agencies in 1997. The new tracking company, RelevantKnowledge, introduced an audience reporting service, which evaluated the surfing habits of 5,000 users in participating households. The company provided advertisers with data about audience composition and web-browsing behaviour. Later in the same year, ratings company Nielsen Media Research entered the market. It developed an auditing system to measure internet usage and content consumption for their ad agencies. It prepared a measurement test with a sample group of households, along the same lines as their system for TV set-top boxes. Other systems were operational by this time

at MatchLogic, an online ad management services firm in partnership with ABC Interactive (Variety, 1997a; 1997b). Before telecommunications networks analysts developed sophisticated audience measurement procedures for their clients in the year 2000—providing advanced measurement indexes for network flows, real-time traffic, paid search, and banner ad effectiveness—online marketers used the click-through rate for direct measure advertising tools in order to assess online film awareness and interest levels, specifically among the core audience of 5 to 18 year olds.

Click-through data was the first step in quantitative audience measurement but it was not an advanced or particularly valid measurement technique. An "impression" can mean the logging of a single page request, or the logging of an advertisement load (Shen, 2004). Secondly, page request logs, as Zufryden (2000) observes, are "not distinguishable across visitors" (59). The ambiguity extends to film websites. Data publicised by WorldSite Networks in February 1997, suggests that a website for the Howard Stern biopic *Private Parts* (Betty Thomas, Paramount Pictures, 1997) was one of the most popular film websites on the web. It received 2 million hits at its peak, and 50,000 visitors per day (Business Wire, 1997a). However, empirical research is needed before we can determine if there was truth to publicists' claims that the film moved beyond its core target audience (listeners and followers of the syndicated Howard Stern radio program, predominantly males in the 18-49 age bracket) and that this reach was in some way attributable to the film's web presence. In view of the dramatically heightened interest that occurred on movie websites in the days before a major motion picture was released nationwide, it is prudent to measure spikes in website traffic against awareness raised by the offline marketing effort and actual market penetration. Zufryden (2000) found that website activity "generally increases" in the days before a film's release, peaking "around the first-week introduction" (57).

In the most well-publicised case study of 1997, Sony adjusted its marketing and communication strategies for *Starship Troopers* in order to accommodate its own measurement procedures. The "Federal Network" is in key respects a successor to the newsletter system which the majors promoted in 1995 and precursor to the many-to-many community applications integrated by New Line Cinema for *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Peter Jackson, New Line Cinema, 2001, New Zealand/US).

In summary, the internet was transformed by the midpoint of the Dial-Up era as more publicly traded companies used the internet to establish connections with consumers worldwide. By 1996, 33 million people used the web and approximately 900,000 accessed film-related information on a regular basis. In 1994, consumers passed on links to new movie websites using email or newsgroups, but by 1996/7 users were discovering websites either by "surfing" (casual browsing) or directly following website address codes incorporated into the offline marketing materials by the film companies (discussed below). In this next section, the research examines the website developed by Warner Bros. for its movie blockbuster *Batman Forever*. The case study is critical for three reasons: it demonstrated the importance of online hype and press attention; it innovated a new practice for the film's home-video release which influenced the way the majors used the internet to sell films; and it illustrated the importance of monitoring website traffic after a film's theatrical window had closed.

Batman Forever (Joel Schumacher, Warner Bros., 1995)

In May 1995, Don Buckley, vice president for advertising and publicity at Warner Bros., spearheaded an aggressive expansion into interactive web promotion for the company's

summer blockbuster and franchise movie *Batman Forever*. This was the most concerted and ambitious effort by a major studio to integrate the internet cross-promotionally with the offline marketing campaign. It was also heavily dependent on visuals, and many of the primitive graphics created specifically by the artists for the site were produced with no cross-referencing to the film. The studio hired New York-based marketing agency Grey Entertainment, part of Grey Advertising, to create *www.batmanforever.com* (Croal, Stone, 1995). The site was designed by a small team: Jeffrey Zeldman (Executive Creative Director), Steve McCarron (Art Director), and Alec Pollak (Designer and Project Manager), in collaboration with Interactive8, Atlantic Records and administrative staff at Warners' Pathfinder. Following a specific design brief from Warners to try to "conceptualise … everything like the movie," the designers reconceived the flamboyant city of Gotham for the website, patterning its additional download features (trailers, images, music clips) on characteristics of the city which the designers invented. Locations (or webpages) included a cybercinema, a walk-through gallery, a Radio Gotham broadcasting service (offering sample clips from the soundtrack album), a Post Office (message board forum) and a tantalising opportunity to converse by email with the film's characters (Brandweek, 1995; Zeldman, 1995 cited in Taylor, 1995; Bruni, 1995).

This unique navigation experience demonstrated a qualitative step forward in website production. Yung, Novak and Hoffman (2000) have discussed the effect of deep website immersion in terms of "the flow construct." Flow refers to the complete and total immersion of a gamer or web user in the digital event or activity, to the extent that "thoughts and perceptions not relevant to navigation are screened out" (24). Although the *Batman Forever* website was limited by design, graphics and performance flaws, my description above suggests that the site designers were clearly involved in what might be termed flow

manufacture. According to the four principles which dictate flow on the web, as outlined by Yung et al., the *Batman Forever* website was optimised to reproduce three: interactivity; skill and control; and focused attention. It was designed, therefore, specifically to generate a user experience, the pleasures of which are tied explicitly to navigation itself.

These changes raised questions about the intended outcomes of engaging cyberteens and children with fictional characters and environments. The first movie-related consumer feedback form was used by Paramount Pictures for the *Star Trek* website and its users offered their feedback on a voluntary basis. Warner Bros. disguised their own as a "Gotham Census," turning the provision of personal contact details and information into an integral part of the *Batman* navigation experience. Whilst there was certainly no harm intended by Warner Bros. in this appeal, a case was mounted by consumer watchdogs petitioning the practice more generally; *Batman Forever* was cited because it invited web users, particularly children—for whom, according to Yung et al., all "self-consciousness disappears" during "the consumption event"— to "consent to the use of their personal information" via a survey disguised as a "virtual city's census" (Yung, et al, 2000; Montgomery and Pasnik, 1996). To my knowledge, no such pressure was brought to bear on the studio for its promotional strategies, but the *Batman Forever* website featured a number of times in the official report "Action for Children in Cyberspace," produced by Montgomery and Pasnik (1996) for the Centre for Media Education.

The listing of the *Batman Forever* website in a watchdog report for the online protection of children was paradigmatic of the challenges marketers faced, both in getting audiences to use their new promotions and in making the whole transaction a worthwhile experience for

everyone. More crucially, it shows the relative inexperience of designers, marketers and film producers at this early stage.

Three issues are worth examining. Firstly, the hype surrounding the website launch was in the internet's short history unprecedented. Whilst developers and marketing researchers were anxious to keep information about their online activities out of the media, Warner Bros. seem to have reasoned that a better way to sell this film online was to volunteer website information to journalists and analysts working for business publications. Buckley, for example, appeared in web/print columns about the online marketing, describing how the website had been created within the relatively short period of ten weeks, from inception to launch. He also revealed in print that the studio spent less than $40,000 for the website—this against a cost of $100,000 for a full-page colour advertisement in People magazine and a cost of $1 million for a thirty-second network spot on a prime-time show (Fitzpatrick, 1995; Sharkey, 1995). This strategy could have backfired on the studio and the producer, but nevertheless the story generated strong media buzz and consumer interest in the *Batman* website. The website's much-anticipated launch on May 15 was reported (a very rare occurrence at this time) by Taylor (1995) for advertising magazine *Adweek* (her brief New Media article was entitled, "Bang! Splat! Click! Batman Forever") and by Silverman (1995) for *Interactive Age* ("Breakthrough Push For Web"); *Brandweek* followed up the story with a profile of Buckley and an interview "Pow! Zap! Wham!" (Sharkey, 1995).

The second aspect of the campaign which is worth investigation became far more important. For feature film websites, the studios usually determined what a website's "online" window should be before its design concept was even approved. The gap between theatrical and home-video windows at this time was approximately four to five months for an A-title

blockbuster with a saturation release. The studios had no interest in implementing a largely

if not entirely unprofitable online campaign for this amount of time. It is on this premise that

many studio websites were terminated very shortly after the theatrical run—typically, at the

end of the month. At this time, websites for properties without the e-commerce potential of a

franchise to hold onto long-term customers (such as the *Star Trek* films) were viewed to

have served their purpose in increasing online awareness and generating some publicity.

Paramount's *Star Trek* site, again a landmark in this regard, opened one month before its

theatrical release consistent with the offline media campaign; the last update on its website

data log showed 23 November 1994, one week after the Hollywood premiere. It therefore

had a long operational window of 2 months but a short post-theatrical life. Thus in

1994/1995, the termination of a movie blockbuster or A-class film's theatrical run

determined the end of the official movie website and not at all user inactivity. This view

would change dramatically in the late 1990s, when a new goal—to "maintain consumer

commitment for ongoing product and home-entertainment sales"—emerged (Mohammed et

al 2003: 588).

Warner Bros.' home-video appeal later in the year demonstrated a studio break from this

convention. Edward Jay Epstein has discussed the issue of "diminishing residual

awareness"—or rather, the fading memory of a highly publicised movie in the mass popular

consciousness (Epstein 2005: 214). In marketing studies, Zufryden (1996) refers to the

affect as a "memory decay in the absence of advertising" (31). Historically, the solution to

diminishing residual awareness was a second marketing campaign to influence awareness

response again. The skilful refinement of the *Batman Forever* website, adapted to sell the

film again but this time in home-video format, marked the migration of this "reminder

marketing campaign" policy to the web. By marrying a film's video release with the home-

video section of the corporate website (MGM launched its home entertainment site in the summer of 1995 at the web address *mgmhomevideo.com*) studios could entice consumers into their video library "vaults" to make purchases and promising them gifts and discounts if they returned. Meanwhile, the main movie website was scrapped and its resources recycled. Warner Bros., however, influenced the practices of the Hollywood majors thereafter by reconfiguring the existing *Batman Forever* website, leaving the design and system architecture (the sequence in which webpages link to others) intact but incorporating new content and new loading screens specifically tailored to the home entertainment market (Fitzpatrick, 1995).

This practice alone broke from traditional systems already set in place by the Hollywood film companies. Thus we turn to the third issue: the decision not to close the website between the theatrical release and home-video release windows. Longer operational windows required constant updates, maintenance and the production of more content and activities delivered to site on a weekly basis. This increased the role of external developers (who developed the website), content-producer teams (including on-site experts) and their supervisory producers. Warner Bros. had no such plan in mind or practice when the theatrical window closed, yet it allowed the website to continue running until it was decided that a home-video promotion was also necessary. The maintenance team, whose responsibilities included moderating the Gotham Bulletin Boards throughout the film's theatrical run, "stopped keeping track" of the website in its aftermath, and this left the website's social message forum vulnerable to attack from abusive commenters (Zeldman, 2008). One dissenter later posted an embittered piece on his own website criticising Warner Bros. management ("The Empower Rangers," 12 June 1996).

In summary, the *Batman Forever* campaign showed that free publicity and online hype benefited a website promotion, particularly if this hype was supported by offline appeals which directed consumers to a web address (discussed below). Secondly, it innovated the practice of using websites to advertise home entertainment online and reconfigured the original theatrical design to include promotional materials specifically for the home-video consumer market. And thirdly, it highlighted the importance of monitoring post-theatrical web traffic which became an important factor in the development of e-commerce. Consumer involvement with the website continued long after it had served its initial purpose in the theatrical window. As a consequence, moderation protocols were required to protect future websites from online public abuse and brand defamation.

Developing links for E-commerce

The examples of *Star Trek: Generations* and *Batman Forever* showed how quickly conventions were established by the majors who were looking to use the web as another commercial outlet for home entertainment. According to the Vice President of Marketing for Twentieth Century-Fox it was too early in 1995 to configure the company's business to selling home-video through the internet because simple, secure e-commerce scenarios did not yet exist. In May 1995 he said "for now, we're looking to make money off of merchandise" (Fitzpatrick, 1995). Potential technical solutions, electronic payment services and new security systems were developed over the next three years. During this period, the majors continued to use their phone ordering systems but some companies, including MGM, conducted occasional transactions online using unsecured payment systems. This section brings together some of these developments in an attempt to show how the majors shaped their online marketing to target the growing consumer market.

The high consumer demand for online video websites in the early Dial-Up era encouraged the studios to expand their online operations. MGM received 500 e-mail messages a day with consumer enquiries (Fitzpatrick, 1995). By 1997, the six majors Disney, Universal, Warner Bros., Paramount, Twentieth Century-Fox and Sony were all operating home-video websites advertising their film libraries. In October 1995, MGM became one of the first film companies to create a home-video website (Fitzpatrick, 1995). The Paramount Home-Video website, which launched in March 1996, listed 4,000 video stores in its Store Search feature and 200 film titles in its online catalogue (Traiman, 1996c).

As discussed above, Warner Bros.' strategy of reconfiguring the theatrical website to support its home-video campaign of *Batman Forever* was innovative. It gave web users new content to explore, but crucially it placed the whole *Batman* video library online, including its animated spin-off series. The company later modified content on the original theatrical website for *Twister* (Jan de Bont, Warner Bros., 1996), a disaster film which grossed $241.7 million, and began advertising with Buy the Video and Buy the Soundtrack links in September 1996, one month before its release on home-video (Traiman, 1996a). The VHS was priced at $22.96 (Traiman, 1996b). While Warner Bros. was repurposing its theatrical websites, Disney worked on a web marketing plan for *Toy Story* (John Lasseter, Buena Vista Pictures, 1995). It used the higher-than-average $70 million marketing campaign for the home-video release of *Aladdin and the King of Thieves* (Tad Stones, Disney Video, 1995) as a test case for several strategies which it used later that year involving television and print advertising, cross-promotions with retailers, and internet promotions.

By 1997, movie websites were largely reconfigured to support links to online stores and home-video catalogues. Hyperlinks embedded on the *Spawn* (Mark AZ Dippé, New Line

Cinema, 1997), *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (Jay Roach, New Line Cinema, 1997, US/Germany) and *Boogie Nights* (Paul Thomas Anderson, New Line Cinema, 1997) splash-pages referred users to the New Line store, which at the time was heavily promoting the letterbox, widescreen and DVD versions of *The Nightmare On Elm Street* franchise. The makers of *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, Paramount Pictures, 1998) also showed interest in the internet as a driver for offline telephone sales, a technique established in the web's first commercial year. Paramount's Truman Liberation Front (TLF) website, conceived as a grassroots protest site boycotting the release of *The Truman Show*, included a telephone number which users could dial to buy merchandise apparently created by the fictitious TLF organisation. In this case, an operator sold interested users a Free Truman T-shirt priced at $18.95 (Milvy, 1998).

When the industry took an active interest in multimedia CD-ROMs as an additional revenue source, the developers used the new format to create Sing-Along discs for children and Making Of discs for older audiences. These CD-ROMs played a role in expanding the home entertainment market and promoting the idea of the digital soundtrack album. Similar methods were developed for websites and some conventions were appropriated from the Sing-Along market. However, information security issues and slow connection speeds prohibited marketers from including links that connected consumers directly with online stores and merchants. Many kit sites were designed, therefore, to give release date information only. By 1996, the majors began marketing new soundtrack albums with artist/track information and more significantly sample clips. To promote James Horner's original score for the award-winning film *The Spitfire Grill* (Lee David Zlotoff, Columbia Pictures, 1996), the website designed by Columbia Interactive included two sample clips. These extras helped to promote the album's publisher, Sony Classical Records (a subsidiary

of Columbia's parent company Sony), and to foreground the film's appeal to adult audiences as an easygoing, undemanding story about small-town values. Alternatively, multiple clips were sometimes hosted on the publisher's own website, which again was a subsidiary of the parent company. For example, *The Craft* (Andrew Fleming, Columbia Pictures, 1996) directed consumers from the landing and Sounds pages to a dedicated section contained on Sony's Music site, which promoted the film with four 30-second clips.

By the end of the century these e-commerce appeals were brought together in the websites for all the majors' movie blockbusters and genre films. The home-video website for *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, Lionsgate, 2000), for example—which included a pop-up window warning under-age users that the film carried a Restricted rating—featured on its homepage an HTML link which connected users to the shop of its home-video distributor Universal ("Click here to get info on new movies, DVDs, videos and free stuff from Universal") and a VHS graphic (similar to the graphics which appear in the Broadband era for DVD and Blu-ray discs) which teased the consumer ("Rent it on Video, Own it on DVD! September 5, 2000—CLICK HERE FOR DETAILS"). In addition, the Soundtrack section of the website included a track list for a forthcoming album released by Koch Entertainment ("Available 4, 2000").

In summary, following the practices innovated by Warner Bros.' *Batman Forever* website in 1995, the majors incorporated links to their online stores at the bottom of every website over the next three years. By 1999, it was an industrywide standard and websites were becoming showcase windows for home-video, DVD, soundtrack and other merchandise.

Marketplace competition

After the successes of *Star Trek* and *Stargate*, the first wave of genre titles to find online support included: *Apollo 13* (Ron Howard, Universal Pictures, 1995), *Billy Madison* (Tamra Davis, Universal Pictures, 1995)*, Babe* (Chris Noonan, Universal Pictures, 1995, Australia/US)*, Pocahontas* (Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg, Buena Vista Pictures, 1995)*, Judge Dredd* (Danny Cannon, Buena Vista Pictures, 1995)*, Toy Story* (John Lasseter, Buena Vista Pictures, 1995), *The American President* (Rob Reiner, Columbia Pictures, 1995) and *Ace Ventura Pet Detective: When Nature Calls* (Steve Oedekerk, Warner Bros., 1995). New Line Cinema's first interactive campaign was for *The Basketball Diaries* (Scott Kalvert, New Line Cinema, 1995) in April. The website attracted 150,000 visitors and cost approximately $5,000 (Bruni, 1995). It was followed by a more elaborate website for *Mortal Kombat* (Paul WS Anderson, New Line Cinema, 1995), which was created by web developer DirectNet (Business Wire, 1996a). New Line's specialist subsidiary Fine Line followed, producing *An Awfully Big Adventure* (Mike Newell, Fine Line Features, 1995, UK), *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (Maria Maggenti, Fine Line Features, 1995) and *Little Odessa* (James Gray, Fine Line Features, 1995). Paramount capitalised on *Star Trek's* success with *Congo* (Frank Marshall, Paramount Pictures, 1995), *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, Paramount Pictures, 1995), *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, Paramount Pictures, 1995), *Nick of Time* (John Badham, Paramount Pictures, 1995) and *Jade* (William Friedkin, Paramount Pictures, 1995). Digital Planet created the *Casper* (Brad Silberling, Universal Pictures, 1995), *Twelve Monkeys* (Terry Gilliam, Universal Pictures, 1995) and *Waterworld* (Kevin Reynolds, Universal Pictures, 1995) websites for Universal, and *GoldenEye* (Martin Campbell, United Artists, 1995, UK/US) for MGM. In addition to its official sites, Sony designed subdomains, called "Spotlight Pages," for *Desperado* (Robert Rodriguez, Columbia Pictures, 1995), *First Knight* (Jerry Zucker, Columbia Pictures, 1995),

Johnny Mnemonic (Robert Longo, TriStar Pictures, 1995, Canada/US), *The Net* (Irwin Winkler, Columbia Pictures, 1995) and *Devil In A Blue Dress* (Carl Franklin, TriStar Pictures, 1995).

This expansive list demonstrates that the internet was breaking free of its genre associations. The websites for both the family-oriented live-action adventure *Jumanji* (Joe Johnston, TriStar Pictures, 1995) and *Showgirls* (Paul Verhoeven, United Artists, 1995, France/US), an NC-17-rated film about the Las Vegas strip world, make particularly clear this expansion, and suggest a reassessment of the internet as a market for film. Websites for movies with the potential for a blockbuster opening but which were targeted at older, predominantly female audiences spawned conventional campaigns. For instance, Paramount's *Braveheart*, which was scripted in an identical fashion to the *Star Trek: Generations* template, and featured a single graphical banner atop a predominantly bare webpage, based its key appeals on the marketability of the cast. But science-fiction blockbusters and action-fantasy adventures with broad appeal beyond the demographics of age and strictly gender drove the expansion of the web standard. Universal's *Waterworld* and *Twelve Monkeys* websites, for example, were deliberately constructed for "early adopters with the time and interest to explore an immersive sci-fi related site" (Kines, 2009). These websites were more expensive than the standard, but cost-effective kit sites were far inferior, both as drivers of web traffic and as stimulators of internet conversation. While the inroads made into online web promotion by the *Batman Forever* website gave the majors incentive to emulate its success, the response was measured. No other 1995 release matched the 1.8 million hits which it received (on a per weekly basis) in the earliest stages of its theatrical run (Barboza, 1995; Fitzpatrick, 1995).

In 1997, Sony's success with *Starship Troopers* was attributable in part to Columbia's management of the expanding web audience. Ira Rubenstein referred in 1997 to a co-operative culture wherein fans "building sites" and "linking to my site" could only "help the film" (Rubenstein, 1997 cited in Kirsner, 1997). Jenkins (1997, cited in Kirsner, 1997) noted that a "reciprocal relationship like this with their fans" was a "step in the right direction;" Rubenstein, in agreement, suggested the industry demonstrate less concern for protecting star equity (cited in Kirsner, 1997). New Line Cinema, an exemplar in this regard, had pitched its *In Love and War* (Richard Attenborough, New Line Cinema, 1996) website to the administrators of 150 fansites devoted to leading actress Sandra Bullock. In addition to pronouncing Bullock, "a goddess of cyberspace [who] reigns over the internet," the website showcased two fan-based webpages and provided links to both.

In January 1998, Ira Rubenstein, speaking to the *Los Angeles Daily News*, said "the internet is now part of the marketing plan for every film. It's a completely justified way to reach the filmgoer, particularly since people online are more likely to attend movies" (Rubenstein, 1998 cited in McNary, 1998). Marc Graser writes of the phenomenon of seeing official URLs for almost every movie title in 1998: "Now part of every studio's marketing game plan, web site addresses are plastered on posters, tacked on the end of trailers and even pushed on other internet sites" (Graser, 1998). In fact, marketing teams and production personnel had already institutionalised the website "as another component in their arsenal" by, at the very latest, the summer of 1996 (Wade, 2009). Consequently, the practice of building awareness for the commodity website became a norm perhaps far sooner than we have come to believe.

In 1999, Artisan Entertainment's skilful manipulation of the mainstream media and careful self-management was as important to the majors as the perception that *The Blair Witch Project* (discussed below) succeeded only because of its online marketing. To this I shall add another factor: market penetration. In a debate about online film promotion 4 months prior to *The Blair Witch Project's* release, Andrew Jarecki (Moviefone founder and CEO) argued that the growth of movie web advertising was ultimately dependent on two factors: the web's capacity to convert a sale (i.e., for transaction revenues to be generated from online booking stores) and to trace the sale using independent, comprehensive measurement techniques. Attributing studio scepticism about the web not to a traditional built-in technophobia but rather to a concise understanding of its commercial limitations, Jarecki described an internet that "just hasn't reached critical mass yet" (Jarecki, 1999 cited in Graser, 1999). Within one year, market penetration of narrowband internet reached critical mass, rising from 39% in 1999 to 52% for the year 2000, and 58% in 2001 (Nielsen, 2001; ClickZ, 2001).

Therefore, among the motives discussed for studios to invest more in the web as an advertising medium, the most likely seems to be the desire to join a mass medium that has, perhaps unnecessarily though nonetheless importantly, the backing of authoritative statistical findings. *The Blair Witch's* incredible popularity online in 1999, Artisan's skilful management of the mainstream media, the emergence of new third-party measurement services online, and the anticipation and optimism surrounding the imminent reaching of critical mass, prompted the majors to scale up their interactive efforts for the year 2000 and accordingly increase their web investments. This activity encouraged a bolder approach to marketing technique, which had important implications later for the relationship between the consumer and the official website.

Print Media

As part of their early experimentations with new media, the studios used weblinks in old media. The first connection made between traditional media and online was for, again, Warner Bros.' *Batman Forever* website. Shortly after, New Line Cinema released two advance posters for *Mortal Kombat* which prominently displayed the website URL and captured the attention of young male fans by offering incentives to go online. This appeal, printed in a bold script, found immediate favour with the basic target audience, whose competence with the web—like the *Stargate* audience—New Line presumed was already well established. The key appeals in the ads were an advertisement aimed at web users ("Preview Mortal Kombat on the internet at: *http://www.mortalkombat.com/kombatbegins*"), an unorthodox substitution of the film's title for the words "Kombat Begins, August 1995," and a blockbuster tagline, promising viewers "Nothing in this world has prepared you for this." It included the same internet appeal on full-page ads for *Mortal Kombat: The Journey Begins* (Kevin Droney, New Line Home Video, 1995), an animated prequel which was released immediately on VHS.

Strategically, these techniques allowed the studio to reinforce an image of the film in the public consciousness as a high-octane action picture, and the web specifically was useful as a device for deepening pre-existing loyalties. In this respect, the campaign satisfied some of New Line's goals for narrowcasting (to target a well-defined niche); but by individualising the campaign message on these terms, the marketers individualised the web also.

The strategy did not, therefore, serve the best interests of all of the studios. Whilst New Line Cinema's slate for the year included films whose marketing messages the company could

translate to the web—the already released *Se7en* (David Fincher, New Line Cinema, 1995) (which benefited from an originally unplanned web campaign), *The Basketball Diaries*, two Stephen King-inflected horrors in *The Mangler* (Tobe Hooper, New Line Cinema, 1995, US/Australia/South Africa) and *In the Mouth of Madness* (John Carpenter, New Line Cinema, 1995)—the major studios presumed and in some instances pressed for a larger web audience. For web marketing to work, the studios reasoned that an audience must reconcile its own anxieties about for whom precisely the web is intended: i.e., "it is for us, and not them." To this end, the studios emphasised variety based on the foundation that in order to make sense of the growing audience it must make general "enquiries into people's tastes [and] preferences" (Miller, et al., 2005).

This response makes the task of defining certain characteristics of print advertising for the period under discussion simpler. Advertisements produced with web support in this period (by Fox, Warner Bros., Universal, Columbia, Disney, Paramount, Miramax, and Castle Rock) subscribed to the same formula. Significantly, the full web address was minimised and positioned at the bottom of the print advertisement with the company credits (or "billing blocks") and not, therefore, above the billing block; a functional, explanatory invitation to "visit the Web Site at" was also regularly included. URL appeals were positioned, with questionable benefit, alongside the MPAA rating or beneath logos, and were integrated seamlessly with the billing block to reduce their distraction. Mid-nineties poster campaigns therefore rarely endowed the web with marketability, a decision which seems to have been taken by marketing executives in light of studio apprehension about developing interactions between the two media.

We do not know to what extent this new practice raised website awareness amongst non-web users. No data exists in internet advertising studies to my knowledge for the impact of a poster campaign on web traffic in the year 1995—or for the 1990s as a whole. Coffey and Stipp's (1997) study on the interconnections between web usage and television media provides data for the launch of MSNBC in 1996; Zufryden (2000) evaluates consumer engagement with the *Eraser* (Chuck Russell, Warner Bros., 1996), *Space Jam* (Joe Pytka, Warner Bros., 1996) and *Murder at 1600* (Dwight H Little, Warner Bros., 1997) websites in relation to box-office performance, not traditional advertising. Thus, we can only turn to specific web campaigns and attempt to unpack the significance of the figures their studios publicise. For example, the record levels of web traffic to *Batman Forever* in May/June 1995 might be an indication for the fact that some non-web users responded to the subway posters or front-page *The New York Times* appeals that carried web addresses (Saunders, 2001). However, the 1.8 million hits received by the site, which then fell to a 600,000 weekly average thereafter, is a deceptive figure because of measurement ambiguities (Barboza, 1995). I treat Zeldman's claim that "half of them [web users in the States] view this one site every week" with caution (2001).[3] Additionally, the campaign is illustrative of the concerted effort within Warner Bros. to exploit corporate synergy on a multimillion dollar scale. Its aim was to bring the "multimedia, multimarket sales campaign" which successfully powered the franchise's originator in 1989 to the cyber-era, in order to create synergistic merchandising opportunities on the website (Meehan, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 1995). As a measure of the franchise's status in the marketplace, advertisers were able to produce individualised ads for subways and bus shelters which bore just the film logo, the website address and no further information.

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[3] I believe Zeldman is referring to users connected to the web *without the benefit of a commercial online service*, which the Pew Research Centre (1995) estimates at 2 million Americans, while Zeldman claims 3. 12 million more Americans were subscribed to the web. Harris Interactive (2007)

At this point, I suggest that an increase in the use of print ads to drive unique web traffic should not be taken as an indicator of its success as an emerging practice. *Congo, Pocahontas, Apollo 13, Four Rooms* (Allison Anders et al., Miramax Films, 1995), *Hackers* (Iain Softley, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1995), *The Journey of August King* (John Duigan, Miramax Films, 1995), *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1995), and *Toy Story* were served by a print campaign that induced awareness of a website, but unlike *Batman*, they lacked the status of a global merchandising vehicle with existing loyalties among dedicated teens and children. However, the strategies New Line and, specifically, Warner Bros. adopted to drive such traffic at this time had a very specific outcome which is worthy of some consideration: they promote the website itself as a commodity. This was an important development for the industry, one that influenced the basic principles behind the website. If, as Comolli/Narboni (1969) illustrate, film possesses "exchange value, realised by the sale of contracts, and governed by the laws of the [capitalist] market," the website, in its immersive-interactive form pioneered by *Batman Forever*, is the Comollian/Narbonian essence of cinema (814). The website, thus, possesses an exchange value itself in that it trades on the powerful navigation experience which its users find most attractive. Indeed, the *Batman Forever* teaser ads—whose chief characteristics were a logo and a URL—therefore, sold a different kind of contract, one in which the web navigation experience itself was favoured as the commodity to be sold. With this realisation, we see the beginnings of Brent Britton's vision-for-the-future taking shape, a future in which the feature film now serves "as a trailer for an extensive entertainment service offered on the web"—in which capacity the navigation experience itself represents the commodity for sale (in Ryan, 1996).

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estimates 17.5 million Americans went online in total. This figure represents, according to Pew (1996)

Website Development

The research has so far examined a range of industrial and technological developments which have included the migration of press kit materials to the internet, the adoption of certain practices associated with the producers of electronic press kits and CD-ROMS, and the major studios' early attempts to find consumer markets online. Their commercial exploitation of the web as an ancillary market for merchandise and home entertainment commenced early, but their websites became e-commerce environments years later, after the establishment of their home-video websites, after the expansion of the web as more and more publicly traded companies came online. The chapter has not, therefore, looked at websites in detail. The next sections aims to address this by raising a number of issues for discussion in relation to website aesthetics, community features, adult content, added value games and added value gaming. The research then turns to case studies of the websites for *Godzilla* (Roland Emmerich, TriStar Pictures, 1998) and *The Blair Witch Project* which are important milestones in Dial-Up era marketing.

Website Aesthetics

The industry's fascination with moving imagery, or "visual culture," was reflected only modestly in the earliest websites of the era. Examples included the blinking surveillance eye of the *Star Wars* universe's omnipresent Probedroids, and the dozens of animated cockroaches that conspire to rearrange the film's title logo on the *Joe's Apartment* (John Payson, Warner Bros., 1996) homepage. Poster art (*Space Jam*, *id4*, *Hard Rain*) or if distinctive enough title treatments (*Mars Attacks!, Ransom, Mission: Impossible*) were included on websites as conventional signifiers of brand identity—standardised tools include a graphical banner or small image file of postage stamp size on the homepage. The websites

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14% of the general public.

for *Mary Reilly* (Stephen Frears, TriStar Pictures, 1996)*, Sweet Nothing* (Gary Winick, Warner Bros., 1995) and *Maximum Risk* (Ringo Lam, Columbia Pictures, 1996) carried lengthy, 3,000-word essays about the production process, and the websites for *Contact* (Robert Zemeckis, Warner Bros., 1997) and *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (Clint Eastwood, Warner Bros., 1997) offered static, non-animated photo galleries covering various aspects of the production. These features, though extensive and detailed, were unfortunately characteristic of the websites produced throughout 1995 and were still artless web spaces to navigate. The web trailer was the most attractive of a website's extras, but was often difficult or impossible to download on 28K and 14K modems. Audience demand for shorter, non-traditional video initiated a shift toward smaller clips, typically showcasing on-set production footage. A turn in the development of websites came as design teams were permitted to use QuickTime Virtual Reality (QTVR) technology. QTVR created small photorealistic, panoramic movies which the majors adopted immediately as an alternative to VRML technologies. This virtual reality imaging enabled viewers to download and examine pre-recorded, two-dimensional, 360 degree panoramas taken by film publicists on the film set. Only a few specially selected environments were chosen, such as the Hell's Kitchen streetcorner in the drama *Sleepers* (Barry Levinson, 1996) or the Doyle Gang shoot-out in a wrap-around simulation created for the Bruce Willis action film *Last Man Standing* (Walter Hill, New Line Cinema, 1996). When PDE launched its website for *The Relic* (Peter Hyams, Paramount Pictures, US/UK/Germany/Japan/New Zealand, 1996) the clips page included an eleven-part behind-the-scenes movie divided into downloadable 3MB instalments; it also featured the conventional 2.8MB theatrical trailer. The same company increased the number of film clips available on its next website to twenty, this being the following year's science-fiction horror *Event Horizon* (Paul WS Anderson, Paramount Pictures, 1997, UK/US). The websites for the big blockbusters of 1997, however, added live event features which

advanced the development of online marketing and contributed to the common website becoming a compelling attraction. *The Postman* (Kevin Costner, Warner Bros., 1997) marked the web's first ever live-streamed webcast from the set of a movie. In the next year, the producers of the *Lethal Weapon 4* (Richard Donner, Warner Bros., 1998) website organised a three and a half hour webcast which was streamed live from a Warner Bros. soundstage on 27 April. During the broadcast, viewers were encouraged to discuss matters relating to the event with others on *The Lethal 4* Message Boards. The whole broadcast was then archived with seventeen chapter indexes (with titles including "Catching the light on the counterfeit money plate, then shooting the scene (watch Jet kill!")', and "Getting towards the Martini, or last shot of the day") and made available for download in the RealVideo format. As the film clip titles and the official announcements contained on the websites showed these live events gave users authentic, behind-the-scenes insights and a valuable sense of immediacy which brought viewers closer to the magic and on-set camaraderie of Hollywood.

Rich media aided this development curve. The last question of an audience survey, included on the official *Star Wars* (George Lucas, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1977) website in 1997, asked dedicated site visitors to identify the existing rich media plugins installed on their systems. It listed: Macromedia's Flash and Shockwave, Java, JavaScript, Progressive Networks' RealPlayer, and for neophytes or regular users, "any VRML plugin." Without this feedback, without these general reference points, the *Star Wars* site might have moved into its next development phase dependent on archaic and uninspired technologies, or worse, handicapped by an over-stimulated design environment. This threatened to create a precarious situation where the biggest blockbusters of 1997, including *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures, 1997), *Men in Black* (Barry

Sonnenfeld, Columbia Pictures, 1997), *Air Force One* (Wolfgang Petersen, Columbia Pictures, 1997, US/Germany) and *Titanic* (James Cameron, Paramount Pictures, 1997) were in danger of looking outmoded.

The upgraded Macromedia Flash and Shockwave 2 players of 1997-1998 were low-bandwidth streaming technologies that enabled web developers to create animated graphics and sound with minimal disruption to site navigation. The strategies for incorporating rich media into Columbia's *The Fifth Element* (Luc Besson, Columbia Pictures, 1997, France) included: the insertion of film clips to disguise page transitions; the mobilisation of a range of different video formats to increase the accessibility of film trailers for most users (such as the .MOV and .AVI formats); and the provision of film-specific games (*The Elements, Hostage Situation*, and *Taxi Derby*). In its pre-release phase as an animated splashpage, the *Starship Troopers* (Paul Verhoeven, TriStar Pictures, 1997) website recapitulated the multi-screen format and histrionic mode of the film's infomercials. Once fully launched, the website's range of games, its "war-bunker interface," and the highly popular VRML skirmish, *Planet P*, bore similarities with the film-world's space environments, as well as repetitiously bringing into focus its (abrasive) tone of address. And in the *Alien Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1997) website, the "Experience" zone unfolded onto the virtual bridge of the spacecraft the USS Auriga. The "Alien Lab" provided video databases about the morphological stages of the alien life cycle (from spore and facehugger, to chestburster, to worker/soldier alien or alien queen).

The thinking behind this strategy was to improve basic site operation, environment, buttons for hyperlinks and page transitions in order to capture the user's imagination and sustain their interest for longer web sessions. Hoffman and Novak (1996) argue that ritualised,

experiential flow states occur if the navigation experience constitutes a leisurely, time-filling activity, with no goals specifically in mind, and a reduced emphasis on purposive exposure to content (62). The details of the *Starship Troopers* training manual and *Alien* learning materials are, perhaps as one might expect, subsumed by the pleasures of immersion—with the hard-core *Starship Troopers* audiences embroiling themselves in the tactical operations of the *Planet P* skirmishes, and *Alien* fans experiencing the low-engagement pleasures of sound effects and text-based mythology. Goal-directed learning it is expected, it is perhaps hoped, blends with the less intentional, exploratory orientation that does not so much nullify goal-directed behaviour, but move it further down the hierarchy of probable navigational alternatives. It is, therefore, in the above concrete examples that we see the origins of the full-screen navigation "experience," used to promote so successfully the key milestones of *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, DreamWorks, 1999), *Fight Club* (David Fincher, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1999, US/Germany) and *The Cell* (Tarsem Singh, New Line Cinema, 2000, US/Germany).

Community features

The rapid growth of movie websites between 1995 and 1996 fostered a predisposition in certain sectors of the entertainment press towards interactive websites with stronger ties to narrative and innovative content. *Entertainment Weekly* posted disparaging reviews frequently about sites it considered to be less than worthy (Burr, 1995a; Burr, 1996a, 1996b; Strauss, 1996; Cury, 1998; Cury, 1999). Moreover, the growth of the entertainment and trade press at this time offered audiences a potential "ring" of official industry sources which could be linked to and referenced in online discussions. This helped to foster a discourse about filmed entertainment on the web that was closer to the mainstream than the far more specialist arena of newsgroups, or the private, confidential sphere of email. The

proliferation of professional and amateur internet reviews columns on the web had no direct impact on the strategy and creative direction of marketing executives, but the clear connections an entertainment magazine like *EW.com* made with a sizeable online community of filmgoers did change the sense of audience participation on the web.

The studios understood the value of audience participation from their partnerships with Hollywood Online and eDRIVE in 1993/4. The studios were keen to incorporate chat features on their own websites, both to create a sense of brand community and to monitor their customers in a controlled environment where marketers could learn more about their personal preferences. The most common feature of community chat was the bulletin board. The website for *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (Milos Forman, Columbia Pictures, 1996) included five discussion threads on contentious issues provoked by the film, such as first amendment rights, the role of the Federal Communications Commission and regulation of the internet. Each bulletin board contained archived comments which began two months prior to the film's release and required the user to click on a confirmation link before entering the forum.

Eighteen of the top twenty box-office films in 1996 were promoted online (via either a subdomain on the company website or official movie websites) and each implemented community features to facilitate person-to-person chat. "The Forrester Report into Entertainment and Technology," which conducted research into the movie websites of 1996, found that 30% of movie websites used message boards or online Palace chat as a means to deepen the commitment levels of consumers to their brands. Sony, for example, used a number of strategies to meet this objective. In May/June 1996, it began alpha testing (the first "stage" in software development, which rarely involved the general public) a new

VRML chat room for the Jim Carrey black-comedy, *The Cable Guy* (Ben Stiller, Columbia Pictures, 1996). Despite some interest it failed to involve an accepting adult audience.

The Palace Chat application, a community feature included on websites produced between 1996 and 1998, was seen as perhaps the most successful and popular of these community applications. A Palace Chat feature is defined as a graphical chat room which required software extensions to operate and which provided web users with avatars, cartoon speech balloons and animations to attract young teens and children who wanted to explore virtual worlds with their friends. The Palace user software (owned by Time Warner) was available for a small fee. 1996 was the official Beta-testing year for Palace Chat and in a veiled show of support *Entertainment Weekly* (also under the ownership of Time Warner) produced an article ("*The Palace; Worldsaway; Worlds Chat*") which compared its playability and value to two other competitors (Burr, 1996c). Key Palace environments for movie websites were created by As If Productions (AIP). The official website for *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (Baz Luhrmann, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1996), a modern reinterpretation of the play developed for a young teen (PG-13) audience and which received wide distribution in nearly 2,000 theatres, is one such example. By eschewing the "aggressively modern, assertively trendy, overwhelmingly of-the-moment" approach of the filmmakers, As If Productions and Global Doghouse created a rich, fairytale environment which specifically referenced one of the film's major set-pieces, and hence key moments of narrative excess (Variety, 1996b). Its virtual reality tour, the Romeo + Juliet Masquerade Ball, combined graphical chat with an authentic visual portrayal of the Capulet's Masquerade Ball. Attempts were made by MGM/UA and The Big Gun Project to cultivate a more mature audience for its 007 Martini Lounge (as the website, *www.mgmua.com/bond*, suggests provocatively: "who knows what villain or femme fatale lurks amid the plush velvet booths?"), and

similarly a Palace Chat was organised by the Pacific Ocean Digital team for Sony's *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, TriStar Pictures, 1996), which played to a broad demographic of men and women primarily in the 19-26 and 27-35 age groups.

For its *Starship Troopers* website in 1997, Sony produced site construction tools which "cadets" could use to produce customised Trooper ID screens. Sony, reacting to Paramount's disproportionate response to online *Star Trek* fan communities, closely supervised the use of these materials, but allowed audiences a far greater latitude; its "reciprocal relationship" was a rational risk-adverse strategy to ensure its marketing message for an original, and largely untested, science-fiction project reached an audience. This initiative allowed the marketing department to disseminate film promotional messages through monthly email newsletters, whilst officially recognising and forwarding community members to the best ID screens created in the network (Kirsner, 1997). Daily content and activities were added to sustain this "audience," which was appropriately organised into a global Mobile Infantry. The program doubled as a large-scale encyclopaedia and manual, expanding the nature of the training game to incorporate information about the original novel, written by Robert A Heinlein, as well as the film adaptation (Harlan, 1997). More than 30,000 fans embraced the opportunity to register (Kirsner, 1997).

Adult content

The addition of mature content on some websites marked an assumption that adult audiences found online chat and general net-surfing an appealing aspect of the computer mediated environment. McKenna, Green and Smith (2001), have argued that the embarrassment factor of exploring oneself and one's attitudes to relationships and sex offline becomes demarginalised online. It is, McKenna et al affirm, easy to explore adult interests online

anonymously, without the fear of negative reactions (302). The studios, aware of these behavioural characteristics, expanded some of their movie appeals accordingly. Sony's website for *Striptease* (Andrew Bergman, Columbia Pictures, 1996) titillated young and middle-aged men with suggestive comments ("find the right hot spot," "skip the foreplay," "Want to come inside?") and a *Playboy*-esque presentation style; whilst *The Fan* (Tony Scott, TriStar Pictures, 1996) addressed its assumed audience in an entirely different register ("hours of pleasant diversion to take your mind off your daily grind"), thus connecting its appeal as a "hard-edged" "Friday-night" film to the relative pleasures of ritualised websurfing. In effect, the interactive community-based environments of the 007 Martini Lounge, the *Romeo + Juliet* Ball and the *Striptease* club have led the studios to incorporate the consumer into the marketing process, where their behaviour can be studied and the lessons learned exploited for future projects and campaigns.

Essential to the appeal of a website like *The Big Lebowski* (Joel and Ethan Coen, Universal Pictures, 1998, US/UK) was the acerbic tone of its address and the persistent use of college level profanity throughout its meandering monologues. Although the film received an R-certificate for including the word "fuck" more than 260 times, the website had to be carefully handled in order to avoid receiving a similar certificate from the MPAA (the Hollywood studios began submitting their websites to the MPAA for classification on 1 June 1998) (Tyree and Walters, 2007). Nevertheless, it contained four uses of the word "asshole," three of the word "pissed", and two uses of the word "jerkoff". This enhanced its appeal with the younger "slacker" audiences and helped to distance it from the inauthentic, promotional language of other non-slacker-oriented websites.

The website for *Private Parts* (Betty Thomas, Paramount Pictures, 1997), a biopic about the controversial radio personality Howard Stern, used a content labelling system to advertise its mature content. The use of a bright red disclaimer on the site's landing page, which carried an adult advertising warning and a confirmation link (which permitted access to the site), demonstrated that the producers wished to be seen to take web monitoring as seriously as any parent and understood that minors often surfed the internet without a guardian. It also provided download links to parent control software sites, such as Surf Watch, Net Nanny and Safe Surf, and asked net-surfers to use the web responsibly. However, the nature of the appeal (which included a compliance statement immediately before the confirmation link) served to reassure Stern fan audiences that his controversial message was subversive even for the internet. Moreover, a powerful advertising appeal was interwoven into the warning. It offered visitors access to "uncensored, unmonitored audience input," live chat, adult imagery, and it even suggested that "Howard might come to the site (and, as you know, he's liable to say anything)."

Added Value: Games

Games had a significant impact on the composition of movie websites in the Dial-Up era. Videogames were an alternative form of advertising in the marketing programme but the studios were not unfamiliar with their appeal. In addition, games were extremely popular with the development companies that designed their websites.

Shockwave played a supportive role in movie promotion: the small puzzle animation included on the *Jerry Maguire* homepage—which connected the film's themes of love to the image of a snow-peaked mountain in Switzerland, itself hotlinked to the official Sweepstakes competition—served the studio's purposes satisfactorily. Developments in the

Shockwave Director and Shockwave Flash authoring tools between 1996 and 1997 enabled

content producers to devise and further refine animated games (moving it away from, for

instance, the generically familiar 2D arcade game, evidenced on the *Die Hard* (John

McTiernan et al., Twentieth Century-Fox, 1988/1990/1995) website), hi-fidelity user

interfaces, and other interactive media.

The website for *The Fifth Element* included a number of games. The *VRML Taxi Pursuit*

game, purchased from Hollyworlds Inc., for $12,000, was an attractive feature for young

visitors who wanted to explore Besson's inhabitable future cityscape (barely glimpsed in the

website's small photo gallery) and hoped the game emulated his vision appropriately. The

download was small by today's standards (400 kilobytes in size), but users with a 28.8

modem connection endured a six minute wait before they could play (McCormack, 1998).

Shockwave add-ons for the *Alien Resurrection* website included a wireframe model of the

space-tug USS Nostromo from *Alien* (Ridley Scott, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1979, US/UK),

a 3D game to kill aliens and incinerate eggs, and an Extraction quiz game which depicted an

alien chestburster growing to full maturity inside the quiz contestant's body.

Twentieth Century-Fox introduced novelty games on two websites created for *There's*

Something About Mary (Bobby and Peter Farrelly, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1998). FMA, an

interactive company which specialised in CD-ROM optimisation and interactive press kits,

developed, designed and programmed the Clean Pipes website using a range of standardised

materials. This site featured interview clips which were used by the theatrical marketing

department in the publicity campaign. This deprived the site's designers of any claim to

exclusivity over materials, but unlike later Dial-Up era websites, which were used for DVD

branding, the repetition online of interview clips used already offline did little to inspire fan

interest in the film's actual production backstory or in the camaraderie that clearly existed amongst cast and crew. In the absence of such extras the theatrical website for *There's Something About Mary* provided only a small sense of the film's "deliriously funny style" (Maslin, 1998). Hyperlinks, however, contained in the character profiles section played on the expectations of users by sending those interested enough to follow the links to such bogus sites as Survivors Of Stalking (SOS) and The Masturbation Index.

An alternative website, titled About Mary and created by The Big Gun Project, was far less discreet about its address. The landing page included a banner advertisement promoting FMA's Clean Pipes site, an animated title, graphics of Cameron Diaz's Mary and her injured Border Terrier in full body cast, and seven multicoloured sub-menu links with options to "PLAY A GAME!!!" or "GET YOUR MARY GOODS HERE!!!" The hyperbolic language used on the site, rather than encapsulating the directors' subversive attitude to the conventions of mainstream comedy, reflected an appropriately street wise sense of humour which appealed primarily to college students. Clicking on the Vote For Your Favourite Prom Nightmare contest led users to a page containing readers' embarrassing stories about personal mishaps on prom night. In keeping with the tone of the site readers could vote on which story they thought was the most humiliating.

Added Value: Gaming

The problems of bandwidth and computer processing power moved the marketing emphasis beyond the conventional rhetoric of trailers and print ads to a more appropriate alliance of narrative and subjective immersion. VRML, a practical solution to constructing virtual reality environments for the web, sharpened an emerging trend toward participatory websites in ways that moved them beyond the dramatic action implicit in trailermaking to an

almost mundane and totalising immersion in the reduced narrative, now fragmented and embedded within cyberspace. In its infancy, the strategy was exclusively niche-based. As Mark Tapio Kines, the lead designer on several major blockbuster websites in the Dial-Up era, explained to me about early production for Universal Pictures:

> The average internet user did not have the dial-up speed that Universal executives did, but the general idea, from the top brass down to production staff, was that we wouldn't sacrifice the quality of our work for all the people with 28K (or even 14K) modems but instead appeal to those early adopters who had faster internet connections, as they were more likely to browse a website for the kinds of movies (sci-fi, hi tech) we were promoting (Kines, 2009).

"VRML," the Virtual Reality Modelling Language technology created in 1994, is a file format that can be received and managed in the internet programming language, Java. It is employed to create virtual multi-user worlds for internetworking, using primitive 3D objects that bear little relation to the films. The *Star Trek: First Contact* website had two access points on its splash-page: a frames option ("graphics") for "hi-tech web browsers," and no-frames ("text only"). The no-frames section includes generically familiar content ("movie," "filmmakers" and "principal cast" information, visuals and individual character dossiers). In the frames section, however, the web experience is more involving, the most prominent change the 3-D modelling which permits users to move throughout the film's Starship Enterprise. Two key electronic environments contributed to this experience: the virtual reality Starship included a flight simulation component which was dependent on geometric shapes, statistical data and iconographic design; and a 3D interactive game. Paramount

optioned Shout Interactive to produce the game (the first commercial interactive 3D web game, called "The Borg Simulator") which it included in the frames section, and which again moved users through the Starship's hallways[4] (McNary, 1996; Anschutz, 1997; Kantrowitz, 1997).

The adoption of virtual reality technologies, clearly oriented towards the more sophisticated gaming community (which was already enjoying *Star Trek* games on Windows, MS-DOS and Macintosh platforms), should be seen within the context of the poor exhibition capacity of the web. In visual terms, the site reproduced the simple generic iconography of the USS Enterprise's colour coded interfaces and computer screen layout. This economical connection with the film endowed the site with a strong unifying diegesis, giving users the impression that they occupied a communal space on the real spaceship. Users were encouraged to view all film-related material contained on the site as diegetic elements in themselves. The inclusion of 12 pages of Starfleet instructions, for example, which detailed the most effective ways of navigating a Starship through space, brings this into sharp relief. *Trek* fans progressed through a comprehensive training manual in order to reach a flight simulator. The information contained in the manual was critical to their success later in the simulator, for the procedure involved logging co-ordinates of longitude and latitude into a computer which the user was asked to calculate beforehand using a system explained in the manual. In addition, the flight simulator itself was an action-less game that seemed to ascribe to the average *Trek* devotee a perhaps questionable desire to learn the protocols of routinised spaceflight—indeed the process required users to repeat mundane training procedures extensively until they could be performed without fault. Here, again, a key

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[4] Five companies created the site: design company, BoxTop Interactive; content producer, Light Intertainment; host company, WorldSite Networks; Hollyworlds Inc.; and development house, Skunk New Media.

aspect of the fictional world was reconfigured for the extra-diegetic space of the website, but with the key distinction that it was strengthened by its own unique diegesis (that is, the website as spaceship).

The aim with this website was to strengthen and support fan loyalties to the franchise, thereby increasing the degree to which *Star Trek* fan groups related word-of-mouth about the brand and explored the online *Trek* catalogue for merchandise. It represented a concerted effort to build a creative environment that corresponded with, and was dependent for success on, the non-directed, exploratory search mode of experiential navigation (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). The VRML components of the site—which recreated the spaceship's key communal locations, such as the Observation Lounge and Holodeck, in 2D and 3D modes— masked apparent disparities between it and the film. When married to the scrolling community chat feature, which enabled live chat between *Trek* fans gathering in "real time" at every location, the micro-sized VRML windows helped to break down contradictions, creating a sense that Trekkies were members of the crew and not spectators searching a paratext for new meanings. The sophisticated terms of this address extended to the "true" paratexts contained on the site hierarchy. A "RED ALERT" game, for example, rigidly determined the levels of knowledge that were considered appropriate for participation. The first question read "The father of Earth's warp drive, Zefrem Cochran, disappeared near Vulcan; Gamma Canaris N; or Alpha Centauri."

The site received 5.7 million hits in one day. This made the website the most popular movie site at its peak in internet history, demonstrating to Paramount executives the crucial significance of using non-subscription-based "public" models to capture the target audience

of loyal *Trek* fans and science-fiction enthusiasts. Its success also alerted the other studios to the publicity opportunities of these technologies, who stepped up their activities accordingly.

First Contact's popularity, affirmed by positive feedback the studio received via its two Starfleet Surveys (a link to which was included on the splash-page for all users accessing the site), encouraged Paramount Pictures to consider a VRML site for its next major release, *Hard Rain* (Mikael Salomon, Paramount Pictures, 1998, US/UK/Denmark/France/Japan/Germany/New Zealand). For their part, companies involved in the production of VRML products lobbied for eminently desirable Hollywood brands as a means to market their offerings to a core youth market of loyal and potential gamers. Virtual reality technologies, however, were of little use to mainstream films with identifiable brand names and stars but no science-fiction elements. *First Contact* was significant for demonstrating the potential of a virtual reality technology in providing added value to participatory metanarratives—that is, the extension of a film's textual world into the immersive realm of cyberspace. However, the technology was not indispensable. It was the emergence of rich media that intensified the development of sites such as *Star Trek: First Contact* and which influenced the creative direction of the websites of the Dial-Up era until the banner year of 1999.

Internet milestones

Two interactive web campaigns bring together many of the promotional strategies discussed in the Dial-Up era. The *Godzilla* website used hard-to-resist incentives and sophisticated "event"-building techniques to elicit usage information from its audience of teens and young adults. And *The Blair Witch Project* website popularised conservative marketing strategies that enabled marketers to manipulate the subjective positions of site visitors. Both

campaigns gave their marketers unprecedented power to attract a customer base and to begin experimentations with one-to-one relationships; and both websites took advantage of the web and particularly its audiences to configure their respective narratives in a variety of digital media, ranging from massively multiplayer games and VRML chat rooms, to historical timelines and archival journal entries.

Godzilla

The lack of agreement among studio marketers in digital entertainment divisions and senior marketing executives—as to the precise value of creating a far more interrogative computer mediated environment—created an ambiguous (perhaps, as we will see shortly, precarious) situation. The recent Paramount and Fox disputes over fan writings, together with the successful suppression of some fan fiction websites, added to this confusion, heightening studio and filmmaker uncertainties about the connections being made in their names between film media and virtual communities (Rose, 2000). This context was significant in situating Godzilla.com as a community aggregation website, intended to centralise and unify the globe's *Godzilla* fans and enthusiasts, or "G-fans."

I wish to frame the discussion bearing two related concerns in mind. Firstly, the enthusiasm of Dean Devlin, who was often seen as a spokesperson for Centropolis Entertainment (the firm co-founded by Roland Emmerich) and for whom the web remained an invaluable brand management tool after his successes with *Stargate* in 1994 and *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1996) in 1996. Indeed, Sony's industrial relationship with the Emmerich and Devlin partnership, and many of the cross-promotional strategies that were accepted for the film (this includes interactive marketing measures), were secured based on the commercial returns of Devlin and Emmerich's multiplatform event picture

Independence Day (Grover, 1998). Secondly, the interpersonal rivalries which underpinned the production of Centropolis films and other multiplatform projects which included *Armageddon* (Buena Vista Pictures, 1998), *The X-Files* (Rob Bowman, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1998) and *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (George Lucas, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1999) (Fierman, 1998). Creating a compelling online customer experience for the biggest film of the year became a priority in this context.[5] This discussion therefore regards the official website for *Godzilla* as a necessary and critical component of its commercial branding, which helped to sustain an impression of brand superiority above all other tent-pole productions for the year.

Godzilla.com is at once a commentary on and extension of the sophisticated measures and techniques which marketers, including those at Centropolis Interactive, have used to leverage audiences on past campaigns. One of the majors' key concerns has been the development of a commercial practice, carefully balanced between two states, which allowed for marketers to target niche-audience constituencies at earlier stages in the awareness programme. The two states were: the clear delineation of a teaser splashpage on the one hand and an ambiguous apparently unrelated text on the other. The *Men In Black* website illustrated this well. Its "deceptive," or "cryptic," online campaign began with a six volume *Men In Black* Magazine, seemingly produced by an amateur hobbyist, but finally unveiled its official purpose "in" the seventh issue. The early awareness phase in this sense thus focused on prolonging the pleasures of anticipation, exciting responses from "knowing" followers and curious neophytes. By contrast, *Godzilla.com* took great care in executing the

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[5] The film's production ($125 million) and promotional ($200 million) expenditures are extraordinary indicators of its commercial prowess; Sony's advertising alone ($50 million) was 2.3 times the 1997 average (Carvell, in Lubbers and Adams, 2004: 55-56).

four "launch" phases of its awareness program, advocating full disclosure from the beginning.

The life cycle of Godzilla.com, from launch (July, 1997) to closure (June, 2003), covered four distinct phases: July 1997, November 1997, February 1998, and May 1998. Each stage revealed more materials and special features. These included a historical database, threaded discussion boards, 2D visual chat rooms, live 3D virtual reality chat environments, a VRML gallery, a fan appreciation wing, unmoderated chat opportunities with crew members, on-set video, sound files, 300 production stills and an e-commerce store. Thus in the aftermath of the populist campaigns executed for several science-fiction films (*Mars Attacks!, Contact*), franchises (*Star Trek: First Contact*), those with franchise potential (*Men In Black, Starship Troopers*) and the existing *Star Wars Special Edition* trilogy, there was the suggestion that the marketers, directed by the filmmakers, were strongly motivated to accumulate as much material as possible. To use Grainge's phrase, the website was a critical component in "a co-ordinated brand attack" (2008: 11).

Its visual style was organised around extractable iconographic elements drawn not from the film, but from the genre of disaster cinema. In web marketing terms specifically, the orthodox black background recalled the perennial presentation styles characteristic of comicbook, thriller and horror titles such as *Batman and Robin* (Joel Schumacher, Warner Bros., 1997, US/UK)*, Eraser* and *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, Paramount Pictures, 1998). The atomic green font used for main text, hyperlinks and sidebars, which reflected the night vision aesthetic of hardware-heavy action films as well as the state-of-the-art technologies of science-fiction films like *Aliens* (James Cameron, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1986) and *Species*, was also an enduring motif. The websites for *Turbulence* (Robert Butler, Metro-

Goldwyn-Mayer, 1997), which was constructed around an airliner cockpit, and *Deep Blue Sea* (Renny Harlin, Warner Bros., 1999, US/Australia,) and *Sphere* (Barry Levinson, Warner Bros., 1998), both of which featured a science laboratory and space terminal, used neon-colours on stark black backgrounds and generic graphics to portray technology as sinister and destructive. This contrasts with the starkly lit white environments which emerged for some blockbuster hits of the Broadband era. Although *AI: Artificial Intelligence* (Steven Spielberg, Warner Bros., 2001) and *Star Trek* (J. J. Abrams, Paramount Pictures, 2009) were family-friendly science-fiction blockbusters, each with different stylistic approaches to *Deep Blue Sea* and *Sphere*, the design teams of these websites were able to break away from the conventions of the Dial-Up era and adopt aesthetic innovations from the advertising industry. The *Godzilla* website, however, was sparse in its use of graphical imagery. Generic images inspired by disaster movies—such as source hazard warnings, logarithmic data panels, radar screens—were repeated incrementally across the site's four phases, culminating in the replacement of the black backdrop in Phase 4 for a full-screen pattern of radar grids, suggesting that visitors to the site could track the elusive monster. Again, these individual graphics were drawn not from the film but from a catalogue of iconographic elements created by the design team or gathered from a stock library. The associations made to Civil Defence paraphernalia suggested a certain "macho" posturing which skewed the website to Hollywood's most coveted audience of active, game-oriented teenage boys and girls.

The striking absence of extravagant video-animations—such as *The Fifth Element's* page transition effects (a Mangalore sprays gunfire at the viewer) or the fundamentally cinematic appeals of the *Starship Troopers* film (the propagandistic mobile infantry interludes)—contrasts with developing norms of artistic reception. This restraint on graphic, cinematic

allusion (to the movie itself) excluded from the interactive environment the very fantasy object that should possibly have existed within it: the creature Godzilla. Restrictions were imposed on the *Godzilla* campaign by Roland Emmerich who endeavoured not to give away the secret of the monster's "look" prematurely. In the first three phases of the website, the monster existed strictly in the filmic world, and so it was only ever fully revealed in the multiplex theatre where it was measured against other fantasy monsters and incarnations from film history. In contrast, the grotesque beasts and magnificent creatures of *Anaconda* (Luis Llosa, Columbia Pictures, 1997, US/Brazil/Peru)*, The Relic*, *Congo* and *Mighty Joe Young* (Ron Underwood, Buena Vista Pictures, 1998) all appeared in their websites, occupying the same computer mediated environment as the consumer. The giant crocodile of *Lake Placid* (Steve Miner, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1999), though diminutive in size on the website, nonetheless surfaced regularly in the water to gobble victims on the menu screen—a game called the "Croc Drop" invited teen users to play as the "mean and hungry crocodile anxious to terrorise a town!" And although it was prized as Universal's most important multiplatform commodity in this period, the Tyrannosaurus Rex from *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* appeared on the corporate website in 1997, promoting both the film in which it appeared and the film company which financed it.

This powerful absence begs the question: What use was a website for *Godzilla* without Godzilla? Further, what use was a movie website without the photographic image? Although the marketing team devised a clever system to encourage a ritualised orientation to the site—a *Godzilla* JPEG, or "G-PEG," photograph was posted everyday for 300 days—these small photographs merely testified to the physical reality of the production, its crew, its actors, and not the creature, which (although obviously computer-generated) many wished to view as a "corporeal being" within the computer mediated environment (Prince, 1996: 273).

These restrictions, imposed on the campaign by the filmmakers but also by the slow modem speeds of the time, dictated the website's creative direction. It, therefore, focused on scope and resources to mask this felt absence: multiple services continued a drip-feed of video, cast and crew chats, sound files (the heavily promoted "roar") and fan appreciation pictures and videos across the site map. Based on an examination of the features available in Phase 4 of the campaign, one can make the following observations:

- As is the case across numerous genre examples from 1996-1998, site content in the final phase is for the most part available to all (55 elements, or 91%). This includes picture gallery showcases, which are freely accessible, as are the movie info and news sections.

- While 23 multimedia items (37%) can be viewed without a browser extension, an additional 32 (51%) are videos and sound files, and each is included on the assumption that motivated users will download the relevant players (hotlinks to Vivo 2.0 and QuickTime 3.0 are generously distributed throughout the site)

- Of these, 7 key features go beyond general moviegoers to the built-in audience of core *Godzilla* fans. Games, chat rooms and the fan network require VRML software in addition to dedicated registration/membership.

These 7 features were all game-oriented and, thus, by their nature social. They were also consistent with the macho posturing evidenced in the marketing style. More importantly, the games were powerful devices, which enabled the marketers to subtly blend the consumer's

instinctive interest in the "look" of the creature and the narrative possibilities of the blockbuster into an evolving, habitual interest in the film's environment. Secondly, economies of technology and scale applied. Again, the campaign's shortcomings (the secrecy policy imposed by the filmmakers which prohibited the use of high impact visuals or any creature imagery), together with the internet connection problems which influenced the web's effectiveness as a delivery system, dictated strategy and creative direction in this regard. The commissioned use of videogames from a variety of companies on the webspace allowed Centropolis to target a key demographic of videogamers with new narratives, each of which was designed to maximise their points of contact with the film. The number of games available on the site overwhelmed the offerings of other corporate franchises. Centropolis turned to multimedia production companies based within California to create these materials. Diablo Productions contributed a combat situation simulator in Phase 2 of the site's development—a VR game which retreads popular subject-matter oriented towards the pleasures of online gaming. The most anticipated feature on the site was *Godzilla Online*, a massively-multiplayer online game created in collaboration with Virginia-based developer Mythic Entertainment (the company later delivered *Independence Day Online* for Centropolis in 2000).

Although other gaming examples were more consistent with the goals of movie marketing—the unsophisticated adventures of family films such as *Mighty Joe Young* and *George of the Jungle*, designed to entice children back online—the alignment of game content with film-world context strongly heightened the sense of one's immersion in that world. As the gaming section of the website (which featured two masked soldiers wielding firearms) made clear:

From Madison Square Garden to the depths of the New York City subways, from midtown Manhattan to the Fulton StreetFish Market, GODZILLA ONLINE is a massive, action-packed adventure—ever changing, always enthralling, and forever challenging.

The promotional materials discussed were designed to establish a ritualised, experiential engagement with the film universe—engagement, that is, largely for the sake of establishing long-term consumer loyalties. Value was, hence, derived from the faith and trust that the filmmakers tried to inspire and instil in audiences at the earliest stages of the marketing plan. Here, then, the "intrinsically motivated flow state" mixed with the consumer's subjective passion for or passive interest in the potentiality of blockbuster cinema and its "(infinite) magnitude" (McGowan, 2007: 83). The site, then, was less a press kit and more a hermetic world held together by "the utopian consciousness that stirs in the hearts of moviegoers" (Kernan, 2004: 210). Both *Godzilla Online* and the Aftermath/Destruction VRML chat spaces represented the successful alignment of content and context, maintaining strong continuities with the filmic narrative and rarely deviating from the referent (at least not to the point of re-conceiving the film). The fundamental role of the consumer in this process, Elsaesser says, is "to be prepared to pay … for the possibility that a transubstantiation of experience into commodity might take place" (in Lewis, 2001: 16). If film indeed commodifies the experience and event of filmgoing (or at worst, only sells the possibility of this transubstantiation), then film websites potentially commodify neither film, nor event, but the anticipation of the event. That is to say, the anticipation that arises when the Elsaesserian possibility of "transubstantiation" is consciously and strategically deferred by the film producers, set further away in time. In the multiple virtual communities of the *Godzilla* webspace, prospective filmgoers and dedicated fans engaged in the real business of

connecting with other filmgoers and gamers in rational ways—about films, games and related subjects. Their enjoyment of the earliest Phase 1 through 3 (pre-release) webspaces, and of course the decisions of some to subscribe to the Federal Network members area, renders visible their faith in a "future potentiality"—the promise of the commodified experience awaiting them across time (2004: 211).

Having investigated the marketing approach and its key downloads, I wish now to consider the implications and consequences of incorporating an open forum community feature (the chat room) on a blockbuster website. Some of the key problems besetting community-based film promotions on the web are: public criticism, argument, personal insults, and ridicule. Weger and Aakhus (2003) found that the practical constraints of the chat room environment release participants from the ordinary conventions of social interaction and inhibit critical discussion. Yet, they conclude that, in such environments, users adapt to an alternative model of argumentative dialogue, in which discussion is often reducible to wit-testing. The degree to which any critical discussion dialogue in a movie chat room helps to shape the prospective ticketbuyer's expectations for a film is, hence, an interesting one.

The purpose of the *Godzilla* 2D Palace, 3D VRML and G-Board chat areas was to bring the base community inside the membership area where word-of-mouth was monitored, and its capacity to influence casual filmgoers significantly reduced. This benefited the domain holders because increased site traffic on a ritualistic basis improved the domain's ranking (and hence its performance on a search engine). However, in this late-nineties chat "utopia," collecting fan groups into a single domain did not insure against brand dissolution: core fans can just as easily turn against a film when commenting on the brand site, and threaten to dissolve the customer relationships of others. It was in the filmmakers' best interest,

therefore, that moderators tried to control negative criticism, and severely curtail inflammatory remarks.

Sony's decision to permanently close the G-Boards within one month of the film's release—subsequent to Dean Devlin's well publicised misconduct on the forum (Hein, 1998; Orwall, 1998; Ryfle, 1999: 345)—caused the filmmaking team, and arguably Sony, tremendous embarrassment. Quite clearly, those members who saw the film and found it uninteresting or unworthy felt within their rights to return to the G-chat areas in order to voice their concerns (Weger and Aakhus (2003) use the term, "light-side commitments"). Devlin felt equally justified in defending his work, however, and the discussion devolved into quarrelling and insult ("dark-side commitments"). My point here is that the macho posturing of the marketing campaign was finally instrumental in shaping the venue for this antagonism. References in Karlin (1999) and Kendzior (2000) to ambition, competition and hubris, support the idea—exemplified in the splashpage disclaimer that this is "Another Super-Duper site from Centropolis Interactive"—that the first premise of the site was to overpower the competition (*Godzilla.com* was distinguished from other science-fiction through its branding as the "world headquarters" of its title character); the second premise, was to "build the ultimate *Godzilla* site" (referenced in Kushner, 1998), a premise which it appeared was directed at pre-existing fan websites. Size, advertising expenditure and the strength of fan following, therefore, became criterions of value. In this context, the trend towards a macho posturing in the site's militaristic sphere of "action" reflected a distinct competitive drive in the campaign's marketing to saturate the marketplace.

Devlin's reaction, in some ways, precipitated a defensive move across the industry towards more tailored viral marketing, and certainly more respectful, closer co-ordination with fan

websites. The account of New Line Cinema's marketing campaign for *The Fellowship of the Ring* in Mohammed et al., (2003) made several allusions to the web as a potential "liability." By contrast, *The Fellowship* campaign was seen as a real breakthrough in firm-to-community relations (cf. Murray, 2004).

The Blair Witch Project

Until one studio says that there was a web site that helped push their film, no one's going to stick their neck out to devote advertising budgets online.

Ira Rubenstein, Columbia Tri-Star

Interactive Director of Marketing (1999 cited in Graser, 1999a)

I underscore Ira Rubenstein's remark here, issued at the *Variety* annual Interactive Marketing Summit four months before the theatrical release of the independently produced *The Blair Witch Project*, for two reasons: for what it revealed about the motivations of major players like Sony/Columbia in the industry, and for what it inferred about the benefits of national and public recognition.

After one week on release, the *Blair Witch* was roundly referred to, with some variation, as "the first wide-release film primarily marketed on the internet" (Stroud, 1999b). Amy Doan (2000) has stated that Artisan Digital Media (ADM, the company's interactive wing) had a "reputation" for being "the first company to understand the relationship between the web address and the multiplex seat"—a view which Artisan propagated: "we know how to use the internet to build unprecedented interest around unreleased movies, and people recognise that" (Van Dyk, 2000 cited in Doan, 2000). Where entertainment news outlets attributed the

Blair Witch's success to the impact of its inventive story, the company bolstered its position in the Hollywood hierarchy and publicised its role as an innovator (Doan, 2000; Goldsmith, 2000). In Nicolas van Dyk's words (president of ADM): "other movie companies will expect us to continue to raise the bar" (cited in Doan, 2000). It is in this context—Artisan's selling of its own business role in the thriving success of the *Blair Witch*—that the website "phenomenon" appears to have made a positive influence on the major studios.

The development of the online campaign is well known. In June 1998, filmmakers Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez created a subdomain for the film on their production company website *Haxan.com*. The site employed a more conventional tone of address than the updated Artisan version. Myrick and Sánchez seeded provocative comments and information on the website's message boards and encouraged interested users to join the Haxan News mailing list (subscribers received periodic news updates about the *Blair Witch*). Whereas the concept of plausible authenticity was fundamental to the Artisan site, the Haxan subdomain and forum were presented as accommodating community spaces, wherein fans rallied support for the filmmakers' impending trip to Sundance and discussed other films on the message boards. This included chat about *The Last Broadcast* (Stefan Avalos and Lance Weiler, Wavelength Releasing, 1999), which was viewed as *The Blair Witch's* clearest market rival at the time. Indeed, the "real" *Blair Witch* crew (the film's producers, production designer, and art director) themselves featured on the site. Perhaps the most notable difference between the two websites, then, was the involvement of the Blair Witch early adopters (see Chapter One). The *Blair Witch* early adopters were determined to see the film succeed in the commercial marketplace and its makers progress in the industry. They seemed unaffected by the folkloric "mythology" created for the film, even before the original concept was adjusted and professionally integrated by Artisan. The website instead

turned on a mutual affinity for American indie film, which reflected the general tone of the website beyond its *Blair Witch* section.

Artisan acquired the film for $1.1 million at the Sundance Film Festival and spent approximately $15,000 reconfiguring the site's original hook which the marketers felt needed reinforcement. The creation of the official *The Blair Witch* site at *www.blairwitch.com* substituted for the intimate, person-to-person context of the Haxan version. Some resemblance to this version was maintained, but the industrial origins of the film were deliberately obscured. The "real" *Blair Witch* crew were no longer included or credited, and the legend was made strikingly clear in bold, marketable terms. Thus, in the context of a computer mediated environment in which mythology and background were privileged—over and above, as J.P. Telotte (2001) suggests, the film's "status as a product of the entertainment industry"—there was the suggestion of a powerful new dimension, a "found-footage" realism, in the idea of *The Blair Witch* site itself (35).

The website garnered 75 million visits during the week of the film's release on July 16 1999. According to Nielsen NetRatings for the week ending August 1 (when the film widened to 1,000 screens from 27), it was the 45th most used site on the web. Its unique audience reached 647,997, with 10.4 million page views and an average viewing session of 16 minutes and 8 seconds. The Online Film Critics Society voted it "Best Official Website For a Film 1999."

Cross-over marketing strategies were common practice in the mid-nineties for major independents like Miramax Films (Neale and Smith, 1998: 81.) As Telotte observed, Artisan pursued ambitious small budget acquisitions like *The Limey* (Steven Soderbergh, Artisan

Entertainment, 1999) and *Pi* (Darren Aronofsky, Artisan Entertainment, 1998), and marketed them intensively. In the case of *The Blair Witch*, its scrupulous saturation campaign echoed some of the early marketing strategies implemented by Miramax and New Line in the late 1980s: young interns were dispatched on college campuses to spread word-of-mouth, to distribute free "Missing" posters and wooden stick-figures, and promote special preview screenings.

Its importance as a promotional tool, though inappropriately "legendary" now in the eyes of some, cannot be overstated. Artisan emboldened the presence of *The Blair Witch Project* on the internet by realistically situating it in the marketplace as a horror-thriller with a controversial edge: this film—with factual documents published online, with a privileged mythology not so obviously divorced from reality, with even missing persons reports filed with the local sheriff—could indeed be genuine. From the initial launch of the *Blair Witch* site in 1998 to the successful change of ownership in 1999, web surfers and prospective cinemagoers visiting out of curiosity were encouraged to make sense of the showcased material in both "real world" and cinematic contexts. Electronic pages like the "Discovered Footage" section contained within the "Legacy" menu tried to immerse site visitors in the day-to-day normality of Burkittsville life by manipulating the codes of documentary realism: this single multimedia downloads page provided context for the story (local anthropology students happening upon HI8 tapes belonging to the missing filmmakers), illuminated other dimensions of the ongoing investigation (the site's operators were, the filmmakers would have us believe, co-operating with the Frederick County Sheriffs office) and satisfied the generic need for supplying paratexts in the form of trailers for our edification.

It was in this latter category that the cinematic and the promotional began to complement documentary and narrative realism. Success in this area was achieved by modifying a visitor's subjective position from an inquisitive spectator—with little or no interest in, for instance, the activities of the University of Maryland anthropology class—to a cyberspace investigator moving freely "within that realm, exploring, gathering background on the region, pursuing the public debate and looking over accumulated evidence" (Telotte, 2001: 36). Indeed, Telotte, in his analysis of the online marketing of the movie, is right in saying it is the film that actually "offers some variation on the thrills of its web site." Thus, much of the background on the site was sought out and interpreted, made sense of for the viewer, by the protagonist Heather in the film's contextual reality (rather than by the site's fictional Maryland-based organisers, who were presumably objective in their selection of materials).

However, if we are to pay lip-service to those who are sceptical within the industry—who say, to be precise, that the "bulk of *Blair Witch's* 56 million visitors," according to one anonymous studio executive (Variety, 2000b), "came after people saw the movie"—then the question of timing and involvement is crucial. The website's popularity elevated the film's national profile, and in so doing amplified it and its *zeitgeist*-tapping web strategy to the level of international news event. In terms of film marketing practices, the degree of influence the mini-major studio held over the film's placement within the marketplace was clearly strengthened. It must follow, as the studio executive suggested, that the site was used by the vast majority to make sense of the extraordinary, i.e., that which rattled the senses of millions seated in the darkness of the theatre. This does not invert, necessarily, Telotte's idea of finding "something more in the film itself," but it reflects the challenge of understanding audience measurement—a task which was made no easier by the suggestion that consumers who discovered the *Blair Witch* through press coverage treated the site and film as low-

involvement (such as TV), rather than high-involvement, products (Telotte: 36; Variety, 2000b; Wallace, 1999).

The internet, in eliciting a new way of perceiving and investigating American cinematic horror, specifically by increasing the plausibility of a highly plausible horror film, thus fostered the appropriate response to the "repressed or hidden reality" that underlies *The Blair Witch Project* as pseudodocumentary: the "What if it were true?" response of the recipient, which drove the impulse to "act upon" a "mistaken conviction" (Telotte, 2001: 35; Schreier, 2004: 306). *The Blair Witch* subverted—eclipsing by offering sensation, subverting through trickery—the studio norm for websites not because it must as an independent film, but because it could as a movie situated "on the borderline between fact and fiction" (Schreier, 2004: 306).

Viral marketing

The shift from a film that released a trailer incidentally to a film that used trailers to generate newsworthy events was made in 1997 with *Godzilla,* nearly a year prior to its much-hyped release. Centropolis Interactive, which posted the preview trailer to the official site several hours before it screened in theatres—and then subsequently withdrew it to engineer want-to-see interest—based its strategy on the premise that, in order to "make the trailer itself an event," traditional advertising models had to be broken to capture the mass market (Precious, 1997). In this case, the trailer model transferred successfully to the medium without much need for reconstruction.

Economies of technology and scale inevitably applied. It should be noted that during this period the studios and service providers used market leader RealNetworks and Microsoft

streaming software to stream film trailers online, and that Apple Computer's QuickTime, which had been framed as the most popular multimedia playback device of 1998, planned to introduce its next-generation player, 4.0, with the utmost impact (Guglielmo, 1999). The film studios had to decide, therefore, how best to use these technologies for branding. Streaming video, which was used on the sites for *Men In Black*, *US Marshals* (Stuart Baird, Warner Bros., 1998) and *The Postman*, enabled studio websites to keep pace with broader developments in the advertising industry itself, but typically resulted in poor quality audiovisual playback; whilst traditional playback, the more reliable option for the majority of video-oriented websites including *Fallen* (Gregory Hoblit, Warner Bros., 1998), *Sphere* and *The Relic*, was time consuming because it required the data to be fully downloaded before final playback.

Apple became the leader in the market of digital trailer exhibition through strategic and aggressive efforts to brand QuickTime as a sign of quality. This has been achieved by allying the global strengths of the brand—high-quality QuickTime delivery over the web— with high-engagement content, in the form of the world's most eagerly anticipated blockbusters. By 1999, QuickTime's Movie Trailers Theatre (located in a subdomain of the corporate Apple site under the brand logo, "Think different") featured numerous movie trailers from each of the following companies: Fox, Paramount, Columbia, Universal, Disney and Warner Bros., and from MGM/UA, DreamWorks, Miramax, New Line and October Films. In this event, showcasing online trailers was not new. However, Lucasfilm's adoption of Apple software for the striking trailer for *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* set the precedent for subsequent blockbuster and event movies, via the creation of its own high impact "event" page at *http://www.apple.com/quicktime/trailers/fox/episode-i/*. This was used by both Lucasfilm and Apple to emphasise the "uniqueness" and meaning of

the union, and carried key art from the film, a brief synopsis and links to the website. On the basis of data collected from web servers, Apple's estimate for download requests within the first 24 hours was close to 1 million (Borland 1999). After two months, the figure had risen to 10 million, and approximately 1 million users had downloaded the newly released QuickTime 4.0 to access the trailer using its live-streaming feature. This success initially supported the proposal that movie websites would benefit as community focal, or aggregation, points for their fans if they were appropriately cross-promoted. This encouraged some marketers to promote the film's trailer as a key attraction in its own right. In the most widely publicised applications of event trailer marketing, such as *The Phantom Menace*, press features emerged immediately (see CNN's, "Star Wars Trailer a Threat To Your Network?" McNamara, 1999) and consumers were driven to official, co-branded or community chat rooms in order to share their personal responses, to present argument and analyse uploaded trailer screenshots. Using these third-party delivery systems, the majors realised that the successes originally achieved with the websites of 1996 and 1997 could be reproduced again "in the wild" with trailer opportunities and other media (Paddison, 2009).

The shift in emphasis which occurred with *Godzilla,* marking the online trailer as a viral marketing event to be promoted in its own right, had further implications for the internet as a growth area for trailer distribution. QuickTime became an increasingly important software source for the major studios, for their contract website developers, and for audiences particularly, who repeatedly called for better quality video playback. Apple Computer, which had valuable contracts with the majors that it could not afford to lose to its competitor RealNetworks, focused on expanding QuickTime's capability as a full-screen player for dial-up modem speeds to guarantee the survival of its trailer showcase. New Line Cinema experimented with this system of distribution, and appears to have used the economic and

cultural promise of its *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy to encourage competition between the two rivals.

Two cases are worth highlighting: the release of the preview footage in 2000, and the teaser trailer in 2001. New Line, indeed Paddison, clearly valued these events because they offered the opportunity to "instil confidence for the product among the most important and critical fan base" (Mohammed et al, 2003: 580). Apple partnered with New Line and Akamai Technologies for the highly anticipated first preview of Peter Jackson's trilogy on 7 April 2000. The footage was assembled for the QuickTime format, however, it was transmitted using Akamai's FreeFlowSM streaming service to ensure sound reliability (although the actual download did not stream for the recipient) (Akamai, 2002). New Line organised a global support campaign to promote the event, which included skilfully linking up with fansite webmasters to synchronise with the global countdown. The unprecedented success of this preview footage—1.7 million downloads within 24 hours; 6.6 million within week one; 10 million within 21 days—consolidated Apple's position as the most popular destination on the web for downloadable and streamed movie trailers. Nielsen//NetRatings confirmed this officially in the following month (Apple Press, 2000). New Line used its success—which was reported across *The New York Times, Newsweek, The Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times* and *CNN*—as insurance to buttress the investments of its third-party offline partnerships. However, this success is often confused by scholars in film studies with the public-relations failure of the first teaser trailer which was posted online on 22 January 2001 (ten days after its offline debut), and which was not launched with QuickTime, but rather RealNetworks' Real Player. Some scholars, intending to reference the preview footage released in April 2000, note mistakenly that the "first theatrical trailer [released] on 7 April 2001" reached the milestone of 1.7 million hits within 24 hours (Thompson, 2007a: 137).

This confusion is perpetuated by the entertainment media, particularly Time Warner publications such as *Entertainment Weekly* and AOL properties like *ICQ*, which treats the success of the *LOTR* preview as the news item which best reflects retrospectively the film franchise's cultural impact.

It seems that what was being suppressed was a certain advocacy function that occurred in film trailer consumption but which worked in Apple's favour in this case (and hence against RealNetworks and temporarily New Line). When the first teaser trailer was made available in Real format through the exclusive *The Lord of the Rings* RealChannel it played poorly in fan communities, eliciting complaints from some about substandard video quality, an issue that never seemed to be particularly contested with regard to QuickTime. Real announced that the trailer was successful, but no data has since been released. Indeed, the questions raised about New Line's "noble" commitments to *LOTR* fans were very quickly mitigated by the creation of the Apple-Trailers-*Fellowship of the Ring* page and the provision of the QuickTime version in 10 different sizes and two QuickTime formats. Still, whether the event trailer campaign was viewed historically as a success in brand messaging or blunder in goodwill viral marketing, the advertising team, including the entertainment press, have played a "strategic gatekeeping role" in helping to blur the divide between two separate promotional events, one a resounding, global success that it was keen to publicise, the other a profound misjudgement (Miller et al., 2005: 268). In such circumstances we as film scholars sometimes overlook this and other such distinctions.

The potential pitfalls of co-opting alternative (i.e., non-film specific) online groups for participation in the marketing process become apparent when we consider the campaigns of two high-profile science-fiction movies released in 2001. The online game created for 20th

Century-Fox's *Planet of the Apes* (Tim Burton, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2001) targeted a

niche audience of geocache hobbyists. The government's decision to discontinue Selective

Availability (SA) in May 2000—a military protocol which enabled the intentional

degradation, or interference, of the global positioning system (GPS) for reasons of national

security—partially satisfied its commitments to integrating GPS into "peaceful civil,

commercial applications worldwide" by 2006 (Press, 2000). Geocaching, a trend which

became mainstream in 2001, combines the conventional "treasure hunt" with mobile

adventure activities: it is a one-to-many process whereby an individual submits the GPS co-

ordinates of a hidden cache of goods to an online community of geocache hobbyists, and

interested participants locate this cache using GPS tracking units.

Fox's decision to bring geocaching into its marketing strategy seems logical, being derived

in part from a film which thematises "advanced" computer technologies and "interstellar"

navigation systems. In addition, geocaching hobbyists are in the slightly older, 25- to 34-

year-old and 35- plus segments, which increases the chances that they could have seen films

or TV shows in the existing canon. But such co-optation shifts the parameters of the

moviegoer-studio relationship in the wrong direction. Project APE, as it was known, ran for

thirteen weeks and generated news stories in *Darkhorizons.com*, *Business Wire* ("Fox

Launches First Movie Promo for Growing Sport of Geocaching," 2001), *bbc.co.uk* ("Hi-

Tech Marketing Goes Ape," 2001) and *The New York Times* ("If Your VCR Still Blinks,

Stick to Hide and Seek" (Genzlinger, 2001). The latter remarked: "'A Fox spokeswoman

said [the campaign] was, to the company's knowledge, the first time geocaching had been

used to promote a movie, although it was used once to promote a horse racing track in

Georgia" (Lyman, 2001a). If such complementary publicity begins with a negative buzz,

then the commercial benefits remain unclear. Of significance is that one scavenger winner of

Project APE—who found a cache containing film props and other items, including videorecording equipment—was a software engineer and geocache hobbyist, with his own geocaching website and evidently little interest in the promoted movie (Delio, 2002). GPS design companies, by contrast, cultivate online relationships with geocache hobbyists because they are an important consumerbase and it serves their interests to involve GPS users in the development of new products with sponsored competitions.

In Fox's co-optation model, then, complementary publicity was generated by the creation of offline participatory exercises which were then experienced and reported on in the local media and national press.

A rather different application of this model which was seemingly of little direct relevance for the studio but which still involved a "depiction" of the film-world that theoretically framed it, The Beast was the most successful example of online nondirected learning in the spring/summer of 2001. The immersive gaming strategies of the campaign are well documented (McGonigal, 2003 and 2006), but less clear is its contribution to film marketing. The comparison with Project APE, is helpful here in that it brings into relief the sort of linkages that traditionally connect a web promotion to the product, i.e., film prizes or merchandise which help to display the brand. There are very few such linkages in the hypermedia world of The Beast, hence, the impulse to challenge its applicability. The entertainment news media (Bacon, 2001; Kornblum, 2001; Landau, 2001; Lazare, 2001; Young, 2001) indulged the perception of a major Hollywood studio, with multiple media and consumer channels at its disposal, pioneering an online initiative with the help of a multinational computer technology firm in Microsoft—to which view several have subscribed (Dobele et al, 2005; Jenkins, 2006a). Some suggest, however, that the

"independence" of the web developers and concept development group from the Warner Bros. film units—in terms of creative input, content development, campaign management—confirms a more complicated relation, in which scenario The Beast was a promotion for forthcoming Microsoft games.

There seems to be agreement that The Beast, as an immersive viral marketing experience, is important, but I believe that its significance as a campaign for film has been overstated. In licensing the *AI: Artificial Intelligence* brand to the world's leading software and internet technologies firm, Microsoft, the objective for Warner Bros. (as the film's US distributor) was to extend the *AI* brand aggressively into adventure gaming.[6] Microsoft contracted the Three Mountain Group to devise an "alternative reality game," ostensibly a promotion to generate, via a complicated murder mystery plot which bore little relation to the referent, complementary publicity for the *AI* brand (Jenkins, 2006a: 126). To link the film to the game brand, Warner Bros. cross-promoted The Beast in key film marketing materials: a film trailer (a bogus credit: "Jeanine Salla, Sentient Machine Therapist") and poster (a telephone number encoded in the text) campaign precipitated all online Beast-related activities, and subsequent TV-spots, which ran later in the campaign, included a cryptic message, "This Is Not A Game," to maintain hype. The studio guaranteed press coverage by circulating promotional posters (bearing the legend, "Evan Chan was murdered. Jeanine is the key") to Harry Knowles' highly influential spoiler site *Ain't it Cool News*, and other entertainment media outlets. In addition, *Time Magazine* and *Entertainment Weekly* gave the campaign high-profile online coverage.

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[6] Six Microsoft games were put into development for Xbox and PC platforms.

Theoretically, alternate reality has two aims: to synchronise a product with a target niche, typically a youth audience; and to exploit film's interactive potential in order to create multiple film-related texts. We can distinguish The Beast from other such "alternate reality" non-game scenarios as the "Free Truman" campaign and *Men in Black* magazine through its positioning as an extra-textual, improvisational entertainment (rather than promotion), with no explicit corporate ownership. The manner in which films are promoted is ultimately heavily influenced by the parent firms and financiers of film studios that make their profits by developing products with powerful marketability (Miller et al, 2005: 266-267). In this instance, "Warner Bros.," "Warner Bros.' *AI: Artificial Intelligence*," and "*www.aimovie.com*" do not feature at all in the game; nor is there a movie website that users refer to in order to make sense of this. These are not requisites for online film promotion, but they are signatures of corporate authorship which facilitate comprehension (a promotion is designed to promote). In this respect, the film's marketing presence cannot be felt inside the alternative reality game experience. We therefore tend to propose linkages between the narrative elements of the game and Steven Spielberg's fictional *AI* film (the "property" that exists in cinemas) based on the discourse that was mobilised around the phenomenon in news media at the time, discourse that was quick to emphasise the expected benefits of such a game. This tends to restrain criticism of the game's improvisational mode (together with one's diffuse motives for engaging the game as pastime) and deepen myths about its positive impact on the film's box-office performance where it was deemed a success (Dobele et al, 2005).[7]

Instead of asking whether such a "sub-dermal" campaign benefited a film studio—by extending the fictionalised reality of a film into our everyday reality, via phone messages

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[7] The film's poor performance resulted in the cancellation of these *A.I.*-brand games.

and fax machines—we might ask about the changing nature of the relationship between consumer and studio (42 Entertainment, 2009). If necessary, we can begin to make arguments for The Beast as an example of transmedia storytelling. But it is more appropriate to ask questions about The Beast's applicability as reconceived narrative to the gaming industry.

The original motivation for viral marketing plans was to cohere fan communities based around a single film brand or title by involving them in the film's pre-release publicity strategies. The highly active Columbia Tri-Star Interactive has been successful in this field, leveraging new technologies on official websites to efficiently target a youthful, mainstream, web-proficient demographic. The specific objectives of the two campaign models discussed here seem to point in this same tactical direction, but the Scavenger subject of the *Planet of the Apes* campaign was addressed as a potential consumer (the commercial benefits of which favoured not the film but the film sponsor), and The Beast network specialist lost sight of the film altogether—the primary object of interest in the word-of-mouth remained the game and not the film. Therefore, an important consideration for marketers, as the Dial-Up era of narrowband internet slowly reached a close, was at what point in the awareness campaign did the applicability of an appeal come into question? This and other issues will be explored in the following chapter.

Conclusion

A major Forrester Research report, "Bigger Hits With Net Marketing" (published in August 2001), made several recommendations for interactive marketers working in motion picture promotion. Its film-specific conclusions might well have been drawn in light of *The Blair Witch's* success. Included is a general proposal to reduce investments in motion picture

websites and to encourage audience involvement with branded media experiences via

collaborative, firm-to-person relationships. It suggested that third-party partnerships with

social networking sites could yield $15 million per film in extra box-office receipts.

Measurement companies agreed. Commenting on the strength of movie trailer distribution,

Jarvis Mak, senior analyst at Nielsen//NetRatings, noted that the basic goals of any studio

with online marketing vehicles should be to "hype a film if people are curious, and then to

draw them in and engage them further" (Mak, 2002). David Mandelbrot, who between 2000

and 2002 would increase his dealings with the majors as Vice President and General

Manager of Entertainment at Yahoo! Inc., also noted that, "exit polls clearly show the

audience is becoming interested in films through online advertising" (Mandelbrot, 2002

cited in Hall, 2002). The studios would welcome this message.

Throughout the chapter, I have outlined the key technical and conceptual areas of concern

for the major studios—including their conservative attempts, largely in response to the

migration of entertainment news and trade publications to the web, to transform web

presence into publicity. As far as investment is concerned, certainly from a business

analyst's perspective, the majors were still noncommittal. The primary measure for this was

the ratio between a film's advertising spend on traditional offline media and its online

expenses. By 2001, a studio spent per film less than 1 percent of its overall marketing

budget on the internet, and this was viewed to be insufficient (Chisholm, 2001; Neuborne,

2002). But not necessarily by studio executives. After a long period of trial and error, fiscal

prudence, and ignorance about new media audiences, the studios had answers to enough of

their questions and enough reliable figures to proceed into the next century with a workable

business model. In its earliest incarnation, this model exemplified the hierarchical design

and database aesthetics of the press kits and CD-ROM packages of the early nineties. By

1996, however, the majors had commenced their commercial exploitation of the web as an ancillary market for home entertainment and related merchandise. By 1999, their websites had become showcase windows tailored more successfully and appropriately to the home-video campaign.

Increasingly, marketers worked on narrative world environments that were designed to retain the interest of their users and to sustain their long-term awareness of film. However, the limits of these immersive worlds became apparent very quickly. The experiential flow benefits of Virtual Reality Modelling Language (VRML), arguably the most distinctive, intriguing and potentially "fun" communications method employed by the majors to unite fans in an interactive forum, were compromised by conceptual shortcomings. It therefore remained highly questionable whether the exploratory worlds and avatar-to-avatar conversation that virtual entertainment firms like ActiveWorlds Inc., laboured to produce—then marketed efficiently to consumers via a major motion picture—adequately supported, amplified and articulated the spectacle of Hollywood cinema's contemporary blockbusters. For example, the unique emphasis on star packaging in *The Thirteenth Floor* (Josef Rusnak, Columbia Pictures, 1999, Germany/US) campaign and on the "contradictory features of stars' simultaneous closeness and inaccessibility"—made manifest by the publicised "presence" of Vincent D'Onofrio and Sarah Michelle Gellar at a virtual premiere, although only in 2D avatar form and reportedly interacting only intermittently with assembled fan "crowds"—exemplified the adjustments that were made at this time to bring VRML more in line with Hollywood marketing (Kernan, 2004: 215; Business Wire, 1999). But VRML was one component, and one problem, in the technological stream. Ultimately, the studios stood to lose significant brand credibility if these, and other problems, could not find a solution and previously interested consumers—unsettled by the website's structural and

technological limitations, the ethical status of the techniques of e-marketing, or a sense of detachment from the marketing message—chose to abandon the project altogether. The following chapter will pursue these and other concerns as the internet—faster, expansive, maturing—developed in rich and intriguing new ways for the broadband generation.

Chapter Three: The Broadband Era 2001 to the present

This chapter argues the case that technological developments, structural changes in the industries, and an increased dependence on high impact imagery have altered aspects of the online marketing programme in the Broadband era. The "story" of online advertising, therefore, moves to a discussion of the central changes shaping the film and internet industries, and to a closer examination of broadband-enabled technological developments. Video technologies, of course, improved the environments of movie websites—allowing for full-screen animated trailer pages and page transitions with carefully layered full-motion video—but more, importantly they gave marketers new tools to reach new audiences, engage their interest and increase their desire to consume more. The research will, therefore, examine the effects of these changes on the Hollywood majors' non-website-based marketing practices. As video advertising grew in popularity the major film companies increased their partnerships with web portals, social networks and news and entertainment publications, and released materials to film-based community sites (in this case the research examines the recent history of Yahoo! Movies). Through this experimentation, the majors were finding the best ways to promote their films to the right people, which in the context of the internet remains those filmgoers who continued to purchase and consume home entertainment on a regular basis. Three main case studies show how the new technologies were used to improve customer retention and their engagement levels with film properties. These are: "The Sith Sense" *Star Wars* promotion designed by fast food company Burger King, New Line Cinema's "Crash This Trailer" application, and an interactive trailer created for the action film *The Bourne Supremacy* (Paul Greengrass, Universal Pictures, 2004, US/Germany).

The research then examines attempts to integrate the additional film-related extras used on movie websites with new forms of display advertising designed to expand the coverage of the theatrical and home-video campaigns. The Expandable banner is used as an intriguing example. These practices increased the visibility of new films, and new DVD releases, in the home, and were used to connect with some niche-audience constituencies who may have been less familiar with the studios' websites or infrequent filmgoers themselves. To better illustrate the effects of the Broadband era's technological/industrial changes, the research turns to a case study of *King Kong* (Peter Jackson, Universal Pictures, 2005, New Zealand/US/Germany) to provide an accurate and detailed overview of the various components used in the online marketing of an event movie blockbuster. Aspects of the campaign established strong continuities with previous film versions, and strengthened consumer loyalties by involving Peter Jackson personally, in order to promote the availability and forthcoming release of DVDs connected with the *King Kong* brand. Finally, the horror movie *Snakes on a Plane* (David R. Ellis, New Line Cinema, 2006) is examined. The initial film idea set into motion a viral marketing campaign which involved community-based internet communications without the benefit of any traditional media influence. The self-developing brand community it spawned needed no help from corporate owners/content producers in creating its own brand, inventing a narrative context and producing promotional materials such as key art, video and blog posts. However, the film's apparent failure at the box-office raises questions about the collective power of the community and its influence upon others in the general public.

The chapter begins with a summary of the AOL-TW merger, which is paradigmatic of the challenges facing the film and internet industries between 2000 and 2002. Firstly, it

demonstrated the crucial importance of broadband compatibility to the successful

commercial expansion of entertainment and communications companies. Secondly, the

advertising opportunities it afforded Warner Bros., New Line Cinema and other studios

across the portal's vast network are representative of broader changes shaping the

advertising industry.

The transition to broadband-internet

The world's biggest internet service provider, America Online merged with the world's

largest communications conglomerate Time Warner on 10 January 2001, forming "AOL

Time-Warner." In cross-promotional marketing terms, this marriage of old and new media

delivered Time Warner programming to millions of online subscribers, in theory giving the

company the competitive web presence it lacked with its Pathfinder portal and other

community-oriented initiatives like ACMEcity. For AOL, the merger of a media and

entertainment conglomerate with a web operation was a form of self-insurance, supporting

the market profile of the company and providing content for new interactive services. Steve

Case, former CEO and Chairman of AOL, said at the time: [consumers] rely on a company

like AOL Time Warner to connect the dots for them" (Case, 2002). This represented

outmoded thinking.

It was hoped that a merger would speed up AOL's plans to add a broadband service for its

paying subscribers in 2001. A successful merger turned on AOL's ability to support its

online dial-up subscription service with advertising revenue, and this became a critical point

as the industry felt the effects of a market slowdown. "If America Online does not migrate

with subscribers to broadband," a *New York Times* article argued in 2000, "the company

could be left behind" (Schiesel, 2000). While the company continued to focus on its existing

customer base—it was the "gateway" to the internet for over 20 million subscribers by January 2000, but on reaching its peak of 26.7 million by September 2002 began to decline rapidly—it was heavily dependent on the growing strength of the dot-com market, which it assumed would continue, to manage its apparently strengthening market position. This came at the risk of deferring what *The New York Times* called "the inevitable transition" (Schiesel, 2000), or the necessary move to broadband.

AOL instead continued selling advertising space on its network to promote new start-up companies, generating $2 billion a year by 2000. As dotcom failures intensified, and start-up companies downscaled their advertising activities, AOL cultivated "unconventional deals," according to the *Washington Post*, with its business partners to sustain its inflated share price with Wall Street analysts in a seriously volatile market (Klein, 2002; Wray and Milmo, 2006). Between the period July 2000 and March 2002, the company generated $5 billion in short-term ad and e-commerce deals (Klein, 2002), but serious questions were already being asked of its subscription service/advertising model. Many long-term contracts were slashed and the company lost $140 million in unrecoverable ad revenue. Consistent with the internet bubble's deflation from March 2000 onwards, the company lost subscribers for the first time in its history after the merger and was troubled both by declines in advertising revenue and an internal power struggle which undermined synergistic efforts by both companies to use the resources of the other. The combined company reported losses of approximately $100 billion for 2002 as a result of the developing negative trend, including debts of $25.8 billion in early 2003. The share price for AOL Time Warner Inc. in July 2002 of $13.11 represented a drop of 72% from the day of merger.

The company stood little chance of fashioning appropriate synergies across divisional units if it did not adapt to broadband technologies. In business terms, it was not enough for a media and communications conglomerate to promote entertainment properties synergistically and in so doing become its own biggest client. AOL Time Warner was hindered by a complicated corporate structure and mismatched divisions. Streamlining the company as a leading force in digital convergence became a matter of upgrading AOL's dial-up subscription base to broadband. This meant moving beyond Time Warner's cable systems and seeking new revenue sharing deals with cable and telecommunications companies—companies like Comcast and Cox Communications—in order to reach customers not already accessing its cable lines (85 percent of the nation's homes). Again, the company failed to understand the changing nature of the web. AOL's purchase of AT&T Corp.'s 27.6 percent stake in Time Warner Entertainment enabled a deal with AT&T's Comcast cable system in 2002 for the delivery of AOL broadband to a potential 10 million homes, but, critically, other cable companies were already negotiating quick deals with rival internet services (Hansell and Lohr, 2001). This failing resulted in a loss of "leverage" for the company "at the broadband bargaining table," according to a 2002 Lehman Brothers report published at the time (Becker, 2002 cited in Kane, 2002). Its failure to effectively overcome this barrier was further hindered by the increased migration of disgruntled subscribers to other providers.

The immediate failure of the merger drew attention to the challenges of rapid growth in the internet landscape. The company's decision to provide free, ad-supported services in 2004 finally indicated an acceptance of the web's new, post- Dial-Up era identity as a mass medium, based on free search, free services and support advertising. The decision was later taken in 2004 to relaunch the AOL portal in a manner that supported the new paradigm,

offering a free service to users in a bid to compete with the market leaders, Yahoo and MSN.

The advantages to this strategy shift will be discussed shortly, but for the purposes of this

section I conclude on this point: the internet market was clearly changing. As early as 2002,

these changes were beginning to influence the ways in which viewers used the internet to

view film-based materials, buy films and research films before going to theatres.

Delay, Growth, and Dominance

These changes were commensurate with steady increases in internet audiences after 2001.

Prior to the merger, 8.9% of online US households were connected to a broadband service,

with the majority (91.1%) using dial-up. 7.12 million Americans subscribed to broadband

with cable modem in 2001; 4.6 million subscribed with DSL; and worldwide subscriptions

had risen to a total of 30 million (Internet News, 2002). By 2002, the number of broadband

users in all online US households had risen to 27.2%, with 72.8% using dial-up.

Questions about the country's "sluggish" deployment and usage of broadband networks

came to the fore in 2001 in light of a critique of the nation's placement in the world

market—comparisons were made with South Korea's expanding broadband infrastructure,

which benefited from fostering competition between domestic service providers, hence

topping the global league table of broadband-wired countries in 2001 (51.7% of total

households). The FCC thought otherwise, concluding in its "Third Report on the

Availability of High Speed and Advanced Telecommunications Capacity" (2002) that

"advanced telecommunications capability is being deployed in a reasonable and timely

manner" (2002: 6). Commentators would attack the FCC for years to come for its definition

of "advanced telecommunications capability" (or rather, services with a high customer-to-

provider and provider-to-customer internet speed). It used the terms "high speed" and

"broadband" for services offering a transmission speed of 200 kilobits per second (kbps) and higher. 4.7% of American households subscribed to such services in January 2001; the figure rose to 7% in January 2002 (FCC, 2002).[8]

Thus, the broader expansion and commercialisation of the web in the early twenty-first century was dependent on "the expansion of broadband capability to the bulk of the population … the ability that is of having material flow as quickly online as signals travel on television" (McChesney, 2000: 16). The federal government noted this in 2001, and in the September of 2002, the US Department of Commerce published its report into the current state of consumer uptake, entitled "Understanding Broadband Demand." It listed four factors limiting broadband growth/demand in the States:

1) the high cost of service/distribution (between $45-55 per month in 2002) prevented many dial-up users from upgrading (72% of those surveyed in a Park Associates Survey for 2001); the report even found, via research produced by ARS research, that broadband providers had increased their charges during the economic downturn.

2) the inconvenience. Complaints about internet service providers and their customer service departments were high among existing narrowband users. Typically, an upgrade would take as long as 24 hours if the technology did not install correctly or

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[8] (The FCC maintained these definitions for five more years, without adjustments for innovations in higher high speed services, or for the faster available broadband services of other countries, like South Korea and Japan, where, it was argued by the FCC and others, it was far easier for telecommunications companies to wire densely populated areas. The typical line speed in America for a digital subscriber line (DSL) by 2004 was approximately 500kbps to 1 megabit (Mbit), while cable companies could offer peak speeds of 3 Mbits. Critics argued that these developments in high speed connections should have been taken into account by the FCC, and adjustments made accordingly to its definition of the national "average" for high-speed broadband capability.)

the customer had little technical support. Negative word of mouth regarding the matter deterred some potential broadband adopters and existing narrowband customers.

3) dwindling consumer confidence. The inconvenience of dealing with poor support services is one indication of a customer's lack of confidence in dealing with technical issues. Another is the fear of losing one's sense of privacy online and in doing becoming susceptible to "identity theft, hackers, fraud artists and viruses" (2002: 18). A Jupiter Media Metrix study published in 2002 indicated that almost 70% of the US consumers surveyed had cited security concerns as a major reason for not adopting broadband. In addition, broadband customers who spent more time online were perceived to be far more vulnerable to unsolicited (SPAM) email and pornographic materials, thus raising critical ethical issues about web technologies.

4) consumer reluctance to embrace technological change, or to understand the potential benefits of broadband. The report places an emphasis in this category on content applications and services, identifying three key service areas which would help to drive consumer demand in the near future: telework, online game-playing, and entertainment-on-demand. The latter growth area was already a contentious issue and a high-risk strategy for content providers; it thus took time to formulate and implement a satisfactory business model for leveraging web technologies. Throughout 2002, media companies pressurised Congress and the Federal Communications Commission for new piracy protections before making any realistic preparations to begin investment in the market (Green, 2002).

To these concerns we should add effective broadband competition. The relation between uptake and demand is critically influenced by healthy competition across broadband networks, and while the trend in the States was towards intensification for the period 2002 to 2004—the aggressive push, that is, endorsed and promoted by the federal government—this increase in the availability of broadband to 90% of Americans by the close of 2002 came at the expense of competition. Two methods of transmission were available: the DSL service available over traditional phone lines, via telecommunications firms like Verizon, BellSouth, SBC and Qwest; and a cable service supplied by cable operators Comcast and Time Warner Cable. The Department of Commerce report notes this with a small degree of caution, adding that other research companies (unnamed in the report) believe that a small percentage of the population (31%) would actually have a competitive choice between either the DSL or cable services by the close of the year (2002: 5). It was hence the belief of some policy makers and certainly many mainstream commentators, such as *The Washington Post* and CNN, that more broadband competition, not necessarily mass deployment, was the best indication of a successful broadband industry. More competition lowers prices, continually pushes up speeds, it drives innovation and offers consumers better services.

By 2002, the number of US online households with a broadband connection was 27.2%. Several third-party measurement companies, including Arbitron, Forrester, comScore and InStat/MDR, reported that broadband users spent between 40 and 67% more hours online per week than those using dial-up. The Nielsen/NetRatings August 2004 report on US Broadband Connections found that "for the first time … broadband connections reached 51 percent of the American online population at-home," with 63 million web users connecting via a broadband service and 61.3 million still reliant on narrowband (Nielsen, 2004). As expected, the highest penetration of broadband surfers came in the 18 to 20 (59%), 2 to 11

(58%), 25 to 24 (55%), and teens and 21 to 24 year olds (53% respectively) age groups, with the lowest penetration of broadband connections amongst seniors aged 65 to 99 years (34%). These statistics matched the major studios' preferences perfectly. Although younger consumers (Generation Y, with an average age of 21) represented one of the lowest spending groups for marketers in 2002 (against Older Boomers, Generation X and Younger Boomers), they spent more of their money on entertainment than any other age group (UW-Extension, 2002). As investors in the internet themselves, with their own online stores and promotional websites, the Hollywood companies were clearly interested in the expansion of the Generation Y audience online.

Display advertising and Yahoo! Movies

Short-term partnerships with entertainment and news sites—such as *E! Online* or *The New York Times,* with whom the studios regularly advertised in order to gain access to young and older social groups—became standard practice in the Broadband era and far more precise in terms of demographic positioning. Between September 2001 and January 2002, the majors, lured by cost efficiencies and rich media-based advertising opportunities on portals such as Yahoo! and the Lycos network, initiated a move towards display advertising in the aftermath of the 2001/2002 recession in advertising. The increased interest in banner advertising resulted in the tactical foregrounding of high impact advertisements which could be multiplied across a range of digital consumer channels. In 2002, the studios paid for a total of 26.4 million banner advertisements, an almost three-fold increase on the 9.4 million advertisements purchased previously. GartnerG2, the research arm of Gartner Inc., reported that studio buys totalled 27,920 internet ads in the first month of 2002. Over ten percent of these buys (2,109) were claimed by a single studio, Columbia, for the late December release of its war movie *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, Columbia Pictures, 2001). Columbia

marketed the film aggressively after its release date was, purportedly, brought forward to capitalise on the simultaneously sombre and patriotic mood of the American public in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks (Keough, 2002).

The viral component of the campaigns for *City by the Sea* (Michael Caton-Jones, Warner Bros., 2002), *Men in Black II* (Barry Sonnenfeld, Columbia Pictures, 2002), *The Tuxedo* (Kevin Donovan, DreamWorks, 2002), *Kung Pow: Enter the Fist* (Steve Oedekerk, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2002, US/Hong Kong), *Swimfan* (John Polson, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2002), *Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, Columbia Pictures, 2002) and the *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, Buena Vista Pictures, 2001) DVD were largely driven by new full-page overlay advertisements, which stirred public interest and distraction in equal measure. These advertisements showed little differentiation in strategic design between theatrical and home-video appeals, indicating that the marketing function of display advertising at this time was largely oriented towards the home entertainment market. A banner such as Fox's *Ice Age* (Chris Wedge and Carlos Saldanha, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2002), for example, which invited children to "BONK" or "SAVE" Scrat, the sabre-toothed squirrel, from a panoply of falling walnuts, helped to define the film's appeal as a broad animated comedy for the family but communicated little information beyond this. The purpose of the advertisement was simply to equate viewers with a new family-friendly brand, one whose appeal was a perfect fit for advertising in the home. The generic space of the advertisement, therefore, was devoted entirely to the branded title treatment, the key image of a cute squirrel fixed against a white background, and the instruction to "BONK!" or "SAVE HIM!"

The renewed significance of display advertising after 2001, manifest in the concerted efforts of the studio films listed above (each of which received a nomination in Eyeblaster's internal awards show which honours creative innovation) had another effect: it compelled the largest online portals to modernise their advertising platforms. In 2002, AOL Time Warner implemented a reconfiguration program for its proprietary advertising platform. This modernisation, which involved upgrading the infrastructure of its text-heavy service, enabled AOL to sell rich media advertising space that now supported Enliven, Eyeblaster, Bluestreak, EyeWonder and Unicast's showcase advertising formats and charge a premium for future banner technologies (Elkin, 2002). In July, Yahoo reinforced its own aggressive sales efforts by cementing long-term partnerships with Eyeblaster, EyeWonder, Point.Roll and Unicast. It hosted a New York conference two months later with over 250 advertising executives in attendance to discuss new branding strategies (Olsen, 2002). This was the first of two major industrywide calibration drives between 2001 and 2006 which strengthened substantially the majors' involvement in high impact display advertising.

In the summer of 2002, Yahoo! Movies became a key entertainment site with which to partner. In May 2001, the global internet services company was struggling to compete in the marketplace with the far stronger search firm Google, finally reporting losses at the close of the year of $93 million. It planned an organised recovery for 2002 with a strong promotional push into search technology, brand advertising and search-related advertising. It began this push under the stewardship of new CEO Terry Semel. Semel had previously occupied the positions of Chairman of the Board and Co-Chief Executive Officer of the Warner Bros. Division of Time Warner Entertainment LP and Warner Music Group from 1994 to 1999. In 2002, he transformed the company's relationship with the Hollywood majors by linking film-related content to advertising on the Yahoo! Movies network (Vogelstein, 2007). He

was joined in April 2002 by Jim Moloshok as Senior Vice President of Media and Entertainment. Moloshok had already successfully run Warner Bros. Online for eleven years (in which capacity he managed the web presence for every company brand, ranging from film to television and retail) and served as Senior Vice President of Warner Bros. marketing and advertising. Moloshok exploited his existing alliances with film community members and struck new advertising deals with the Hollywood studios. In the summer season of 2001, Yahoo! Movies carried promotional pages and ad spots for 5 of the top 10 grossing films, and went on to make a total of 17 deals for the full year. Under Semel and Moloshok's influence, the number rose to 74 movies in 2002 and 131 movies in 2003 (Bond, 2004).

The dissemination of additional promotional materials across the Yahoo! Movies network and other such portals generated strong word-of-mouth which increased the hype surrounding a release. Investigating the effect of "valence" (or, the "persuasive" effects of word-of-mouth on purchase behaviour) in online groups, Liu Yong (2006) examined data collected from the Yahoo! Movies message boards (*http://movies.yahoo.com/*) for 40 movies released in the summer of 2002. These included *xXx* (Rob Cohen, Columbia Pictures, 2002) and *Scooby-Doo* (Raja Gosnell, Warner Bros., 2001, US/Australia), whose opening weekend revenue of $54.2 million was judged to be a considerable success (Box Office Mojo). Of the average number of postings concerning a "major movie in the summer of 2002" (the number of 303 is derived from a study of 12,136 messages posted to message boards), 32.5% were understood to be negative. Liu emphasised the quantitative value of word-of-mouth over its qualitative value, and suggested that volume provided enough explanatory power for box-office successes like *Scooby-Doo* (which was once thought to occupy a vulnerable market position). I also examined the boards for *Scooby Doo*. Some older Yahoo! Movies users derided the film because it was aimed primarily at children, and teenage contributors that

discussed the film's stars (Sarah Michelle Gellar and Charles Cousins) as well as its soundtrack attended the film and returned to the message boards with their endorsements. Liu's findings were based on the feedback not of film neophytes or average web users, but of an informed group of cinemagoers who were already aware of the film's anticipated market-performance and its marketing. These filmgoers were active consumers of popular culture with access, via Yahoo! Movies, to entertainment news published by trade papers such as *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter*. Dan Rosen, the former head of Research at Warners, warned against the use of sales advertising "to change the attitudes" of these users in 2004: "These frequent visitors are so well informed that [it] is hard to change their attitudes" (Bagla, 2004). The studios shared this understanding, but strengthened their partnerships with the web portal nonetheless.

In October 2002, Yahoo! launched Yahoo! AdVision, a rich media advertising initiative, using two promotions for *The Bourne Identity* (Doug Liman, Universal Pictures, 2002, US/Germany/Czech Republic) and *Signs* (M. Night Shyamalan, Buena Vista Pictures, 2002) (Yahoo!, 2002b). Its "digital film centre" gave advertisers the option to post 30 minutes of streaming audio/video (which the publisher hosted for 30 days), as well as auto-detect technologies which improved the interface's usability (the proprietary technology read the user's computer system for bandwidth information and media software) and sophisticated audience measurement data. In 2002, this involved monitoring the number of unique users and member web sessions, video downloads (including minutes played data), repeat user numbers and mouse-click activity within the content area. Universal learned that 300,000 unique viewers spent an average of 4 minutes interacting with *The Bourne Identity* site in its first three weeks online (Yahoo! 2002b). The results, for Universal particularly, created an impetus to produce more video-based AdVision campaigns for *Red Dragon* (Brett Ratner,

Universal Pictures, 2002, US/Germany), *8 Mile* (Curtis Hanson, Universal Pictures, 2002, US/Germany) and *The Truth About Charlie* (Jonathan Demme, Universal Pictures, 2002, US/Germany).

The viable Yahoo! Movies market invited a different take on current marketing orthodoxies. Yahoo! partnered with Revolution Studios and Columbia Pictures in January 2003 to host video content for the horror-thriller *Darkness Falls* (Jonathan Liebesman, Columbia Pictures, 2003, US/Australia). The exclusive was a downloadable clip which showcased the first ten minutes of the film, complete with a commentary track by director Liebesman talking about the production. The successful drip-feed campaign of *The Lord of the Rings* films had unlocked the potential benefits of keeping "distinctive interpretative communities"—core fan groups who "pre-interpret the films intensely and intently over time"—in close harmony (Hills, 2006: 163). A low-key exploitation film, *Darkness Falls'* potential audience was very small, and box-office projections limited total revenues to the $20 million mark. However, the studio endowed the informed Yahoo! Movies readership with early "first viewer" status, generating strong word-of-mouth on the site's message boards and circulating favourable buzz. The film's total domestic gross was $32.6 million (Box Office Mojo). The strategy triggered a new diplomacy. For the psychological thriller *Taking Lives* (D. J. Caruso, Warner Bros., 2004, US/Australia), starring Angelina Jolie, Warner Bros. and co-production partner Village Roadshow mounted a similar promotion, allying its exclusive nine minute clip with other content positioned, at some expense, on the Yahoo! Movies homepage. As a result of these measures, the site attracted a total of 9.4 million unique visitors in the month of December (Olsen, 2004a) which was a 15% increase on the previous year's monthly average of 6.1 million (Graser, 2003).

This trend again attracted the attention of the entertainment news media, who reported that a growing "demand for entertainment and film previews online" and a "desire for rich-media content" was fuelled by "mass market high-speed internet access" (Olsen, 2004a). However, by citing the speed of deployment of broadband internet we overlook the policy decisions that were arguably central to Yahoo!'s recovery. The company was driven by a competitive need to become the leading entertainment portal for the studios it lobbied for advertising. The studios were equally determined to capture the brand loyalties of its substantial user base. General Manager Doug Hirsch's enthusiastic summary of his business—then in its first full year of trading with the studios under the Semel/Moloshok regime—obscures this reality further:

> We are seeing an exciting trend taking place where studios are looking for new ways to get audiences familiar with their movies, especially original films that are not part of a franchise. The Internet is the perfect place to build your brand ... and we see this "first nine minutes" format sparking interest in all genres, for thrillers like *Darkness Falls*, or for comedies like *Barbershop* or independent dramas like *The Cooler*—all of which debuted exclusively on Yahoo! Movies. (Hirsch, 2004 cited in Anfuso, 2004)

The promotional point which Hirsch wants to make is clear: this was a natural development commensurate with the evolution of the web, a trend which illustrated how in synch Yahoo! Inc. was, compared to AOL, with the internet. Hirsch is more frank in the following statement:

Sometimes within the first ten minutes of a movie, viewers are either hooked or not. And if you're hooked, you're going to want to see that movie when it opens. (Hirsch, 2004 cited in Olsen, 2004a)

This second comment is revealing when read alongside producer Mark Canton's more obtuse description of a similar point: "this opening sequence is strong and lays the groundwork for the thrills that are to come … By sharing it with fans directly via the internet, we're able to show the scene in its entirety, unedited and uninterrupted, which offers a real sense of the mood and complexity of the film" (Canton, 2004 cited in Anfuso, 2004). The difference in address here foregrounds Canton's obvious commercial agenda, which was to promote the film as a work of craftsmanship (and therefore a film to be consumed properly in cinemas), but it underscores the obvious fact that there will be many for whom the clip fails to intrigue. Movies are clearly not exempt from criticism, and the reputation of the Yahoo! Movies website as a democratic forum for, within reason, free, decent expression seems to be given credibility by the number of negative posts that are published on the message boards. While the film's producers understandably wished to skirt the issue in press statements of this kind, Hirsch, perhaps the key spokesman for Yahoo! Movies in public, acknowledged the essential fallibility of marketing campaigns—film studios that advertised with Yahoo! Movies were susceptible to strong criticism in an open forum. As Adam Fogelson, head of marketing for Universal Pictures, revealed to *USA Today*, "audiences may not like what they see when you show them more, or they may look at 10 minutes and say 'that was good, but I've seen all I need to see'" (Fogelson, 2004 cited in Bowles, 2004). But this susceptibility also therefore represents insurance in the form of an entertainment site whose readership cared not if they read negative criticism from peers on a daily basis.

Thus, as more advertising business went to entertainment portals like Yahoo!, the more refined and attractive as a streaming format broadband video became. Importantly, there is a sense that the studios were moving more resources into non-website-based ventures in order to find the people who purchased and consumed home entertainment on a frequent, dedicated basis. These developments had a small but detectable impact on the amount of advertising expenditure that went into web advertising. In contrast, the major film companies' investments in old media remained at approximately the same levels, although some changes were occurring as more TV-spot and network TV money was reallocated to cable (MPAA, 2004).

Print Media

For the news media, the growth of display advertising threatened to jeopardise the long-term future of traditional advertising. The large newspapers—like the *Los Angeles Times*, which rely on film advertising for 10 percent of their revenue—had two options: reduce their high premiums to protect blanket advertising; or intensify their online presence. In line with this perception in 2005, Disney chief executive Robert Iger stated: "Consumers are getting messages in non-traditional ways and our spending has to reflect that. Consumer behaviour and consumption is more fragmented and spending should be more a mix of traditional and new media" (Iger, 2005 cited in Nash, 2005). Concerned with this loss of constituency markets, Borrell Associates presented its findings on the migration of readers to online services and its implications for revenues to the World Association of Newspapers shortly thereafter. The study found that if one print reader migrated to the web, a newspaper website would need to attract between 20 and 100 extra unique readers to compensate for lost

circulation and advertising revenues. A single reader was hence worth between $500 and $900 in circulation and ad revenues.

Ultimately, the allocation of more advertising money to the internet made fiscal sense for the film studios for some of their films, primarily their blockbusters and A-class films. In 2005, Joseph Jaffe, the President of marketing consulting firm Jaffe LLC, noted that web advertising is "the opposite of buying a spread in a newspaper or a slew of 30-second slots on TV. Studios need to stop trying to reach the most people and focus on reaching the best people" (Jaffe, 2005 cited in Topcik, 2005).

In the Dial-Up era, the studios established their own corporate websites to service their online home-video and merchandise stores; as internet technologies became more prevalent, the dedicated movie websites which they created to support these shops (and online retail stores like Amazon) were optimised over the course of the Dial-Up and Broadband eras to maximise revenues generated by the theatrical marketing campaign, launching earlier prior to release, and downsizing sometimes years after the first DVDs reached the market. As the Hollywood companies used the internet more and more to promote the consumer market for home entertainment, they developed strategies for targeting frequent filmgoers and fan communities (like the Yahoo! Movies readership discussed above) using web portals, forums and email marketing. As the majors increased their online activities their online spending grew. Between 1999 and 2007 their average per-film advertising expenditures on the internet rose from 0.5% to 4.4% (the highest average on record). Together, these increases in advertising expenditure and online activities represented the acceptance of the internet by the majors as the right medium for "reaching the best people."

TV Advertising

There is, however, still a lack of knowledge in this crucial area. While the internet may reach the best people, by which we mean primarily consumers of home media and frequent filmgoers, network television, spot-TV and cable television advertising reaches the general audience, the infrequent filmgoer, the family member who occasionally buys a DVD to give to someone else as a present. Marketing teams, therefore, spend on average two-thirds of their total advertising budget on television-based advertising. The "comfort" factor associated with this level of expenditure has for some overtaken the very purpose of using national high-profile television programming to reach a general audience. The studios' collective dependency on this form of self-insurance was proof of the industry's complacency when it came to television. Indeed, it seems particularly obstinate in light of the emerging commentary at this time on television's relative lack of effectiveness as an advertising medium amid the greater migration of viewers to the web (The Register, 2004; Rodgers, 2004; Markoff, 2004). The Online Publishers Association, in its Generational Media Study for 2004 found that the number of survey respondents using the internet for entertainment purposes (74%) had climbed to rival that of television (86%) directly (Online Publishers Association, 2004).

In the second quarter of 2004, a reported increase in the number of 15–24 year olds leaving the main TV networks (CBS, NBC, ABC and FOX) for the web prompted speculation about television's future (Borland, 2003; Caspare, 2004). Claims that growth in broadband video might lead inexorably to the demise of TV advertising were wildly premature, if not wholly inaccurate, but were endemic to the internet's reversal of fortune since the dot-com crash. At the same time, the TV broadcasters were faced with the issue of how to hold onto their best advertisers now that 3 million homes used ad-skipping television devices like TiVo to wipe

out advertising altogether. The response from national advertisers was to prepare for a 20 percent cut on TV advertising over a period of five years (Olsen, 2004a). A Forrester Research report published in May found that three quarters of the 55 national advertisers it surveyed would make cuts—and, indeed, the threat deepened anxieties across the TV industry (Olsen, 2004c). The upshot has been an aggressive call from advertising clients for better audience measurement services for television (beyond the generic modes of audience reach and frequency) and a quick response from the consumer electronics industry. TiVo presented one small solution in the summer of 2005 (which received official sponsorship and funding from the Warner Bros. Television Network), in the form of a "next generation" interactive advertising package which gave advertisers more interactive tools to engage consumers (PR Newswire, 2005).

The film studios, hedging their bets, refused to be drawn into the debate publicly. There were two reasons for this. Under the corporate structure devised and streamlined by AOL Time Warner, Viacom/CBS, Disney, the News Corporation, Sony and NBC-Universal, television remained the key consumer channel for maximising the benefits of corporate synergy, with on-air advertising representing the vital component still in the launch of any corporate franchise, blockbuster or genre film. Since this corporate structure was designed to spread the risk of investment in entertainment properties across multiple media, each company was now co-dependent. A major studio would not suspend its television advertising expenditure at the risk of lowering the networks' overall earning capacity with other advertisers. Creating this problem would likely result in a broader weakening of the controlling corporation's shareholder value, and possibly add to the reasons for why an underperforming division should be spun off or sold. Secondly, the studios still did not know how to use the internet in such a way that could replicate the successes of television. It

has long been standard marketing practice to deliver advertising spots of 60-seconds and 30-seconds for television. The high cost of these commercials, combined with a minimal accountability in audience measurement terms, meant that the studios were essentially trusting to the most basic TV ratings figures (Stelter, 2007). Of course, their counter-argument is equally reasonable. The difficulty of gathering accurate data about audience behaviour, consumption, and time spent with a film, was not unique to television. Historically, the fixed banner advertising format has always yielded low conversion rates on the web and, hence, poor "click-through" for the studios. This means that internet users ignored, or just did not see during their browsing session, a banner advertisement situated in the margins or at the top of a page. Thus, in the absence of quantitative, third-party data for both channels, the studios continued to support the old models, conceding only to short-term experimentation with different formats.

The counter-arguments for decreasing TV spending in this period supported two positions. First, some market analysts favoured the creation of collaborative, or cross-promotional, campaigns that utilised the best characteristics of both mediums. Director of New Media at Miramax, Ian Schafer, rejected in 2001 the internet's power in "the short term" to directly compete with television, and suggested that marketers embrace the medium not as a replacement but "a complement" (Schafer, 2001, cited in Schafer, 2005a). In fact, the studios did not share even this view, preferring to concentrate the bulk of their advertising budget in television ad buys (Galloway, 2006). *The Blair Witch Project* showed the initial promise of integrated marketing campaigns. Interested television viewers were directed to the website by a fake documentary "Curse of the Blair Witch" (which aired on the Sci-Fi Channel) and exclusive film clips showcased on the Independent Film Channel, however, the film was so uniquely well suited to web articulation that its success was hard to

reproduce. The value of integrating the offline (on-air) and online marketing campaign had yet to be proven empirically to the studios' satisfaction. Conveying the marketing message in "unconventional ways" in 2004 seemed to entail broadcasting sample clips on prime-time television. Notable examples include a ten minute sample of Universal's R-rated *Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, Universal Pictures, 2004, US/Canada/Japan/France) which ran on the USA Networks and the debut of the newest 2 ½ minute film trailer for Sony's *Spider-Man 2* (Sam Raimi, Columbia Pictures, 2004) which ran during the prime-time NBC show, *The Apprentice* (Mark Burnett, NBC, 2004 –). These practices increased awareness about the films and their respective release dates, but provided little more than the URL to channel curious viewers onto the web.

The second position favoured multidirectional marketing on the web. In 2003, Joseph Jaffe made an earnest appeal to the movie studios in his article *Beyond a Website* in which he drew the analogy of an official website as an ordinary bricks-and-mortar storefront:

> Offline is not cutting it, especially when the sum total of support is a token three-second URL at the end of a typical television commercial. This discussion needs to be stepped up a notch to allow for and accommodate the bigger picture of connecting with consumers in their natural environments (read: not your Website), especially with the very real reality that if they are to convert, it will most likely be offline. (Jaffe, 2003)

Jaffe supported the dissemination of online content beyond the boundaries of the official website, and in 2003 he implored the studios to exploit broadband video (by 2004, his creative roadshow "Battle for the Heart" had helped to garner mainstream interest in online

advertising). This deliberate criticism of the online strategies of the studios was part of a broader attack on the 30-second television commercial, the hegemony of which was built on the attitudes of mainstream advertisers like the film studios who had endeavoured since the mid-1970s to ensure they saw strong returns on their investments. In his own words: "the reality many marketers are still clinging to is a security blanket, embroidered with the letters UPFRONT, that is soiled, worn, and infested with mould and mothballs" (Jaffe, 2005: 3). In the same year, Jim Moloshok spoke with optimism to *The Hollywood Reporter* about the present-day realities of "advertisers using the internet the same way they used established media," and contributed to the debate by evangelising the engagement opportunities of the web:

> When you buy a commercial on television, you lease the consumer for 30 seconds. But if you can get a consumer engaged online, you can own that viewer for 30 minutes. (Moloshok, 2004 cited in Bond, 2004)

For the Hollywood majors, this particular characteristic of the web—the ability to reach not just the best person, but to engage him/her in a way that intensified their interest in a film and any inclination they might have to consume other films from the same "stable"—served their interests in ways that traditional media did not. Motion picture websites therefore continued to expand on the initial promise that was first demonstrated in the early 1990s with such films as *Star Trek: Generations* and *Batman Forever*.

With this statement in mind, the research now turns to three cases studies drawn from this important midpoint in the Broadband era (films released during or after the banner year of 2004). Each case study was chosen to reflect a different aspect of web marketing which it

was felt encouraged the viewer, or site visitor, to stay on the website for a significant amount of time (more than ten minutes). The first website employed 3D gaming technology in an interactive trailer format, the second user-generated video in a similar interactive video format, and the third viral marketing.

Interactive Trailer: *The Bourne Supremacy* (Paul Greengrass, Universal Pictures, 2004, US/Germany)

Universal Pictures' website for *The Bourne Supremacy*, working from the assumption that online consumers wanted to "play" and interact with the film's characters and their resources, hinged on an innovative new paradigm for reworking typical online trailer presentation. This application relied on an interplay between trailer video sequences and newly created electronic environments to hint at a change in the user's subject position. It is this unique milestone, and this notion of suspending the trailer as it played at intervals in order to reach "into" the simulacrum—which gave the website some distinction, and indeed, the interactive trailer promise as a next generation format.

The official websites for *Shrek 2* (Andrew Adamson et al., DreamWorks, 2004), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Alfonso Cuarón, Warner Bros., 2004, UK/US) and *Spider-Man 2* dominated the marketplace, benefiting from a string of cross-promotional partnerships with Yahoo! Movies, Burger King and MSN, that focused on male and female teen, and older teenage niches. *The Bourne Supremacy* had no promotional partners, but it received, instead, important offline support from the NBC Universal marketing council, an internal marketing team created to exploit promotional synergies across the conglomerate's entertainment divisions. It therefore ran "daypart" promotion spots for the movie on NBC, Bravo and USA Networks, encouraging much older viewers in the 18 through 34-years-old

bracket to visit the website URL; in addition, it produced similar ads for other NBC-U-owned cable units, which presented a formidable vision of *The Bourne Identity's* former hero as a calculated and meticulous assassin (Consoli, 2005a; 2005b).

Compared to the websites for similarly-themed films, such as *Die Another Day* (Lee Tamahori, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2002, UK/US), *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2002), *The Recruit* (Roger Donaldson, Buena Vista Pictures, 2003) and *Mission: Impossible III* (J. J. Abrams, Paramount Pictures, 2006, US/Germany/China), *Bourne* provided a higher level of story and genre information which was disseminated carefully across a range of applications. From the menu's six main content areas, users accessed a movie synopsis, cast and crew biographies, production notes, a 25-clip photo gallery, the theatrical trailer in three different formats, four low-resolution clips from the completed film, three E-cards (which can be sent to friends via e-mail with a personal message), a screensaver produced for Mac and PC users, three desktop backgrounds in three screen resolutions (with the following pixel dimensions: 800: 600, 1024: 768, and 1280: 1024), four buddy icons for use as profile avatars on message boards or instant messaging chats, and a final trivia game, the successful completion of which granted players special access to a sub-site content area called the "Treadstone Vault" (named for the black operations program of which Bourne was an elite member). This site section contained a 2 ½ minute trailer clip (with behind-the-scenes footage and some scenes not contained in the theatrical version of the film); of the four short clips showcased on the site, two involved action set-pieces with the film's hero and villain (India Chase and Moscow Chase); another juxtaposed the central premise of the series—Bourne's amnesia—with the hero's romantic attachment to his girlfriend; and the final clip (Nicolette Kidnapped), though expositional,

introduced the two investigating officers in Berlin who track Bourne and attempt to bring him to account.

This densely structured database, in addition to disseminating high levels of story information about the new film, served primarily to further our investigatory participation as one of the film's characters. The contemporary spy/espionage tech-thriller sub-genre laid an equally strong claim to web technologies in bringing the web user literally face to face with the hero and his exaggerated technological environment. The website for *The Bourne Identity* invited users to "HELP BOURNE FIND HIS IDENTITY," utilising both the gaming conventions of the Dial-Up era but at the same time coherently introducing a vital plot element that saw Bourne partner with a secondary character to achieve his mission. The latter's absence in the *Supremacy* website problematised the collaborative partner role which typified the user's engagement with the *Identity* website, and hence further despecified the motif of identity struggle that thematises film and website. The *Supremacy* website, therefore, turned this search for identity on its head, reconfiguring our relationship with Bourne such that it reflected the director's amplification of the search for the hero himself. Within the movie's interactive trailer, the interplay between trailer narrative and exploratory CG-environment resulted in an ambiguous subject position that lies ultimately somewhere between movie character and omniscient spectator.

The first movie sequence began with poignant vignettes of Bourne and his girlfriend, Marie, in exile, and a typical voiceover artist stating, "Two years ago Jason Bourne walked away from his past, never to look back again." The final image of the two embracing in Marie's scooter rental shack faded to a low-angle computer-generated shot sweeping into their isolated beach house. Once the CG-camera settled on Bourne's study area and the music

faded out, the user entered the scene by zooming the CG-camera into designated content-areas and interacting with numerous objects: a notebook revealing important backstory and new story information, a falsified passport, a note left by Marie, and Bourne's medication. As each content area was revealed, the precise subject position of the user became less clear. The fact that Bourne was at one point heard audibly telling Marie to flee with him ("get in, we're blown") cued users to the significance of the notebook as a device for remembering past events, overriding its function as a promotional convention. There was, hence, a possibility that we were Bourne, for we apparently interacted with Marie when the notebook was opened (since he confided to her "I have to keep going with this") and his gun was still strapped to the underside of the table. But paradoxically, audio of a secondary character, Nicky Parsons, served to remind us that, either way, we were interlopers and therefore possibly existed outside of this "trailer" world.

The trailer's next montage sequence established that Bourne's suspicions were correct (his cover was blown) and he was in danger from the assassin Kirill. Brief action clips of his escape to Naples were followed by group introductions to the CIA team that was also tracking him, and the continuing voice-over, "But his past never stopped looking for him." The same navigational system was used to explore the second of the trailer's interactive environments, a CIA command post which, although barren of people, buzzed with lines of dialogue from the movie. To that extent, it is assumed that users had infiltrated Pam Landy's team (as another of Bourne's pursuers) or were effectively visiting the scene after the fact. The conventional appeal of the environment itself, wherein users were invited to zoom in on computer and television monitors which played back accordingly different video and audio clips from the movie, transposed the emphasis away from agency onto anonymous detachment.

In the penultimate "act" leading to the trailer's conclusion, Bourne was shown being taken

into custody in a high-intensity action sequence which culminated in his triumphant escape.

This clearly delivered on the promised thrill of close-quarter fighting specific to the

franchise, and indeed the pathos of the trailer's first beach house scene was largely

expunged by the satisfyingly generic closure of the voice-over narration: "Now he's playing

their game—on his terms." The sequence then blended the most iconographic moment of the

movie (Bourne on a rooftop in Germany, angling a highly distinctive bullup sniper rifle

towards a target) with the 3-D rooftop environment created for the interactive trailer. Again,

there was no human dimension at all, and the visual presentation lacked some continuity

with the film, but this final trailer environment ostensibly marked a shift in generic

expectation towards a gaming-reality. Bourne's gun was aimed, for instance, at a building,

which the user could survey in closer detail by peering through the sight and aligning its

cross-hairs on any window: it is as if the interactive trailer, having assumed of its audience a

certain tolerance threshold for exploring its non-action elements, ultimately compensated the

assumed male audience by reproducing the iconography of the first-person shooter.

Thus, while early Dial-Up era sites like *Species* (Roger Donaldson, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer,

1995) afforded visitors a degree of agency by virtue of their direct participation in an

unfolding manhunt (wherein the user was the alien Sil, attempting to evade capture from

government agents and scavenging for sustenance), the *Bourne* interactive trailer had a

stronger continuity with the television advertising and the theatrical trailer, eschewing

identification with the hero for a less action-oriented, investigatory role that supported the

new film's conception of the hero as "emotionally detached," "formidable" and "isolated." It

created its own "alternative" participatory narrative, wherein web users interacted not as

Jason Bourne but as any one of his opposite number. This sense of pluralism, of multiple points of entry into the text, was reinforced by the official website itself which inferred that we were multiple characters: Treadstone agent, the CIA Deputy Director Pam Landy, a member of her team, or the Russian assassin from the new film, Kirill. Users who assumed an agent-in-training identity and gained entry to the Treadstone Vault were given regular updates via "Mission Control" messages about events in an external "reality," thus giving the user more incentive to stay at the website. In this "reality" the hero was apparently escaping from captivity in real-time (as the first communication says, "He was last seen commandeering a helicopter"). The generic emphasis on the film as a compelling lesson in surveillance techniques, counter-espionage and tactical one-upmanship prevailed over the old "regime" of the spectacular action-oriented blockbuster. Thus, the *Bourne* site pointed to its own important role in the generic reconfiguration of the franchise, privileging participatory identification not with the hero but with *The Bourne Supremacy's* "army" of pursuers and its lavishly technological milieu.

Interactive Trailer: *Wedding Crashers* (David Dobkin, New Line Cinema, 2005)

The Bourne Supremacy website had little market success as a viral campaign (for example, it was not reported on in the entertainment press), but this was partly attributable to the fact that the film did not call for blockbuster treatment. Although the gaming elements reproduced generic iconography from the movie adequately, the positioning of textual elements within the narrative framework of an interactive trailer was done in such a way as to refuse the possibility of new connections and thematic expansion of the existing narrative. The website's main appeals were therefore made through an increased reliance on the aesthetic wonder of animation and a return to the rhetoric of the trailer ("Now he's playing their game—on his terms"). However, its real-time Mission Control messages and off-screen

real-world escape narrative prepared viewers for the film and increased the chances that if they explored the website more then the next phase in the escape narrative would unfold.

New Line spearheaded the interactive marketing campaign for its 2005 comedy *Wedding Crashers*, which stars Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn, with a fan participation video. The campaign's Crash This Trailer application was an appropriate illustration of corporate and grassroots convergence—not to mention corporate self-parody—in that a high impact theatrical trailer produced by a commercial Hollywood studio was unexpectedly married with the exaggerated characteristics of amateurish fan-produced video. Unlike the trailer promotion for *The Bourne Supremacy*, which aimed for theatrical continuity by recapitulating the film's seriousness of tone, the *Wedding Crashers* trailer demanded that it be taken in a different comedic spirit to the film's conventional humour; this sense of the apparent inappropriateness of the premise (replacing the star's faces with funny fan photos—an activity which was, of course, susceptible to abuse) worked to its advantage, helping to engineer a sense of the filmmaker's own complicity in the success of the marketing and making the film seem more knowing and ironic than in fact it is.

The trailer feature was accessible via a link on the homepage. The subdomain, *www.weddingcrashersmovie.com/crashthistrailer/*, which opened in a separate pop-up window, resembled a self-contained website itself. It featured a promotional graphic of the two stars posing before the title, TRAILER CRASHERS (which was appropriately styled to maintain continuity with the campaign advertising); a description of the application which was framed as a conventional poster tagline ("Become a character in the *Wedding Crashers* trailer. Send it to your friends. Life's a party, so crash the trailer!"); a Budweiser official sponsor logo; and copyright disclaimer. The application's premise, of course, was that

anyone can "star" in a movie trailer (just as, equally, anyone can create a movie trailer, if they have a degree of competency with editing software and web technologies) and yet the paradox, evident from the very outset, was that few consumers had the resources of a fully-funded interactive marketing unit in addition to the graphic artists, technology specialists, technical and online producers, and web consultants it hired, to create such a website with such a well-marketed application for just such a video.

The Start Crashing Here button revealed an interactive tutorial which appeared between the two men, accordingly "moving" the pair aside. This interface, designed to reflect the apparent evenness of tone of the film in that it addressed a non gender-specific web audience, guided the user through the trailer-making process in four stages. It began, "OK, HERE'S WHAT YOU DO," and continued in this informal register. After deciding who was to appear in the video ("Just me," or "Me and a friend") and then filling out a name form for the purposes of the billing block, the user was then taken to the third stage: "please choose a character for yourself." Interestingly, the "characters" were identified by their screen names ("Rachel McAdams," "Isla Fisher") and not therefore their film roles (i.e., "Claire Cleary," "Gloria Cleary"), revealing the assumption that the pleasures derived from audience participation here were somehow rooted in the desirable status of stars and celebrity names, and not, rather less pointedly, the aesthetic spectacle and fan-social aspects of personalised customisation. In the final section of the tutorial, the user was invited to upload a personal photograph (by pressing the Upload Image button and selecting the desired image), position the face according to the custom template using Scale and Rotate adjustment tools, crop unnecessary space around the chin and jaw, and finally mark the corners of the mouth with two red dots. The website played back the customised trailer for the user within a minute of its completion.

The film trailer itself appealed to a conventional, mainstream sensibility in that Wilson and Vaughn's characters, serial philanderers both, are moved through a redemptive story arc that sees the former falling in love and the latter encumbered by a romance with a demanding inexperienced teen. It thus combined the broad appeal of a multigenerational, middlebrow comedy, like *Meet the Parents* (Jay Roach, Universal Pictures, 2000), with an anarchic, low-rent humour designed to play well with older teenage niches. The interactive component of the trailer capitalised on this slide between the middlebrow and low-culture, where the former evidently framed the basis of the appeal (the impulse to participate in mainstream consumer culture) and the latter was the essence of the "pay-off" (the spoofing of mainstream culture). Indeed, the finished article used several familiar conventions to amplify the "spoofing." For instance, a black triangle appeared over the mouth when a character was speaking, and the user's face was disproportionate in size to the star's body. Such conventions were generically familiar to pastiche video makers, whose own viral content reworked the practices of animated television shows from *South Park* (Matt Stone and Trey Parker, Comedy Central 1997 –) to *Charlie Brown*. Thus, the trailer did not strive for a CG-reality, or aesthetic verisimilitude; it instead comically undercut the cinematic "value" of the film image on the assumption that its web-savvy audience was acquainted with the crudest excesses of YouTube-oriented fan-production—and therefore recognised that it was, in large part, tied to the same self-reflexive cause, not opposed to it. It did not therefore satirise fan activities or different fandoms, but it was distinctively knowing about the culture of short form video that became the hallmark of YouTube in its formative years and other platforms for participatory media.

By virtue of its self-referentiality, the *Wedding Crashers* application demonstrated a "knowing" understanding of the fan/producer relationship as it continued to develop along mainstream commercial lines in the Broadband era. This has some resonance given the studio's fidelity to the Tolkien fan base for *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, who, it is highly certain, would not have tolerated any such approach to the trilogy's theatrical trailers and previews. *The Bourne Supremacy*, on the other hand, whilst innovative (perhaps deceptively so) as an "evolving" marketing technique, exemplified by virtue of its architectural structure web marketing's dependency on advertising forms that were by necessity "small," "both spatially and temporally" (Sobchack, 1999). In its brief 10 second montage sequences and superficially depth-less game worlds, *The Bourne Supremacy* trailer was less successful at increasing customer retention. The *Wedding Crashers* feature demanded different levels of engagement and it is suggested did increase retention. The highly infectious viral aspect of the trailer meant that users also returned multiple times, bringing friends to join in with the fun.

Viral Component: *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (George Lucas, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2005)

> The film is rich in technology, detailed in execution, high definition in clarity, emotionally resonant with its fans … unless you create an ad that reflects all of the above, it weakens the very brand that it is trying to sell.
>
> <div align="right">Ian Schafer, president of Deep Focus (2005b)</div>

As Ian Schafer's comment suggests, the *Star Wars* promotion was ideally suited for the film and the web. More than this, it can be used to vindicate Moloshok's ambitious assertion about customer retention. Burger King, the second largest global fast food hamburger chain,

with recorded revenues of $2.234 billion per year and over 10,000 restaurants serving over 11 million people worldwide, partnered with Lucasfilm on two promotions for the last film in the *Star Wars* prequels trilogy: an online game (*www.sithsense.com*) and an in-store promotional give-away. The Burger King Sith Sense campaign was organised by design agency Crispin Porter + Bogusky (Santa Monica), which subcontracted the 20Q branded gaming service (Canada) and design studio Firstborn Multimedia (LA), whose production team shot green screen footage with costumed actors in Hollywood for the project. The game reduced the all-encompassing sweep of the fictional "Force"—the mystical energy which governed the *Star Wars* universe—to the "Sith sense," a similarly enigmatic ability which users were required to activate if they wished to succeed. Upon entering the game, visitors arrived on a Control Room balcony overlooking the volcanic landscape of Mustafar, the environment which was most frequently used in the broader marketing campaign's efforts at product differentiation. Users were challenged by the central protagonist of the film (an interactive Darth Vader) to a simple game of mental ingenuity—the traditional game of 20 questions—which involved the user imagining an object and Vader's subsequent attempts to read their mind. Wrong, or unimaginative, answers provoked Vader's wrath ("Ah, what a simple mind you have"), and sophisticated answers earned his grudging respect. Like most viral games, the Sith Sense called attention to the fact that there were no prize give-aways, but merely the satisfaction of outwitting the database designed by 20Q which "thinks" for the character. This provided a powerful viral element which, within generic gaming terms, increased user competition and ambition; indeed, the website told users that Vader grew increasingly more adept at tackling answers with each new challenge, as if the promotion was trying to couch the artificial intelligence of the database (i.e., the digital Vader character) in habitual cognitive routines, as if it was processing thought and applying deductive reasoning.

These authoritarian aspects of Vader's character, in addition to the looped *Star Wars* background music (Vader's Wagnerian signature tune, The Imperial March, was first used in Irvin Kershner's *The Empire Strikes Back*), contributed to a redefinition of the character in his proper historical context as the classic villain. To be precise, the particular representation of Vader here in his pointedly evil mode was phenomenologically disconnected from his re-presentation in the new trilogy as a fundamentally good young man, corrupted by his own hubris and by the evil Emperor. It may have seemed this way to newcomers, but *Star Wars* fans knowledgeable of the lore understood that this third film in the prequels trilogy would finally reveal young Vader in his classic image as original trilogy villain. This play on Vader's image (and textual "return"), therefore, allowed older *Star Wars* fans of Generation X and Y to simultaneously "fear" and "celebrate" Vader again based on the conventional rhetoric of the early New Hollywood (as, for instance, cinema's most frequently nominated "favourite sci-fi villain") and for younger viewers to be acquainted in an online environment with perhaps the marquee character of the *Star Wars* universe. Indeed, the references to Lord Vader in the opening introduction (which reproduced the credits sequence of the films) and allusions to protocol ("Lord Vader doesn't concern himself with specifics") were recuperated into a focus on the character's stature, as if the viewer had been at last granted "an audience with" him.

The site received 7,947,069 hits, making it the most popular viral movie tie-in of 2005. The cross-promotion was more successful than Burger King's action figure give-away (tagged, Choose Your Destiny), which ran into difficulties when the Dove Foundation challenged its strategies for targeting children under the age of 13. This resulted in a "disconnect"—a break between the brand and the target audience which, in this case, resulted from a

mismatch with younger audiences accustomed to a more commercially viable PG-rating. Conversely, the *Sith Sense* traded on the legacy of the corporate franchise (i.e., *Star Wars*), and thus reduced the iconographic imagery of the latest film to the one-dimensionality of a simple background, the mere setting wherein the "real" appeal to audience interest was made. It thus privileged style and a connection with the franchise's historical past over the more questionable aspects of the new, PG-13-certificate film. In sum, this compensatory undertaking—the placing of distance, in promotional terms, between the brand character and *Episode III*—illuminated a broader shift in Lucasfilm's marketing strategy away from the hard-edged, ambivalent language of this film onto the promotional formulas of the original trilogy.

In summary, the three case studies selected are indicative of the majors' strategies at the midpoint of the Broadband era to develop new applications that improved customer retention and the depth of their engagement with the brand. The *Sith Sense* was regarded as the most successful application, attracting 7.9 million visits from internet users. Although it was not featured on the *Star Wars* website, the dedicated URL which Burger King created for the application distanced the game sufficiently from the company and the fast-food industry. The viral component was critical to its success and the game's "outwit-Vader" challenge increased customer retention markedly. New Line's *Crash This Trailer* feature similarly helped to boost the popularity of the brand, demanding a similar level of engagement and also improving customer retention. Users derived a lot of entertainment value from each application. *The Bourne Supremacy* interactive trailer, by contrast, encouraged users to explore the website as if they were playing a game. The trailer itself, though enjoyable, was short in length and lacked the viral component or the gaming challenge that made the other case studies so engaging. Together, the three case studies gave

internet users additional materials to explore beyond the core "extras" contained on the websites and expanded the opportunities for film-based digital entertainment in the home.

Website Standardisation

In this section the research turns to the issue of website standardisation for the period 2004 to 2009. Since design projects are strictly awarded on a meritocratic basis, website production is a fiercely competitive business and no mistakes are tolerated, either on the side of the brand (film studio) or the vendor (agencies). *The Lord of the Rings* project was passed on to the One Ten Project by Gordon Paddison after the appearance online of a preliminary website designed by another firm which did not meet New Line's standards. As a consequence of this industrial system, the goal of many digital firms online was to adapt the relevant data (pictures, video, sound effects) to a predetermined graphical style. This style, whilst visually gratifying or tastefully executed in their respective cases, nonetheless subscribed to a fixed and standardised series of procedures, templates and presentation styles that were ultimately connected to specific ideas of taste. Many of the websites discussed below were designed by Big Spaceship, Divine Penguin and Jetset Studios, some of the leading design firms producing Flash-based studio sites supported by co-operative online multiplayer games in the mid-2000s.

The developing Flash technologies of the Broadband era promised new opportunities for marketers. Larger Flash files gave studio marketers the choice to screen and thus foreground digitised film footage directly to spectators via the homepage (with minimal demands placed on the user's internet connection). Flash also allowed for a greater continuity with the aesthetics of commercial cinema. Through a bolder use of reducible advertising graphics, arresting animation, full-motion video and musical accompaniment, the Hollywood majors

gave their online audiences in-depth, richly animated websites which were the epitome of commercial Hollywood.

Action blockbusters and horror film sites utilised the full horizontal length of the monitor screen with higher resolution visuals. The websites for *Mr and Mrs Smith* (Doug Liman, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2005), *The War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, Paramount Pictures, 2005), *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, Universal Pictures, 2006, US/UK) and *Miami Vice* (Michael Mann, Universal Pictures, 2006, US/Germany/Paraguay/Uruguay) signalled a growing trend away from the pop-up window toward a borderless, unmistakably cinematic presentation style. This design mode recapitulated generic effects that were originally established in 1999/2000 in the form of the animated site introduction. Dimension Films' US website for the Australian import film *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean, Dimension Films, 2005, Australia) offered a veritable slideshow of full-screen trailer clips which dominated the computer screen, heightening the user's awareness of the generic space of the film and of the soundtrack samples that played alongside these images. This approach had continuities with some of the early animated websites of 1999/2000—a mechanical repetition of trailer imagery, endlessly cycling through animated "scenes" with no narrative trajectory or intended story. The official full-screen websites for *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, DreamWorks, 1999), *Fight Club* (David Fincher, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1999, US/Germany) and *The Cell* (Tarsem Singh, New Line Cinema, 2000, US/Germany) could not achieve this dominance-of-image in the Dial-Up era. This forced the marketers and designers to find alternative solutions for their promotions, moving the basis for the film's electronic appeals beyond the conventions of old media (predominantly image-based) advertising.

Many websites for Broadband-era genre films incorporated larger Flash files if the user was required to follow interactive links, or "steps," deeper into the main site. The sites for *Identity* (James Mangold, Columbia Pictures, 2003), *The Grudge* (Shimizu Takashi, Columbia Pictures, 2004, US/Japan), *Casino Royale* (Martin Campbell, Columbia Pictures, 2005, US/UK/Czech Republic/Germany/Bahamas) and *Dark Water* (Walter Salles, Buena Vista Pictures, 2005), in entreating users to investigate generic puzzles hidden in the darkened corners of a webpage, regressed to a more information-based exploratory mode that was tied to the generic subject matter of horror, spy thriller, and mystery. These sites purposefully facilitated a first-person subjectivity, moving users through a cryptic narrative that was clearly intended to trigger intense excitement and exhilaration. In *The Grudge* website the user assumed the role of a volunteer social worker, guiding themselves through the bleak rooms of the seemingly abandoned but deeply tormented Saeki household, searching paradoxically for clues as to why they were there. Evidently the user proceeded at their own peril, as the typical visual tropes of horror cinema were unleashed upon viewers flawlessly in the form of half-glimpsed video of Toshio and the vicious aural assault of the film's onryō, its vengeful ghost. These websites presuppose a similar spectatorial position in the cinema. Indeed their promotional value was derived from their capacity to instantiate these very same cinematic devices, from the horizontal, anamorphic frame, which guided the unprotected eye closer to the screen, to the employment of long takes between scene (i.e., page) transitions. The use of layering techniques which combined extended video clips with graphics-based animation, interactive video, and text and graphics added to the illusion of a live action cinema in the user's living room. These layering techniques were useful as quality indicators, advertising the film's A-class production values.

The third and most popular variation of the contemporary website was the compact Flash window. Unlike the previous examples, these sites were inextricably tied up with the assumed technical competency and dispositions of the intended audience. Where the aforementioned sites appeared to be embedded in the conventions and rhetorical devices of cinema, the official websites for *Madagascar* (Eric Darnell and Tom McGrath, DreamWorks, 2005), *Miss Congeniality 2: Armed & Fabulous* (John Pasquin, Warner Bros., 2005), *The Dukes of Hazard* (Jay Chandrasekhar, Warner Bros., 2005), *Borat* (Larry Charles, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2005), *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby* (Adam McKay, Columbia Pictures, 2006), *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* (Ivan Reitman, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2006), *Happy Feet* (George Miller et al., Warner Bros., 2006, Australia/US) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2006), to name some of the most popular, were organised less around textual fidelity, but, rather, the technological capabilities of the medium itself. These websites reproduced the films' generic environments within an enclosed space, and as a chief characteristic rarely forced identification with a protagonist. The websites combined, instead, a range of high impact audiovisual forms that are the contemporary web equivalent of hyperbolic trailer rhetoric. As Kernan states, "trailers allow audiences to link particular generic features with their anticipated spectatorial experience" (2004: 51). These sites persistently asserted both genre and spectatorial experience by exploiting new features of Flash video integration. An excess of link buttons, in-video caption displays, motion, video cue points, animated graphics, sound effects, and layered page transitions—which, combined, allowed users to leap with sprightly characters from one environment to another—instilled specific kinds of generic expectation. Thus, the websites for *School of Rock* (Richard Linklater, Paramount Pictures, 2003), *Bridget Jones' Diary: Edge of Reason* (Beeban Kidron, Universal Pictures, 2004, US/UK/France/Germany), *Chasing Liberty* (Andy Cadiff, Warner Bros., 2004, US/UK),

Dawn of the Dead, *The 40 Year Old Virgin* (Judd Apatow, Universal Pictures, 2005),

Barnyard (Steve Oedekerk, Paramount Pictures, 2006, US/Germany) and the embedded

Nacho Libre (Jared Hess, Paramount Pictures, 2006, US/Germany) shared qualities with not

only trailers but theme park attractions. With, for example, the embedded *Over the Hedge*

(Tim Johnson and Karey Kirkpatrick, Paramount Pictures, 2006) site's swooping title cards

("PLAY: FOOD, FOOD, FOOD!") and an amalgam of spoken dialogue clips ("HEY KIDS,

DIG IN!"), the excitable marketing neatly summarised this family adventure's appeal as a

dynamic distraction for young children. A tickertape "SHOUT OUT!" feature on the

homepage of *The Sisterhood Of the Travelling Pants* (Ken Kwapis, Warner Bros., 2005)

helped integrate into the website's design some of the teen-oriented appeal of "real time"

instant messaging for its core audience of high-school girls. A succession of sites in varying

generic classes relied equally on audiovisual spectacle and hyperbole to leverage audience

interest. *Inside Man* (Spike Lee, Universal Pictures, 2006), *Silent Hill* (Christophe Gans,

TriStar Pictures, 2006, US/Canada/France/Japan), *Cars* (John Lasseter and Joe Ranft, Buena

Vista Pictures, 2006) and *Flushed Away* (David Bowers and Sam Fell, Paramount Pictures,

2006, US/UK) were indicative of the design industry's move towards and refinement of

these conventions as a means for signifying mainstream commercial quality.

The Weinstein Company's *Grindhouse* (Robert Rodriguez et al., Dimension Films, 2007),

which was launched online in 2006, is an interesting case in point. Users navigated from the

lobby of a grindhouse theatre to the projection room, and used firearms at the confectionery

counter. Adam Chang, the Art Director for *Grindhouse*, explained that the design brief was

to create a navigation experience that embodied the spirit of "the gruesome but awesome"

Tarantino oeuvre. Thus, in responding to the studio's request for a "website that was gory,

bloody and all that exciting stuff which most clients tend to stay away from," Big Spaceship

(the vendor), and for its part The Weinstein Company, clearly favoured existing Tarantino audiences who "wouldn't expect anything less" (Chang, 2009). Immersion in this sense moved away from the casual user's subjective incarnation as one of the movie's characters (or exploration of a potential metanarrative) to fan-participation. Thus, the site focused less on the extended point-of-view shot (and the intensity of assuming a character's vantage) and more, therefore, on a formalised, yet outrageous, presentation style. This style was designed to meet the requirements of the mainstream Quentin Tarantino fan (who had more currency than Robert Rodriguez), and less so therefore the subcultural fan factions that valued the grindhouse mode of exhibition (at least on the same personal terms as the filmmakers). But at a macro level, the website was designed to fit the requirements of an increasingly distracted broadband user.

Cinematic visualisation—still protected by some design agencies today as a core asset of the movie website, but I understand less so by studio marketers—was hence linked in no small part to the emergence of the latest video technologies of 2004 and 2005.

Display advertising and the Expandable banner

This section turns to the Hollywood studios' attempts to integrate the promotional extras used on movie websites with new forms of advertising designed to support their theatrical and home-video campaigns. It begins with a discussion of an industrywide shift in advertising towards broadband video. Web portals, social networks and online news and entertainment sites were reconfigured to support new forms of video-based advertising, and the Hollywood majors took advantage of this with better forms of display advertising. This trend was exemplified by the Expandable banner, which exposed website content to more casual, less-consumption-oriented audiences who visited the multiplexes less frequently and

spent less on home entertainment. The studios, therefore, did everything necessary to increase the visibility of their films in the home. They found new configurations in broadband-video and new ways of re-using online promotional materials to reach broader audiences, thereby increasing the coverage of their theatrical and home-video campaigns.

Display advertising became increasingly video-oriented after 1999. In the Broadband era, display advertising incorporated animated GIF imagery, low-quality streaming video and higher quality Flash video as indicators of quality presentation. New formats, such as the Superstitial, emphasised the transformative vertiginous potential of hypermedia; or rather, they demonstrated how appealing to young teenage niches with an ad format that effectively commandeered one's web browser for a brief period gave a blockbuster edge in an increasingly competitive advertising environment. Universal Pictures profited handsomely in publicity from the use of high-impact video and animation technologies. Since the late-nineties, its collaborations with various online companies, like MasterCard and ESPN.com, and agencies, such as Design Reactor, to further the development of rich media advertising resulted in awards for creativity and innovation (*The Hulk* and *Cat in the Hat*), in addition to generating high traffic volume to official websites (*The Mummy* films). With the further development and streamlining of video presentation formats in late 2004, together with an increasing interest in the actual marketing function of the banner advertisement and its potential for overhaul, the majors were instrumental collaborators once again in demonstrating the technological excellence of online video.

Advertising spend on video advertisements rose to $225 million in 2004, almost doubling to $410 million in 2005. In February 2005, an Online Publishers Association (OPA) study found that among 27,841 respondents aged 13 and over, 51 percent used online video at

least once a month, 27 percent watched internet video once a week, and five percent watched on a daily basis (McGann, 2005a). Dynamic Logic's 2005 survey into the use of various banner formats amongst 3,800 consumers offered more finite results for advertisers. The study measured the impact of the Unicast video advertisements on consumer brand awareness, message association, brand favourability and purchasing intent. Its key findings were unsurprising for a sponsored brand impact study (Unicast video ads, it found, are three times more effective at raising awareness than the average advertisement produced by less competitive companies), but its findings on the effectiveness of new media advertising compared to traditional media (specifically, television) are worth noting. The data suggested that video advertising was more effective on consumer engagement within ten seconds than a conventional television commercial was for a full 30 seconds (Kesmodel, 2006). In 2005, 21% of US buying agencies planned to prioritise video advertising, which accounted for approximately $640 million in advertising alone; however, the expansion was limited because only 30% of US publishers supported in-stream video (the most popular form of video advertising for consumers, emerging from the first years of broadband development) (Oser, 2005). Developments in third-party rich media, video and trailer technologies from firms such as Dart Motif, Point.Roll, Eyeblaster and Klipmart obliged many such publishers using the advertising formats of the early Broadband era to reconfigure their webpages to accommodate the new media of 2005. These developments introduced a new advertising format for the majors which they were keen to exploit for their films.

Of significance to the major studios were several decisions by executive management in the online news industry to authorise website redesigns. For instance, in its initial endeavour to draw more advertising revenue from the auto industry, *The New York Times* website launched a redesign of its key sections in January 2005, incorporating a new 336 X 280

standard pixel size for premiere placements on its dealer inventory pages and a photo slideshow on the homepage (McGann, 2005b). The site would be fully redesigned across all sections in early 2006. The *Village Voice*, a weekly in print with ambitions of becoming an online daily to migrate advertising revenue onto the web and hence accentuate its value, was relaunched entirely during the same month. Kara Walsh, the Vice President of *The Village Voice Online*, described how the New York newspaper's goal was "to increase our number of unique users, pageviews and impressions through a better advertising environment that will increase our overall ad revenues" (in McGann, 2005c). In addition to tempting new advertisers with a variety of Unicast and Eyeblaster rich media ad formats, the *Voice* radically increased its shopping and entertainment listings from 2,500 to 12,000. The trend towards broadband video, therefore, gave online news and entertainment sites the impetus to reconfigure their web environments and accept the evolving marketing function of the advertisements themselves. Indeed, following successful redesigns, both *The New York Times* and the *Village Voice* anticipated ad revenue increases of 50 percent. As the IAB commented in early 2005, "we recognise [that online video advertising] is a big opportunity since it gives marketers an easy way to transition their television advertising to online" (Greg Stuart, 2005 cited in Cohen, 2005).

Video was once more marketed as a solution for easing apprehension about the web and its "unreachable" audiences, and the majors were again targeted as potential advocate marketers. This was to be expected, for the studios were already accustomed to purchasing advertising space in *The New York Times* and *The Village Voice Online's* film and arts sections; but congruous with these transformations, they increased their total advertising expenditure as a means of asserting their online dominance. Before 2004, the studios spent $6.76 billion on advertising annually, of which just 1.3 percent was allocated on average to

internet marketing (Terdiman, 2004). According to an eMarketer report, *Hollywood Online: Getting the Big Picture*, the typical advertising budget had risen from 1 to 3.7% by 2006. However, these figures vary according to sources, with New Media Strategies founder and CEO, Pete Snyder estimating, for instance, that the studios committed as much as 15% to display advertising for the period (Variety, 2000; Chisholm, 2001; Hall 2002; Dobrow, 2006).

This discussion provides the context for some intriguing campaign strategies that emerged at the midpoint of the Broadband era. As noted above, one such strategy was display advertising, and the major film companies made exceptional use of a particular format called the Expandable banner. The Expandable banner is defined as a small web application that expands to a much larger window when activated by the user (see iMedia Connection, 2003). These Expandable banners focus the user's attention on a single advertising message but can contain additional extras and materials. It is used in support of the main campaign website because banners contain only limited amounts of information and/or content; they can only serve as gateways, or portals, to something larger and better tailored to the web. Design agencies are typically given more creative leeway with Expandables than they are with larger more expensive projects, so innovative designs, appeals and practices are not uncommon.

The Expandable moved through several phases and configurations. In film marketing, one useful example is the *Star Wars* Trading Cards and Miniatures promotion developed for Wizards of the Coast. Although it was designed specifically to promote *Star Wars* merchandise during the theatrical release of *Revenge of the Sith*, it is worthy of inclusion here for the series of appeals it made to film audiences utilising the new *Star Wars* film's

promotional materials. The advertisement used the distinctive *Star Wars* logo in an animated graphic which included a general appeal to "EXPAND YOUR STAR WARS EXPERIENCE." The ad used a drop-down window, which instead of presenting a trailer in the traditional custom, displayed a simplified menu containing links to the two promotions advertised. In this sense, the micro-menu resembled an ordinary splashpage in that it drew on the specific conventions of the poster appeal, the film/brand title, and exploratory links, imploring users to go deeper. The menu incorporated iconographic imagery from the movie, designed both to appeal to pre-existing fan factions and to familiarise neophytes and novices with characters, stars, and settings; the axes of gender and age were further divided by the characters and scenes depicted (the advertisement depicted the Yoda character in battle, while the menu presented Anakin Skywalker hovering over a defeated Count Dooku), and campaign rhetoric, which was skewed to younger teens on gaming or action terms ("Choose Your Battlefield"). The expanded menu window loaded the relevant content for the chosen sub-section (or battlefield), then expanded a complementary window to play other media. For example, users who selected the Trading Card Game were presented with cues to sample trading cards; when a card was selected "to see it in action" a brief 3 second clip from the new film was streamed into the secondary window.

There were two advantages to this format. Firstly, the expandable system—which literally expanded the window size allowing marketers to use larger video files and interactive options such as sound and playback controls—was first and foremost a space-saving initiative. Secondly, expandable micro-sites were adaptable to most web environments and web browsers, meaning that unlike an official website (with all the expectation that a site visit entailed) they were more conducive to intuitive and spontaneous behaviour. The latter was particularly significant in the *Star Wars* case study, which triggered a looped music file

to hold the interest of fan factions and casual consumers or neophytes who accidentally or inquisitively activated the advertisement whilst inspecting other areas of the webpage. The sample track in this case was the infectious Imperial March theme tune, which commanded a distinctive, high impact and *nostalgic* power for some Generation X and Y audiences.

This first example demonstrated the potential for overlap with the marketing function of the official website. The issue for *Star Wars*, however, was that the innovative stylistic techniques used to create a faithful *Star Wars* promotion risked subordinating the specific e-commerce appeal of the marketing message (i.e., to sell merchandise) to the film (i.e., a more predictable appeal to simply orient oneself with the medium). The question which the *Star Wars* example therefore raises for the Expandable model as a prospective web standard, is whether these new advertising types focused on goal-directed behaviours or nondirected experiential behaviours, as outlined by Hoffman and Novak (1996).

The second example, which seemed to take up this issue within a month of the *Star Wars* expandable's release, was the theatrical promotion for Warner Bros.' *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Tim Burton, Warner Bros., 2005, US/UK). This added another dimension which brought the marketing function closer in alignment with that of the traditional splashpage. While not strictly reproducing the content on the film's splashpage—which approached veritable "overload" by virtue of its streamed trailer, downloads, hyperlinks to character-specific webpages (subdomains in the *Chocolate Factory* directory), email newsletter and e-commerce appeals—the Expandable banner nonetheless drew on its conventions, prefiguring the model's alignment with the movie website in later examples. For example, the advertisement loaded a brief Flash introduction (which became a feature of splashpages in the Broadband era) before auto-playing the trailer (another web standard after

2001); and the expandable menu, in place of *Star Wars'* 3 second video clips, provided a content area for a range of applications: a picture gallery, AOL Instant Messenger icons, wallpapers and screensavers.

In my third example, *The Shaggy Dog* (Brian Robbins, Buena Vista Pictures, 2006) advertisement introduced an interactive feature which evoked the film's comedic premise of a man (Tim Allen) transmuting into the family dog. Children were invited to upload personal photographs into an image generator, which then "morphed" their young faces with the film's Tibetan Terrier and displayed the results in the advertisement space. The application evoked the parcel-size novelty appeals of the Dial-Up era, and the *Wedding Crashers* trailer discussed above specifically. What is involved here is not merely repetition or variation on a concept seen before, but changing assumptions about the types of audience that could be targeted around the web. As a mode of advertising the Expandable banner encouraged a spontaneous engagement. The initial, impulsive action (the act of rolling over an advertisement) was here extended into something more sustainable. The majors, in their role as the client, were keen to use these new forms of advertising to distribute some of the additional materials developed for movie websites to Yahoo, AOL and Microsoft Network audiences, in addition to many of the children's online channels (for instance, Nickelodeon's online site Nick, the target audience for which is children aged 9-14).

The Expandable model therefore demanded a different mode of engagement. As a marketing device it was conducive to acts of spontaneity, to impulse, and it therefore could be used to further the sales of films downstream, via online retailers and digital downloads. The industrial practice of establishing a reachable searchable domain, as both an official source for information about a film and an advertisement for home entertainment will continue as

long as corporations link domain names as "the crucial first point of product contact" with films (Jenkins, 2006a; Murphy, et al, 2003: 223). However, the continuing trend to redistribute original website content across a range of new media channels demonstrated an increasing need to bring the promotional extras of movie websites to more casual, less-consumption-oriented audiences who visited the multiplexes less frequently and spent less on home entertainment than the more motivated users of movie websites. By redistributing film content in various ways across numerous web environments—which have also included Real and the Cartoon Network, in addition to the networks noted above—the studios were in some respects discovering new configurations, and finding new ways of re-using online promotional materials to promote their films online.

There is no question that the major studios—who require of themselves that they be positioned at the forefront of ongoing technological developments for the fiercely competitive purpose of product differentiation—wished to exploit online video for their movie blockbusters and genre films. It is tempting therefore, given the perception that the marketers of filmed entertainment think only in terms of campaign strategy and leveraging audiences for commercial gain, to dismiss these new web technologies as merely trends with no textual permutations, but it became clear within several months of development (i.e., the first quarter of 2005) that video advertising provided an effective means for accentuating the value of the studio's film brands—and for increasing our points of contact with film in the home.

The research has argued the case that technological developments, structural changes in the industries, and an increased dependence on high impact imagery have altered aspects of the online marketing programme in the Broadband era. The following case study examines the

various components of the online campaign for the 2005 event movie *King Kong* in order to better illustrate these changes.

King Kong (Peter Jackson, Universal Pictures, New Zealand/US/Germany, 2005)

Director Peter Jackson's decision to manufacture his own promotional campaign for *King Kong*, using alliances which he had formed with key personnel during the making of his *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, ostensibly limited the studio (Universal) in its capacity as the official marketer. This curious situation presented a new paradigm for Broadband-era movie marketing: one which combined new forms of audience interaction with conventional content provision, viral video appeals with Dial-Up era event-making initiatives.

Of significance are several comments by Ken Kamis, Peter Jackson's agent and personal manager; Michael Regina, the co-founder of *TheOneRing* and editor of KongIsKing (*kongisking.net*); Marc Shmuger, the vice chairman of Universal Pictures, who has overseen the studio's global marketing and distribution practices since 2000; and Peter Jackson. According to Bing (2005b), Jackson suggested that the studio's conventional plan to launch an information-content model was inappropriate for his film. In a *New York Times* article (Johnson, 2005b), Shmuger described his "first conversation" with the director "about the dangers of [studio-based] overhype versus his desire to communicate how much he wanted to do justice to the original" [film]. Jackson objected to Shmuger's plan to launch the website six months before the film's release on the grounds that *King Kong* was not a conventional blockbuster, and therefore proposed his own method of self-advertising. Thus, the marketing arrangement finally breaks down as follows: the studio's online activities were limited to event-trailer exhibition, third-party promotions, display advertising and

standardised content provision for the official website; Jackson co-opted fan support primarily through the KongIsKing website.

KongIsKing offered the movie's early adopters a community aggregation point for studio-authorised, but not studio-executed, behind-the-scenes movie footage, news and community chat. Jackson contracted DVD producer Michael Pellerin (who produced on-set video diaries for *The Lord of the Rings*) to film "confessional" diaries on set, intending to retail a two-disc package in a stand-alone DVD before the film's release. He then agreed to send the organisers of TheOneRing production video twice-weekly, if they created KongIsKing, giving the site an official lead-time of fifteen months. This was, hence, romanticised "guerrilla filmmaking" conducted without the assistance of "one marketing person" from the studio (Thompson, 2005a). Jackson shrewdly asked his and *Kong* fans to submit suggestions for diary pieces and questions, which he agreed to answer, addressing the selected fan by name and revealing "how tough directing really is" in the course. Such personal attention from the director himself strengthened brand loyalties which gave his forthcoming Production Diaries DVD a competitive edge in the marketplace (from which, of course, he would directly profit).[9]

Universal's official website was developed and created by Jetset Studios, a Californian-based operation in West Los Angeles. It passed through several stages in its lifecycle, but in its primary teaser phase—i.e., the October/November version which went online before the film was officially classified by the MPAA—it served the singular purpose of a traditional

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[9] The two web campaigns were not divorced from each other. A KongIsKing link was included on the theatrical site in October; Nestlé's *King Kong* promotion also linked to both sites. Nor was Universal potentially "factored out" of the video materials. It had right of approval and all materials were scheduled for release through Universal Home Video in November/December; the agreement stipulated that all video be removed from the site two months before the DVD release (Thompson, 2007a: 163-164).

splashpage with no secondary level page design. The distinctive blue logo was situated

between a row of links and a release date banner ("IN THEATRES DECEMBER 14TH"),

set against a classic black background. It thus bore few of the hallmarks of contemporary

splashpages—such as social networking links, email registration, sponsor and third-party

logos, international language versions—and its emphasis on graphic imagery, in the form of

the title logo, was hence the quintessence of artistic minimalism. Though far from the

diametrical opposite of contemporary teaser launches—such as *War of the Worlds, Harry*

Potter and the Goblet of Fire (Mike Newell, Warner Bros., 2005, US/UK), and *Pirates Of*

The Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest (Gore Verbinski, Buena Vista Pictures, 2006)—this

deliberate regression to a non-photographic-based style of presentation (and information

provision) reflected the self-consciousness of a film that, as Vogler (1978) said of the 1976

remake, intended to deliver "something totally new" by virtue of its paradoxical return to

something "so old" (Vogler, 1978: 110).

Like the preliminary teaser version, the pre-release teaser website (online for the period

November/December) combined the contemporary marketing function of a splashpage with

that of the ordinary landing page (i.e., the page the user first sees when directed from

another site). It had two purposes beyond simple content provision. The first was to promote

the release of Peter Jackson's Production Diaries DVD; and the second was the explicit

promotion of the computer generated (CG)-character itself, in a highly circulated piece of

key art which underscored the creature's fleshy battle scars, the digital realism of its silvery,

matted hair, and a clear anthropomorphism. In light of Peter Jackson's fan interactions at

KongIsKing, and the highly inclusivist nature of these interactions, it was appropriate for the

studios' promotion to be managed accordingly, i.e., with transparency. Indeed, the previous

version of the site already presumed audiences had seen Kong in multiple contexts: over the

course of the film's 6-month production period, 90 short videos were posted on KongIsKing (Snider, 2006). The studio website assumed its audiences were predisposed to visiting official websites for materials of higher quality—far less hard-edged creations, in short, compared to the production video of a fansite. It therefore used the creature's CG-aesthetic as one of the most critical features of the film's brand identity. Thus, Kong appeared in all 6 of the site's wallpapers and the single screensaver.

This emphatic focus (but not in pro-filmic terms) on Kong's realist CG-appearance served to reassure an over-25 age group—which constituted the core audience according to *The Hollywood Reporter* (Fuson, 2005)—about the film's fidelity to the original *Kong* and even the modern revisions made for blockbuster audiences in the 1976 remake. Recapitulating the same appeals but via the promotional rhetoric of critics' reviews, the new splashpage created for the website's official theatrical launch on 14 December included a positive reviews feature and a trailer modified with similar early critics reviews. By virtue of their inclusion, the official site asked that *Rolling Stone, New York Post, Maxim, Newsweek* and *Access Hollywood* be seen as representative of *King Kong's* audiences in various ways—as "influencers," "predictors" of success or failure (Eliashberg and Shugan, 1997), and additionally, as signifiers of middlebrow taste. Thus the trajectory of appeals that this section has been charting suggests that *King Kong's* target audience was broadly adults in the 18-34 age group, with secondary audiences possibly in the 12-17 and the 35-54 age groups.

The terms of this audience address were given signal clarity beyond the splashpage. This third (and hence final to be discussed here) reconfiguration of the site used a new information architecture to organise a compelling amount of material for this more mature

demographic, and a compact Flash display to signify professional artistry for an event blockbuster. In this theatrical phase, the site's black background spaces were illuminated by directional floodlights, apparently originating from a small graphic of the Chrysler building sprouting from the top of the viewing window; this was extravagantly framed, bearing the period detail of Art Deco. The film logo, unmodified but downsized to fit with the specifications of the Flash file, was offset against the golden cubist abstractions characteristic of the site's new design, firmly contextualising the film within an early, twentieth century time frame and style. As the window loaded an eerie score lent to the mounting tension for expectant audiences who watched as the locked metal shutters of the interface slid back with accompanying sound effects. Thus, in its theatrical edition, Universal's official site attempted to both transcend its previous incarnations and couch the marketing appeal in the sort of historical context which was so heavily underscored in KongIsKing.

To that extent, the image concealed behind the shutters—Darrow in a deserted Manhattan street, approaching the great creature with awe and perhaps love—was a frank and self-reflexive acknowledgement: both a stylistic incarnation of a classic icon, and a tribute to the cinephiliac devotion of millions of fans. This slide between historical legacy and cinephiliac devotion was repeatedly underscored in its historiographic Special Features section. Arguably the most self-conscious content area in the hierarchy, this section of the site took as landmarks the film's moments of outright (marketable) excess (the island natives, its dinosaurs and distinctive insects). The Beastiary, thus, alluded to the dinosaur sequences intended for the original film and (less obliquely for younger audiences) recent creature movies (the zoological—specifically, arthropodological—nature of this section alluded to multiple past incarnations of *StarWars.com's* various Character, Droid, Species and

Creatures databanks). Similarly, The Skull Islanders five-part essay utilised a stylistic

anthropological approach as a means to strengthen the image of the island's savage natives.

If, as Vogler (1978) has noted, the "movie natives" of the 1970s version of *King Kong* (John

Guillermin, Paramount Pictures, 1976) were "shaped by several decades of cinematic

narratives" stretching back to the 1930s, the Special Features section of the site revealed

Jackson's film to be no different, using the objective language of an anthropological study to

reposition the natives of his film, and the films from which his draws, as historical subjects

belonging to a specific historical moment (1978: 110). This focus was later refined with the

addition of several concept applications: Lost Cities, Big in '33, and The *Kong* Legacy. Lost

Cities, while at first glance the most obvious concession to a younger teen audience,

assumed the user was at least informed enough to be familiar with Homer (although less so

his *Iliad*, or British author James Hilton); it supplied therefore an entry-level overview in the

form of an educational timeline called Vanished Civilisations and Mythical Places which

preceded *Kong's* own story (for he appeared on the timeline also). Pitched at a similar

audience, the Big in '33 archive appealed to audience interest in the film's specific historical

moment, combining news headlines ("THE BLAINE ACT ENDS PROHIBITION"), star

introductions ("KATHERINE HEPBURN: Known for her wit, sophistication, independence

and beauty"), and movie summaries ("DUCK SOUP: The very definition of satire"). Finally,

The *Kong* Legacy constituted the website's explicit homage to the original *King Kong*

(Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933) in the form of a full-text, non-illustrated

essay.

The website intentionally conflated the spectacle of familiar creature movies with clear

product differentiation in the form of a stylised CG-Kong. The site's most extensive

differentiation occurred in The Beastiary, where detailed arthropodological information

about, for example, the "carnictus" was intended for an identifiable audience who appreciated Jackson's earlier (*Bad Taste, Meet the Feebles, Braindead*) and perhaps later mainstream work (*The Frighteners, LOTR*) as horror parody. It also addressed audience members who wanted to see the *King Kong* story modernised, and perhaps one that was keen to see the original film's many restored and lost scenes reimagined in Jackson's hands.

The website's use of iconographic imagery was reproduced in the many third-party websites developed for the film. The clearest example was in Apple's dedicated trailer page (*www.apple.com/trailers/universal/king_kong/*) which used the campaign image of the CG-close-up, but in this "event-making" context as a full-page image. Users could download the theatrical trailer, teaser trailer and A Look Inside behind-the-scenes video file in four QuickTime sizes. Apple also used the *King Kong* promotion to launch the first official movie trailer for its fifth-generation iPod model.

Universal forged persuasive partnerships with Volkswagen, Kellogg's, Toshiba, Chase, the City of New York, Nestle and Burger King for an estimated value of $100 million. The first series of promotions described here were targeted at an under-25 age group. Each promotion incorporated an interactive world in its campaign which posited the appeal of *King Kong* as a film of mystery and wonder.

Pringles (Procter & Gamble) used two websites in its potato snacks promotion. Firstly, a King Kong Jump advergame site, *www.kingkongjump.com/*, was used. The game reconceived one of the film's key action set-pieces involving a stampede of dinosaurs. It, naturally, substituted dinosaurs for Pringles tubs and a gorge setting with a tree stretching to infinity. The gaming element matched the film's socio-cultural status as an event movie with

the gaming appeal of a group competition, intended for a young, playful audience. It thus

offered the option to "START A LEAGUE," and view a "GLOBAL RANKING" scores

system, which was clearly designed to foster competition between influential or provocative

users. Secondly, a dedicated *Kong* website, *www.pringles.com/KingKong*, was launched

with sponsorships from Toshiba, Ubisoft, Weta Digital and Gameloft. This included a single

content area for promotional materials (e-cards, a trailer, the Pringles TV Spot, concept art

wallpapers, a Pringles Kong-branded screensaver, and two games). The site was designed to

maintain a visual continuity with the film, combining generically familiar iconography from

the blockbuster film (shafts of sunlight, the widescreen) with important motifs from the film

(the dense jungle of Skull Island, noose-like hanging vines, Carl Denham's movie camera);

Kong himself was omnipresent, in that a growling offscreen voice frequently "shook" the

browser window.

Packaged foods company Nestlé. Nestlé branded packs of its Crunch, Baby Ruth and

Butterfinger bars with the *King Kong* logo and ran an online instant win game. Its dedicated

website, like the Pringles promotion, privileged certain aspects of the film's iconography

and story (for instance, the Manhattan skyline, or film exhibition circa 1933), which it

connected to moviegoing as a leisure activity (the graphic interface showed the interior of a

modern cinema which "screened" the trailer). The site used the typeface of the branded logo

for all of its links (the only film-specific content was a trailer) and included a text appeal

(i.e., which was not hyperlinked) for the Production Diaries DVD, which we were assured

was "IN STORES NOW!"

Burger King. Alignment with the film was based on the blockbuster's dimensions and

excesses: a "Kong-sized" appetite to match the scale of the modern movie blockbuster. It

provided support on the official Burger King website, which rebranded to include the signature screen shake caused by an encroaching Kong, and a mini-site containing screensavers, buddy icons and desktop images of film characters for teenagers.

Gameloft. Universal's Consumer Products Group negotiated a multi-year licensing agreement with Gameloft (a publisher and developer of mobile phone videogames, with distribution systems in over 65 countries), beginning with the launch of *King Kong*. Gameloft's fully sanctioned website, *www.gameloft.com/kingkong*, was, for reasons of brand continuity, based on the homepage of the second stage official website and hence had very little modification to acknowledge its younger users: thus, the site bore a black background, which was dominated by the blue logo and a smaller version of the close-up image of the creature. The sites content areas—The Game, Wallpapers, Ringtones—were designed primarily for older teenage boys, whose interest in the Movie game extended later to the Pinball game released in 2006.

To reach an over-25 age group, the campaign also partnered with electronics and auto industry companies.

Car manufacturer Volkswagen. Volkswagen began its *Kong* promotions six months before the film's release as part of an integrated online and offline campaign for the film's teaser trailer. The *King Kong* Roadblock telecast, which directed audiences to the Volkswagen website, was a simultaneous broadcast across NBC-U's nine networks, reaching an estimated audience of 109 million. Volkswagen's support was substantial, although online promotion was localised to the corporate domain and was not customised to the iconography of the brand. Most importantly, it hosted the online debut of the film's

trailer from June 27-29, which boosted site traffic by 100%. This was used as the springboard to launch an offline TV commercial for the Touareg *King Kong* Crew Vehicle, which was heavily promoted in the site's subdomain. The existing content area was renewed for the theatrical release, with character profiles of Ann Darrow, Carl Denham, and Jack Driscoll, and behind-the-scenes video.

Electronics company Toshiba. The company's involvement was limited to driving consumers to the specially dedicated website Capture The Beast, a promotional platform which combined sweepstakes competitions, film information and a *Kong*-related game to publicise its new 72" High Definition television and other products.

In October 2005, a sixth link appeared on the official website branded in the logo colours and enigmatically inviting audiences to "GET THE CARD." This promotional language is typically used in connection with e-cards which—prior to the splashpage fan art galleries, music videos, and social network marketing links of contemporary tentpoles—were key elements in a blockbuster's marketing focus on pre- and teenage audiences. The link took visitors to a credit card registration site for First USA Bank, which promised 0% introductory APR on its Limited Edition MasterCard—thus, combining the conventional rhetoric of blockbuster scale and blockbusterness ("Colossal Universal Rewards") with attractive incentives ("a USB Flash Drive with KING KONG content") for the purpose of credit card solicitation (and clearly, of young audiences of student-age). Lyons (2004), Roach (2004) and Pinto and Mansfield (2006 and 2007) have shown, for instance, the value of college students and graduates for credit card companies and financial institutions who regularly try to connect with consumers by exploiting brand loyalties. Since 45% of the *King Kong* audience on opening weekend were under the age of 25, Universal and First USA

appear to have had little problem branding the appeal indiscriminately for over-25 and under-25 age groups. Indeed, three TV-spots with PG-13 ratings appearing on the site at this time, suggested teenagers were part of the website's audience.

These promotions, therefore, made several assertions about the title character which emphasised their continuity with the official website. The Pringles advergame demonstrated an assumption that younger audiences were keen to see Kong behaving with characteristic, unsentimental abandon (thus, the creature thumped its chest and roared on the successful completion of each level), but it privileged the relationship between Kong and Ann Darrow as being more central to the story. Toshiba, Pringles, Kellogg's and Volkswagen's promotions avoided depicting the creature as a malevolent, destructive beast, but seemed to take as their focus, rather, an audience's fascination with the formidable creature's pathos. The movie's draw as an emotive character study thus provided an appropriate fit for the commercial agendas of several companies who used the brand to capture consumer loyalties and hence their business. The MasterCard campaign, which used an iconic image of the creature observing a sunset in one of the film's most sentimental scenes, was an exemplar. The emphases in this regard on treating the creature with dignity thus brings into relief the significance of using highly personalised corporate brands to personalise other corporate brands.

The objective of this case study was to provide an accurate and detailed overview of the various components used in the online marketing of an event movie blockbuster. In its theatrical version, the official website couched the marketing appeal in a historical context which was shared by the KongIsKing website. The latter gave users of the brand community an aggregation point at which to discuss and share behind-the-scenes footage and news. It

strengthened brand loyalties through the personal involvement of director Peter Jackson in order to promote a Production Diaries DVD, which collected all of the videos published to the website together in a high-definition disc set. The official website established strong continuities with previous film versions (available as DVD purchases through the Universal store) and offered in-depth archives on the character's historical legacy and the production design of the new 2005 version. These comprehensive studies offered web users material that took roughly an hour to fully explore.

The official website and the KongIsKing website were but two aspects of the campaign. Third-party websites also used key-art from the film and specially designed games to bring the brand to other, non-film-related audience constituencies. Another aspect was DVD display advertising, which was just as significant but which I cannot take up fully here in the research. In this area, the campaign used far less restraint to pursue new audiences who knew little about the film, or its status as a Hollywood event movie. The UK DVD release created by the London-based company New Media Maze, used animated images of Kong battling the film's V-Rex in numerous full banner, expandable banners and overlays, complete with lightning flashes and aggressive posturing on the part of Kong. Here, the advertising privileged audience interest in movie excess and hyperbole ("THE YEAR'S BIGGEST ADVENTURE," one set of Stateside banners proclaimed), providing a tactical counterpoint which complemented the two areas discussed in this section.

Niche-audience constituencies and *Snakes on a Plane* (David R. Ellis, New Line Cinema, Germany/US/Canada, 2006)

As indicated in the last section, the major film companies use their websites to find the best ways to strengthen consumer loyalties in order to profit from their custom in the home

entertainment market. The KongIsKing website benefited from the involvement of two existing brand communities linked to the previous film versions of *King Kong* and Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Through the efforts of its producers, and Jackson personally, the website repackaged and released all of the exclusive behind-the-scenes video made available on the website over the course of the film's production in the form of a new collector's item, the Production Diaries DVD, and profited by promoting it to fans as an emotional keepsake.

This section examines the effectiveness of harnessing these small brand communities in relation to *Snakes on a Plane*, a film which benefited from the expertise of the campaign strategists behind *The Lord of the Rings* films. For some, *Snakes on a Plane*, a film concept which was drawn by fan communities and ultimately greenlit for development by New Line Cinema, promised to provide a powerful new commercial template for social influence marketing and fan-based campaigning (IABUK, 2006a). Buzz for the film was generated by internet users who heard a rumour about a Samuel L. Jackson project before it was even properly conceived. This sparked a viral marketing campaign that involved community-based internet communications and user-created media without the benefit of any traditional media influence. When the film entered the development stage New Line Interactive adopted a familiar stance of pro-active engagement, encouraging fan creativity with a range of community features and supporting their efforts with a dedicated website. The film was released in August 2006, grossing $34 million in a maximum of 3,500 theatres (Box Office Mojo, 2006).

Critics measured the film's market performance as a box-office failure and a cult disappointment. It is in this respect that the internet's ability to leverage mainstream

audiences and therefore to influence the number of visits they make to cinemas was brought into question. Part of this problem stems from a confusion about (often ambivalence towards) New Line's online viral marketing campaign, which was believed by some to be on a scale far greater than it was in practice. *The New York Times*, for instance, emphasised New Line Interactive's role as a vigorous strategy group, orchestrating online anticipation as if it were controlling a universal web audience. The same article quotes Paul Dergarabedian, who makes no distinction between studio marketing and the daily practices of interpretative fan communities (Waxman, 2006). This both undermines the exceptional organic nature of word-of-mouth, and exaggerates New Line's contribution as the viral strategist.

I have three points about contemporary marketing that I wish to connect with the film. The first is to note that for many commentators, including the Internet Advertising Bureau, the strength of the film's word-of-mouth referral alone provided sufficient market visibility and brand awareness on which to base and devise future viral campaigns. For these marketers, the high rate of word-of-mouth referrals and web published fan fiction for the film provided an object lesson in pre-planned marketability—that is, to the extent that a film's title markets itself by virtue of its viral spread through existing fandoms and personal blogs. The increased visibility of blogging websites, together with the new popularity of video platforms such as YouTube, illustrates the extent to which networked computing has been transformed since *The Blair Witch Project's* success in 1999 (which inspired approximately 20 fan sites at the time). This higher visibility has enabled new forms of social connection and fan production. In film marketing, however, the concept of engaging consumers for the sake of engaging them seems in itself to have fogged the key function of viral marketing (which is to increase the theatrical and home-video sales of a movie). The expansion of the "brand-conscious, brand-visible" media environment of which Dobele et al., have spoken

enabled the migration of innovative advertising practices into other industries (Dobele et al., 2005). However, this has thrown into relief some of the claims of internet marketers. The IAB, for instance, reassured "all you FMCG [fast moving consumer goods] marketers out there" that "regardless of the product" "your brand can achieve the same bite as *Snakes*"— this before the film was released in cinemas (IABUK, 2006b). What I am suggesting here, is that for the IAB and some of its professional readership (and one suspects for movie executives themselves) it is enough to capture the imagination of key demographic pools in the contemporary market in order to lend some "social-scientific credibility, or at least a professional aura to marketer's judgements" (Miller et al., 2005). The majors have used the web consistently throughout its history to give film brands and film titles a competitive edge, and this helps to preserve the film in the public consciousness for its post-theatrical commercial life-cycle.

Second, the online campaign *did* follow specific strategic objectives to sustain the film's currency as a property with high want-to-see value, but studio-sanctioned marketing largely took a secondary role to fan-generated pre-publicity. New Line's key community elements—a film and soundtrack contest, a King Cobra sweepstakes, and a Snakes On Your Phone viral—were unveiled relatively late, although still early in the promotional strategy, in order to avoid any probable backlash or antipathy generated toward the film as a result of pre-existing buzz. Indeed, its teaser website, online three-and-a-half months prior to release, provided a simple graphic, a title treatment and a direct link to "FAN SITE OF THE WEEK." This guaranteed that the studio was monitoring web reaction extensively, but it also demonstrated an understanding of the public domain nature—the "open-source architecture"—of the web (Murray, 2004: 20). Secondly, rather than maximise non-grassroots interest in the film, the applications leveraged constituency markets within the

existing core audience: the soundtrack contest extended the film to potential consumer groups on the social networking site, TagWorld, who were perhaps more ideally centred towards the mainstream of teen and adult males; the sweepstakes addressed fans explicitly, emphasising the critical value of fan popularity within the borders of existing fan factions; and the VariTalk mobile phone promotion maximised the countercultural appeal of star Samuel L Jackson, helping to broaden the film's positioning to urban and ethnic minority audiences with investments in the actor as the star/celebrity of *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, Miramax Films, 1994) and *Shaft* (John Singleton, Paramount Pictures, 2000, US/Germany). This does not mean to say, therefore, that New Line did not foreground these strong viral appeals in its marketing strategy, or that the individual or cumulative impact of these applications barely influenced the core demographic; on the contrary, they met with success. But it is precisely my point that each viral component was designed, strategically, to cohere and co-ordinate multiple fan cultures whose members expressed interest and commitment to the movie. To that extent, the key elements which constitute its online marketing (the sweepstakes, the mobile promotion and the music contest) addressed not a homogenous web audience of everyone, but the ironic media fandoms that remained the studio's key concern throughout the campaign.

Although the *Snakes* campaign seems to lend itself to the problematic image of a studio seized by its own incapacity to monetise and multiply the potential benefits of positive cyberbuzz for theatrical exhibition, the film fell short of the reported industry projections by only $5 million in box-office terms. It earned $15.2 million on its opening weekend which was consistent with the performance of a medium-budget horror film (Waxman, 2006). However, with such valuable word-of-mouth on the web and free publicity coverage in the entertainment press, New Line admitted that its expectations had become "inflated."

Consequently, articles in the trade press and business periodicals questioned the appropriateness of word-of-mouth marketing[10]. Jenkins (2006c) and Thompson (2007b) rightly questioned these responses on their blogs. They cautioned that grassroots cyberbuzz was still significantly distanced from the mainstream—"a community used to speaking from the margins" still speaks from the margins (Jenkins, 2006b: 141-2). Finally, as this research has stressed throughout, movie websites have developed to support film's lucrative commercial life-cycle, and many commentators failed to progress beyond the film's exhibition on opening weekend to consider its appeal to new demographics on home-video.

In summary, the existing brand community, rather than the conglomerate Time Warner or its subsidiary New Line, created its own brand, giving it a narrative context and using multiple delivery systems to spread user-generated content such as key art, video and blog posts. In this case the film's associations with crass materialism, that is its commodification by a corporate entity (New Line Cinema) through merchandise commercialisation, were part of the general "joke," which means that it was unlikely that audiences rejected the film *because* the brand was developed ultimately into an actual film. Rather, the brand community's strong feelings of ownership towards the brand recall the potential dangers connected with retro-branding, as described by Brown et al., (2003) (introduced in Chapter One). Jenkins (2006b) has discussed the effects of reception practices and fan discourse with respect to the online transmedia experimentations of media producers and companies: "The old rhetoric of opposition and co-optation assumed a world where consumers had little direct power to shape media content, whereas the new digital environment expands their power to archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate media products" (150-1). The success of the *Snakes on*

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[10] See, *Business Week* (Helm, 2006), *Advertising Age* (Wheaton, 2006), *Inc.*, a daily resource for small businesses (Freedman, 2006), *Entertainment Weekly* (Pastorek, 2006; Rich, 2006) and the *Los Angeles Times* (Welkos, 2006; Netburn, 2006).

a Plane project modified this: consumers now have the power to create their own brands. The "schoolyard" excitement associated with the *Snakes on a Plane* campaign and the disappointment attached to its theatrical box-office indicate, nonetheless, a powerful and healthy community engagement with the brand and its marketing.

Conclusion

This chapter proposed that aspects of the online marketing programme were influenced by technological developments, structural changes in the film and internet industries, and an increased reliance on high impact imagery in the Broadband era. It provided an overview of the improvements in broadband connection speeds and national availability to establish a background to the expanding operations of large-scale companies like AOL, Google and Yahoo! which service millions of filmgoers worldwide. This focus moved the research necessarily away from movie websites to the film companies' other marketing activities with web portals such as Yahoo! Movies. The majors realised that they had to find the right audiences for film—which meant filmgoers who continued to consume and purchase home entertainment—in other areas of the web but wanted to control the use of their content online. This resulted in partnerships with high-profile internet companies and social media sites, like Yahoo! and MySpace. The majors tested these new delivery systems with ten minute preview clips and trailers for their members, but at the same time they looked for new ways to increase customer retention on their own websites.

The research examined the effects of these developments on website and non-website marketing practices. Case studies included *The Bourne Supremacy* interactive trailer, *Wedding Crashers* Crash This Trailer viral feature, The Sith Sense game and Trading Card Expandable banner for *Star Wars Episode III – the Revenge of the Sith*, and two banner

advertisements for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Shaggy Dog*. In summary, the case studies showed that customer retention was improved when the applications integrated viral components with brands that had broad universal appeal. The Expandable banner examples increased the visibility of new films, and their DVD releases, in the home, and were used to connect with internet users who did not visit the studios' main websites. The research then evaluated the various marketing practices—website and non-website components—used in the *King Kong* campaign to develop an understanding of how a Broadband-era event blockbuster communicates its message to multiple audiences. Finally,

Snakes on a Plane showed the strong collective power that brand communities have over brands they create. However, the group's size was called into question by the film's perceived underachievement at the box-office. Although the film performed according to New Line Cinema's projections for a low-budget horror film with one major star, the trade press, entertainment press and even some industry figures believed that the film had crossed-over to a more general audience through strong word-of-mouth and marketing. According to the box-office returns they were most likely wrong.

The Hollywood film companies accepted in the first years of the Dial-Up era that movie websites served their best interests in home entertainment, rather than in theatrical. The popularity of home-video in the Broadband era has tailored their websites more closely to the aesthetics of DVD. Movie websites are, of course, a form of Dial-Up era marketing transposed to the Broadband era. Once freed from the impositions of narrow bandwidth issues and risky internet connections that once impeded the growth of e-commerce, movie websites were expected to deliver on their initial promise—to become showcase centrepieces for the theatrical campaign, the "primary motivation driver(s)" which boosted

box-office revenues (Mohammed et al., 2003: 616). It was hoped that national improvements in broadband availability and faster connection speeds would yield more landmark sites like *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, Artisan Entertainment, 1999) or the community-building, five-year long web project that New Line Cinema created for *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Peter Jackson, New Line Cinema, 2001, 2002 and 2003, US/Germany/New Zealand), but they remained largely the exception to the rule. The major film companies continued to use Broadband-era websites fundamentally to profit from home entertainment and related merchandise. Their design, appeals and content reflected this.

Chapter Four: Prestige Films and Participatory Culture in the Broadband Era

Chapters Two and Three explored four research questions outlined in the Introduction. Why did the studios promote their films online? For whom were websites intended? Does the studio paradigm for website marketing support the marketing programme? Were motion picture websites an effective form of internet advertising? This chapter offers further discussion in relation to these questions and presents the final research question posed in the Introduction: How did the studios leverage the internet for films that were less ideally suited to a digitally networked environment? To address this question I have chosen to examine the prestige picture, which I believe to be a largely overlooked production form in the existing literature on online marketing.

Prestige films have been defined by researchers as a category rather than a genre. In the 1930s, Hollywood production was tailored for A-class feature films, often designed as star vehicles for the studios' contracted talent, and this was supported by a steady supply of B-class movies which were sold in blocks to exhibitors (Gomery, 1986; Schatz, 2008). To this mix the studios added the prestige picture, but due to the high production costs involved and the often enormous resources required to complete them, the studios only ever slated prestige pictures as occasional productions throughout the year (Maltby, 1995). Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) was perhaps the clearest exception, as it focused prestige production into a two or three picture per year system. For Balio (1993), the prestige picture was the most important production category of the 1930s. It encompassed different genres and trends (including musicals, women's films, comedies, social problem pictures and

biopics) and drew on well-known pre-sold properties such as best-selling books, plays and biographical studies. To enhance their profitability at the box-office, prestige pictures were designed and tailored for multiple film stars—Balio cites as an example the seventeen stars that appeared in three MGM films: *Grand Hotel* (Edmund Goulding, 1932), *Rasputin and the Empress* (Richard Boleslawski, 1932) and *Dinner at Eight* (George Cukor, 1933). Additionally, prestige pictures involved lavish set design, elaborate special effects, and extended running times.

Cagle (2007) has discussed the prestige picture in the context of the industry's changing fortunes after the Second World War. He refers to an industrial mode, which describes the type of prestige picture produced by the studios in the 1930s, and a socially-defined mode, which reflects a new post-war emphasis in the production cycle of prestige pictures, one largely determined by the middle-brow sensibility of the popular audience. The prestige picture, therefore, was forced to break out of its 1930s industrial mode, forming two new categories of prestige: the big-budget epic spectacle and the low-budget social problem film. This was caused by the Paramount antitrust decree in 1948 which required the studios to sell their theatre chains, and by a broader cultural legitimisation of cinema which occurred throughout the 1940s boosting the industrial development of low-budget films such as the social problem movie. The post-war prestige pictures Cagle describes had several themes in common: they promoted the public face of the studio; they received endorsements in the popular press and "disproportionate recognition" from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; and they were promoted through screenings for community groups and other niche audience constituencies (2007: 8). In addition to producing their own large-scale prestige films and lower-budget social problem films, the studios also used in-house independent producers who developed low-budget B-class films into mid-budget prestige

pictures with strong box-office success. Examples of prestige epics include the three

Twentieth Century-Fox pictures *The Robe* (Henry Koster, 1953), *The Sound of Music*

(Robert Wise, 1965) and *Hello, Dolly* (Gene Kelly, 1969); social problem film include *The*

Lost Weekend (Billy Wilder, Paramount Pictures, 1945) and *No Way Out* (Joseph

Mankiewicz, 1950); and in-house independent production include *The Naked City* (Jules

Dassin, Universal-International, 1948) and *The Farmer's Daughter* (H.C. Potter, RKO,

1947).

Since the 1950s the line between prestige pictures and A-class films has become

increasingly blurred. Neale (2003) notes that there may be a degree of truth to the suggestion

that within the prestige category the tradition of epic spectacles was "swept aside" by bigger

budget blockbusters which grew in commercial importance (as discussed in Chapter One) in

response to changing market conditions (2003: 53). However, the prestige category has not

disappeared. It exists in the genre films, high-budget blockbusters and low-budget

independent/semi-independent productions which pass through the distribution arms of the

Hollywood majors. Today, the clearest examples of prestige picture originate in the

Indiewood sector of the Hollywood system. "Indiewood," the term coined in the 1990s to

denote a system of independent film production with close ties to the Hollywood studios,

now refers to a small number of specialty divisions/producers established by the majors to

produce semi-independent and "art-house" cinema for their distribution wings across

multiple platforms. In his *Indiewood USA* (2009b), King defines the Indiewood sector as an

industrial/commercial phenomenon, and locates its "institutional base" not in the

independently owned mini-majors of the Broadband era (such as Lionsgate and MGM) but

in the new studio-created subsidiary (Sony Pictures Classics, Fox Searchlight and

Paramount Classics) and the studio acquired independent company (for example the

formerly independent Miramax which is now owned by Disney, or Good Machine which

Universal merged with USA Films in 2002 to create its arthouse film division Focus

Features).[11] In recent years, a range of successful Indiewood productions have been

identified with the prestige picture category. In a *Salon* article titled *Hurray for Indiewood!,*

Andrew O'Hehir (2006) suggests that prestige picture production is now the central business

aim of all the Hollywood specialty divisions. Prestige picture production, therefore, remains

a highly prioritised production category. The Hollywood studios possess the resources and

operations to develop big budget epic spectacles in the traditional prestige mode, but they

continue to benefit from particular sectors of the independent/semi-independent market

which rely on their distribution arms to reach audiences and which are now partially

integrated into the Hollywood system as semi-autonomous Indiewood divisions (King,

2009b). Examples include *Capote* (Bennett Miller, Sony Pictures Classics, 2005), *Little*

Children (Todd Field, New Line Cinema, 2006) and *Little Miss Sunshine* (Jonathan Dayton

and Valerie Faris, Fox Searchlight, 2006).

This chapter aims to generate knowledge of online marketing practices for this specific

production category. As noted above, the prestige picture and its online marketing has not

been addressed at any significant length in the marketing literature. I aim to gain a clearer

understanding of the special methods and appeals used on their websites by textually

analysing them for the narratives they encode. The chapter does not include empirical

research on the effects of these websites on actual web users because the study's focus is on

producer-created promotional materials and the role they play in sustaining the life-cycle of

Hollywood films. This methodology follows that of primarily Lisa Kernan's *Coming*

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[11] This strategy of assimilation can be traced back beyond the formation of classics divisions in the 1980s to the studios' use of (as noted above) in-house independents for new product in the 1940s (Balio, 1993; King, 2009b). After divorcement the studios provided studio space, finance and

Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers (2004) but also recent works such as

Jonathan Gray's *Show Sold Separately* (2010).

Although this study crosses two periods in internet history, the case studies for this chapter

are drawn from the Broadband era (approximately 2001 to the present) exclusively. It was

felt that the different marketing strategies developed and tested by the studios during the

course of the Dial-Up era (1994 to 2001) had become by the Broadband era established

practices with certain continuities, therefore, internet promotions were firmly embedded in

the larger promotional network across all sectors of the film industry. It examines the

official websites of four films. Two of the films examined were developed and co-produced

with the studios, and two were marketed and distributed by studio-owned specialty

divisions. These films are *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Rob Marshall, Columbia Pictures, 2005), a

lavish production adapted from the novel by Arthur Golden; *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan,

Warner Bros., 2005), a political thriller which blurred classical boundaries by placing its

emphasis on authorial expressivity (Staiger, 1985: 373); and in a comparative study, *Capote*

(Bennett Miller, Sony Pictures Classics, 2005, US/Canada) and *Infamous* (Douglas

McGrath, Warner Independent Pictures, 2006), two biographical films loosely based on the

books *Capote* by Gerald Clarke and *Capote: In Which Various Friends, Enemies,*

Acquaintances and Detractors Recall His Turbulent Career by George Plimpton.

Marketing Eastern culture in Rob Marshall's *Memoirs of a Geisha*

In this section I analyse the official website developed for the domestic market and turn to a

range of international websites which were also developed specifically for non-US

audiences. I relate this analysis to a broader discussion concerning Hollywood's view of

distribution services to independent productions as an alternative to the studio system of production,

itself as the leading global producer (and taste-setter) of prestige pictures. A sub question which developed from the research involves whether marketers merely replicated pre-existing Orientalist discourse (as defined by Edward Said) or whether the internet's unique reach marked a new phase in the way that global media shapes and constructs ideas of ethnicity.

In 1999, pop icon Madonna appeared on the CNN show Larry King Live using Arthur Golden's novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* as the springboard for her latest cultural transformation. She appeared again on the cover of the February edition of Harper's Bazaar, presenting herself as an emblem of New Asian chic (Mehren, 1999). Earmarked "Geisha Glam" by *Entertainment Weekly* writer Clarissa Cruz, the fashion cycles which Golden's novel inspired included not just Madonna's geisha transformation, but also "exotic" trends from Jean Paul Gaultier, Prescriptive and Chanel (Cruz, 1999). The cycle expired well before 2005, but similar connections were established with Japanese culture and the global market by the movie's official partners when Rob Marshall's film adaptation came to market. This narrative is significant for the online marketing campaign as the marketers created a website which sheltered the film from the glare of this Geisha Glam. Of significance here is the fact that the US website was reproduced without content changes (other than for translation) for different language markets around the world: Asia Pacific, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East and Africa. With this in mind, the marketers developed an accessible website, the core elements of which—text, imagery and downloads—were intended for international audiences on a global scale.

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and these collaborations resulted in prestige pictures (see Balio, 1985).

The website was designed to captivate online audiences with its opulence. The loading screen animation began with a single stroke of ink, drawn from a *fude* (a large brush used in Japanese calligraphy), which pulled discreetly across frame as if by an unseen digital ghost. It vanished into black, to materialise again as a full character in bold red colour beneath the title: "Memoirs of a Geisha." Encroaching from the darkness: a detailed photograph of a *geiko* half-knelt in a regal pose before an audience of admirers, a parasol tilted behind her flattened, upturned hand. As the image set, a line of text emerged at the foot of the page— hyperlinks labelled in English, tempting further investigation. It was proposed, from this front page alone, that *Memoirs of a Geisha* is a film of supreme elegance and high-level artistry.

Of the four films discussed in this chapter, the *Memoirs* website celebrated aesthetic generalisation and artistry as the defining component of its promotional appeal. Designed by DNA Studio (before the agency's subsequent purchase by WhittmanHart), it was an all-Flash, full-colour website embedded in the browser window (this was in itself an exception to the rule of pop-out windows). This meant that users saw a full-screen image as opposed to the compressed, windowed environments that characteristically suited the computer-literate internet user who was adept at multitasking numerous open browser windows, tabs, email applications and image/video viewers. The template was black, and there was no formal text-based or video introduction. Six menu options were available from the homepage: Story, Cast and Crew, Production Notes, Downloads, Video, and Photo Gallery. The menu was presented horizontally across the bottom of the webpage. When users selected a new page within the site hierarchy this initiated a sophisticated page transition which involved three processes: the backgrounds and page elements turned black; the loading bar appeared;

when loading was completed, the title logo emerged from the black, followed by the requested page.

Web technologies were therefore used sparingly on the site, moving site visitors away from the gimmickry of automatic downloading (streaming video) towards a coffee table book look, grounding the site in a middlebrow aesthetic. (Not coincidentally, a hardcover book, *Memoirs of a Geisha: A Portrait of the Film* by Peggy Mulloy and photographer David James, was released with 150 colour images.) The clear absence of musical accompaniment was also significant. While the site provided an excellent opportunity to sample key tracks from the original John Williams score (one that is rarely squandered by the marketers of prestige pictures), the key emphasis remained on the seriousness of simply looking. The marketers did not seem to want to inspire a cinematic experience for site visitors by allying sound, or video, with imagery. They preferred a soundless, contemplative, meditative register. Thus, on first inspection, the *Memoirs* website offered to those who may have read the book, or seen but not read it, an elegant and importantly adult cinematic experience.

This selling of the film as an artwork for the eye, to be regarded thoughtfully and without the fanfare of audio-visual sensation, continued throughout the site's other web pages, which offered little variation on the same design. J P Telotte has noted that the electronic marketing for horror films in 1998 and 1999 followed a simple design template: "replicating the films' key advertising graphics against red or black backgrounds, [these websites] seem like little more than electronic posters" (2001: 34). While black background colours did indeed set the tone for countless genre movies ranging from *Deep Blue Sea* (Renny Harlin, Warner Bros., 1999, US/Australia) to the *Scream* films (Wes Craven, Dimension Films, 1996, 1997, 2000), website designers working in other disciplines adopted the colour

because it provided a stylish alternative to the black-on-white arrangement of standard browser pages and search engines. The *Memoirs* site (neither a horror nor a fantasy adventure) followed this rationale. The main images that appeared throughout the site were vignettes which blended classically with the background. Such minimalism appeared to be consistent with universally accepted cultural indicators of Japaneseness—a decorative elegance with connotations of nobility and cultural refinement. The allusion to Japanese Noh plays, which are characteristically played out against a decorative backdrop with very few props and no scenery, is suggestive in this regard. Contrasted to Mogulsoft's website for *K-Pax* (Iain Softley, Universal Pictures, 2001, US/Germany), for example, which dazzled viewers with a convulsive, agglomeration of colours, text and looped dialogue mixed to music, the *Memoirs* site appeared to be little more than a repurposing of the conventional press kit—it seems the traditional features of contemporary movie websites had been discreetly withheld, perhaps for reasons of artistic legitimacy.

The website did not, therefore, require a high level of proficiency on behalf of its users in order to navigate it, nor a familiarity with the web's community-oriented social mechanisms. Since it was designed in such a way as to limit user interaction as well as brand participation (a point to which I shall return), site users did not, on entry, have to scramble for a mute button to silence disagreeable music, nor were they obliged to visit a bulletin board on the site hierarchy in order unlock certain sections of the website previously concealed to non-members. The *Memoirs* website assumed no such participation on the part of its audiences. There was, therefore, no agency effect, no sense of group participation surrounding the release of the film, nor its post-release during which time consumers could share reactions or criticisms about the novel's translation to the screen.

In addition to providing visitors relief from the juvenile world of the web outside, the generic spaces of the site insulated users from the other marketing campaign running in parallel, which involved corporate partners such as Banana Republic, high-end cosmetics firm Fresh, and Republic of Tea. Indeed, the promotional experience of *Memoirs of a Geisha* in the material world was radically different. Fresh cosmetic stores sold bath soaps enriched with "the sensual allure of the geisha," their display counters and walls adorned with cherry blossom pink posters of star Zhang Ziyi and bottles of Eau de Parfum (Lin, 2005). Consumers learned of the film, how it looked, through the various commodities for sale in hundreds of retail department stores around the country. A bath product, candles, or geisha make-up set, did not offer insight, did not, importantly, contribute to the storytelling, and since, as consumer items, they each drew on stereotypes of Japanese mystery, exoticism and eroticism, they did not necessarily deepen consumers' understanding of the geisha lifestyle. They essentially bridged the "participation gap" as peripheral items, "trends" brought to the high street in order to reach the very audiences who did not use the internet for home-shopping services, nor possess the skills to do so (Jenkins, 2006a: 23).

The *Memoirs* website it seems abstained from this conventional work, rendering unnecessary the high street, its brands, its consumer way of thinking. To allow a connection between the official website and an outside advertisement for a Geisha Beauty Face Palette would likely have undermined the air of carefully staged seriousness that characterised the website. It might also have diverted site users into a retail mode, which the film's producers, and presumably Rob Marshall, were less keen to encourage (specifically before the film's subsequent home-video release). The website's aim may have been similar, that is to sell the world of the film, its characters, and, hence, the lifestyle, the quality, the sensuality of being a geisha—but its main job was, fundamentally, to uphold the film as art, to impress so much

that neophytes viewed the film as a signifier of quality (Jonas-Hain, 2005). If the Geishaisation of the country existed as a concept or project for retailers, the website's developers would have us believe that project operated externally, independently of the website.

If the retail spaces of the high-street were anathema to the website (and, it is suggested, also its users), similarly, the two-way, communications world of the web belonged with the clutter of modern America as well. Historically, the websites for film adaptations with built-in audiences invited a level of viewer interaction that bordered on connoisseurship—with such connoisseurship being particularly well served by two-way web communication. The book on which *Memoirs of a Geisha* was based spent 2 years on *The New York Times* bestseller list, establishing a level of awareness before the film's release that was similar to *The Da Vinci Code* (Ron Howard, Columbia Pictures, 2006)—which also became a Sony production in the following year. The website for *The Lord of the Rings* films encouraged an open, two-way dialogue with its enormous cross-section of users by incorporating ICQ and AOL instant messaging services into its web strategy (in addition to subscription email services). The official website for *The Claim* (Michael Winterbottom, United Artists, 2000, UK/France/Canada), in reconciling the mismatch between the web and Thomas Hardy's late nineteenth century Wessex novel on which the film is based, invited site visitors to do more than lurk in cyberspace, essentially offering the privilege of monitoring a modern production online and watching over its assembly. Both examples demonstrate the ways in which film adaptations, or films with publishing tie-ins, accommodated through their electronic marketing the more sophisticated, modestly cine-literate filmgoer. Marketers benefited by leveraging such connoisseurship on the web, and in doing so potentially extended the life-cycle of film for consumers.

Notwithstanding the initial newsletters service (which was established for interested subscribers in the month running up to the site's official launch in August 2005), the only other claim to connoisseurship on the existing *Memoirs* site was made in the provision of the downloadable Production Notes, made available as a PDF file for site users and totalling 23 pages in length. By contrast, the official websites for *Titanic* (James Cameron, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1997) and *The Perfect Storm* (Wolfgang Petersen, Warner Bros., 2000) pointed interested viewers towards the video downloads sections (replete with behind-the-scenes material, later to be recycled as DVD supplements), asking that both films be read in terms of their digital-effects firsts. In keeping with the broader stylistic decision to avoid any kind of sensorial overload, the *Memoirs* site offered the most fundamental background information on the production via the production notes file, and did not, therefore, stream video. In this respect, the site invited its visitors to become connoisseurs, though not on the same level of scholarly connoisseurship that users once saw on display in *The Lord of the Rings* message board forums. The notes offered, for example, some insight into the preparations made for the film, but with a journalistic sophistication that matched the tradition of glossy moviebooks for *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, DreamWorks, 2000, US/UK), *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, Warner Bros., 2005, US/UK) and *The Lord of the Rings*. The presentation appeared to stress reading-for-connoisseurship, and the invitation itself was intended as transactional: the visitor "acquired" connoisseurship by showing an active interest in the film's production history. However, the content of the Production Notes was less distinctive, straying infrequently from the mainstream, or the low-cultural, into a more serious, or reflective mode. Many references to the actors' training and research, for instance, were linked to soundbites praising their accomplishments, bolstering the film's status, its artistic legitimacy.

Thus the website asked that we forget the audio-visual distractions that characterised less meditative movie websites, like *The Lord of the Rings, The Da Vinci Code, Starship Troopers* (Paul Verhoeven, TriStar Pictures, 1997)*, K-Pax, Titanic* and *The Perfect Storm*. It moved us as visitors beyond the realm of the ambitious, two-way communications environments that typified the external digital world, toward a more traditional, immersive environment that was based almost exclusively on visuals, with little site-to-visitor interaction; it avoided making connections with promotional partners, for this may have undermined the inscrutable effectiveness and aesthetic value of the website; and it differed from other sites by being less accessible, crafting a low-key experience that required a modest attention span. It effectively shielded users from the elite consumers of the web, and the skills they have acquired to master it. The emphasis remained, therefore, on conventional presentation and not consumer participation, on the act of looking as opposed to electronic social interaction, on the simple processes of familiarising oneself with the refinement and beauty of the film. This simplicity of design, its textual universalism, eased the transition of the original North American model into a different context, a global context.

De-localised and Localised Web Marketing

> If the coming story in film is globalisation, *Memoirs of a Geisha* may one day be seen as a movie at the tipping point.

> (Anne Thompson, 2005b)

In her essay *Webs of Conspiracy*, Jodi Dean (2000) debates, and concludes by finally overthrowing, the assumption that the web as a mass communications medium is a utopian forum for the democratic voice of the public. I point to this study here, not for the results of

its conclusion, but because of what Dean says about our other commonplace assumptions regarding the web as a site for excesses, limitless contacts, inclusive fun: "in traditional media representations, these excesses produce a flattening of distinctions between authorised and unauthorised, official and covert, expert and amateur … that seems to threaten reason, and the bounded stability of the nation" (2000: 63). The web, she argues, is perceived as a threat because it evokes an ideal, the ideals of inclusion, of limitless accessibility, of universality (74). I will turn to this latter point regarding national stability later, but for now, I wish to frame the remainder of this section with this ideal in mind—the ideal of the web as an inclusive communications space for the geo-targeting and the de-localising of non-Hollywood products. Whether or not the flattening of distinctions, to which Dean refers, does occur in the minds of the general public does not concern me; what interests me is the influence this ideal, this opening up of the web to international non-Hollywood products, has on the electronic marketing of the prestige picture.

Some stylistic elements of the *Memoirs* website, and many of the downloadable materials which were available in the North American version discussed above, were repurposed by the studio and published to several networks in foreign territories. It followed three campaign plans. Where it chose not to launch alternative language versions of the domestic website (referred to hereafter as the theatrical model), it collaborated with regional entertainment companies in carefully selected foreign territories. These websites supplied basic background information about the film and standardised extras which were routinely shared in the Broadband era between studios and web portals (such as Yahoo!, discussed in Chapter Three). These sites serviced audiences in Norway, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro, Finland and Chile, and, in presentation terms appear to have no association with the signature advertising graphics of the official website. In similar fashion, the film's

theatrical distributor in Italy, Eagle Pictures, created a webpage in a subdirectory on its website, although this page (a small text-based content area with no *Memoirs* branding) has since been closed down.

In the second approach, Sony co-ordinated its international divisions to link with an English language international version of the site. This was identical to the theatrical model. Since the level of participation, as I have argued for the theatrical model, was limited for users and the content itself (we might call this "communal media," to borrow Henry Jenkins' term) was purely functional, the marketing team could easily circulate the theatrical model on a global scale without incurring additional expense via the customisation of these sites. *Memoirs of a Geisha* advertising featured prominently (employing the key art used for the Stateside poster campaign, discussed below) on Sony's international corporate sites for several markets on the East Asian peninsula, notably Indonesia and Malaysia. These advertisements linked to the English language international site. There were three exceptions to this pattern. A German-language version; a version for Hong Kong audiences in traditional Chinese; and a version in simplified Chinese for mainland audiences. In these instances, the theatrical model was localised to the specific market. For example, Sony hired Beijing visual design company Kuanhang to localise the theatrical model for the Chinese market—a process which Kuanhang actually referred to, in the firm's now unavailable website for international clients, as "website Chinesisation." This involved simply converting the product mark (the film title) and all text embedded in the Flash interface into simplified Chinese. Therefore, these versions differed from the theatrical model only in their translation, maintaining an identical information infrastructure, visual display, and the same assumptions about audience participation.

In the third approach, Sony designed and produced original websites for three key East Asian markets. A second Chinese-language website was developed for Taiwan, one of the key Asian markets where the number of film imports from Hollywood, Hong Kong, Asia and Europe (288) heavily outnumbered the number of local productions (26) in 2005 (Davis and Yeh, 2008: 10). The site, which framed the film's key art in a luminescent red surround, included a trailer and a small content area. The Sony Pictures logo was displayed prominently both above the mainframe and beneath it (a copyright disclaimer and a link to the Sony Corporation were also included). The two websites produced for the Japanese and Korean markets, however, represented an interesting case of regional customisation. Both have been deleted, although I have been able to see some marketing materials used for both campaigns.

In the case of the Korean website, the differences in the mode of consumption—although less so in subject-matter—appeared to be substantial. The splashpage reconstituted the coffee-table book aesthetic of the original model for the Korean web user. It did not, for instance, concede the original design specifications, or the formatting of the content specifically—a decision which enabled thematic continuities, such as the black vignetting and the silvery-grey font, across the majority of *Memoirs'* international websites—however, these specifications seem to have been adapted to fit within an enduring stylistic tradition, one that has taken root in South Korea due to its globally renowned broadband infrastructure (Min, 2009). The key art poster of Zhang Ziyi which adorned the website splashpage was, for one, accentuated in accordance with this tradition. As the page loaded, Zhang's beautiful features emerged femme fatale-like from the darkness. The whole screen was filled by her image, exciting the imagination, the result being that users might detect previously hidden depths in the essential two-dimensional, pale flatness of her face. After the film credits, title

and release date appeared in Hangul script, a cherry blossom drifted into frame from the right of screen, followed by dozens more. At each return of the ensuing movie loop, the single blossom invited another falling cascade.

For the Japanese market, a localised version of the *Memoirs* website evidently required a more tactful approach. The 3 minute and 15 seconds-long *Sayuri* trailer (the official title of the film for Japanese audiences) was designed specifically for the Japanese market, and was perhaps understandably more structurally coherent (the US theatrical trailer, still available online, has a 2 minute 33 second running time); it also demonstrated more restraint at the level of narrative, and narrative pleasures, by delaying the delivery of action sequences (such as the fire that erupts in Sayuri's lodgings during the film) and foregrounding the obvious artful details and opulence of the geishas' lives. In this instance, the original model apparently lacked the cultural authenticity (the storytelling elements that triggered identification with Japanese cultural identities and aesthetics) to satisfactorily distance the subject matter from the consumer-mainstream. This was certainly a key factor when the film played in Japan to mixed reviews and disappointing box-office figures. Located in a subdirectory on the film news site *Movies.co.jp* (*www.movies.co.jo/sayuri*), the *Sayuri* website was far removed from the brand continuities that were so rigidly maintained on other versions of the theatrical model. The colour coding, for instance, moved away from the black and red design of the established brand—a colour scheme that signified, in web marketing terms, the hard sell—to an equally formulaic, de-saturated canvas of browns, calligraphic blacks, yellows, and maroon. The register was, hence, low-key; across national cultural boundaries it was deliberately premodern. The splashpage, which featured an

underused image in the Stateside promotion of the young Zhang cradling a parasol,[12] was

reminiscent in tone of the romantic melodrama and the traditional tragedy, wherein such

generic, characteristically feminine virtues as chastity, altruism, hospitality and subservience

become some of the key concerns of the master narrative. In using this graphic for the

website's splashpage (the one component in the site architecture that visitors to the page

were guaranteed to all see), it was hoped that any hint of a perceived pan-Asian identity

would be erased by the archetypal image of a premodern (and one has little reason to think

otherwise) Japanese woman. It was not, for example, immediately clear that the featured

actress was Zhang Ziyi, since her head is bowed courteously in the image; indeed, the supra-

sensual dimension of the original key art (which was foregrounded in the intimate spaces of

the Korean webpage particularly clearly) was absent here. It is as if the marketing was

attempting, in projecting a radically different image of Japaneseness, to underplay *Memoirs'*

well-established brand identity in the Western marketplace, an identity which was based on

the image of a beautiful woman meeting and holding our gaze.

The above examples demonstrate the ambition of the global online marketing campaign. In

addition to establishing a range of sub-sites and promotional add-on webpages in some

foreign, mostly European, countries, the marketing team circulated tailored duplicates of the

original *Memoirs* model in territories throughout Asia and Latin America, including Brazil,

Korea, Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan. These tailored variations offered the same pleasures

of looking, reading-for-connoisseurship and experiencing the prestige of high culture (the

selling of the middlebrow as high art) that domestic audiences in the States similarly

enjoyed, with the emphasis, again, being on looking, and on visual pleasure itself. With this

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[12] This image was used in Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong. It appeared less frequently in the States, where it was synonymous with the Fresh cosmetics campaign.

global context now established, I turn finally to the subject of our collective gaze: the imagery in which the website invested so heavily.

Style: Imitation and Allusion

The term Orientalism, used to describe constructions of the Orient as feminised, ineffable, exotic, erotic, weak or archaic, refers to a cinematic tradition of films which are either produced by the West or indulge pre-existing Western perceptions of the Orient. All Orientalist texts ultimately serve, or are motivated by, the imperialist powers of Europe and America. Edward Said's 1978 book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* is a seminal account in this regard, but scholars in the West and within the People's Republic have criticised Said's definition, refocusing the term to include different forms of orientalism (on the grounds that the Orient itself orientalises) and counter-hegemonic representations (produced of the Orient by the West). Said's essential point, however, is still relevant. Western depictions distort the realities of life in the Orient, reducing Asia as a geographical concept (comprising forty different countries and thousands of islands) to one monolithic, homogenous culture; even when Western writers, artists, or in this case filmmakers, visit Eastern countries, the Western-centric model of an Asian monoculture changes only very slightly. That orientalist mapping of Asia, the construction of an Oriental image that exists outside of history, persists in the advertising of *Memoirs of a Geisha*. If the website placed its emphasis on craftsmanship, reducing the overall spectator/user experience to the act of merely reflecting on its elegance and finesse, the film by virtue of its marketable elements linked this to a variety of stylistic choices, notably the look of its lead actresses, its extras of "light-skinned Asians," and its hand-embroidered, hand-woven high-end kimonos (Wallace, 2005). The director Rob Marshall made this statement as it appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*: "I'm not doing a documentary of the geisha world, this is a fable.

I'm very proud of an international cast. It is a celebration of the Asian community [and] I think it brings the world together" (Marshall cited in Wallace, 2005). Filmgoers and book fans were expected to join in with this democratic celebration in good faith.

As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have found, "the global politics of difference established by the world markets is defined not by free play and equality, but by the imposition of new hierarchies, or really by a constant process of hierarchisation" (2000: 154). The Hollywood studios are constantly engaged in this process of hierarchisation. In light of the Stateside success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, Sony Pictures Classics, 2000, Taiwan/Hong Kong/US/China), and Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, Miramax Films, 2002, Hong Kong/China) and *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou, Sony Pictures Classics, 2004, China/Hong Kong), the majors have attempted in recent years to fund and distribute Asian films for eastern as well as western audiences. With *Memoirs*, Sony found a competitive edge to bring Oriental exotica and pan-Asian imagery to a global audience, more pointedly to the East Asian peninsula.

I am, therefore, thinking beyond the limits of the People's Republic of China itself, whose six thousand cinema screens did not appear to command much incentive for the Hollywood majors to cast its most high-profile actresses in their films—at least not against the 36,000 cinemas the Hollywood film industry commands (Barboza, 2006). I am concerned, instead, with the marketable elements of a form of East Asian cinema familiar to American audiences and the globalised spectator. The casting of established stars in far-Eastern markets[13] and the cinematographic cross-over look of the final product became guiding

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[13] Sayuri is played by Chinese actress, Zhang Ziyi, Gong Li is also Chinese, Michelle Yeoh is a Malaysian born Chinese, and Ken Watanabe is Japanese. The well-known Korean actress Kim Yoon Jin was also considered during the casting stages.

principles in the marketing of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, a film which I suggest was promoted to dominate international markets in the opening week of the theatrical run.

In marketing the film as a pan-Asian blockbuster to global audiences, the electronic marketing traded on static conceptions and representations of the Orient and Oriental exotica. It achieved this through selective appropriation. The website used key signifiers of traditional Japanese identity: the kimono, paper lanterns, *washi* (paper umbrellas), and winter-themed dance. These elements were combined in the striking image of the geisha (the film's central protagonist Sayuri), wearing a *furisode*, a formal kimono with elegant, long flowing sleeves, and performing in lacquered platform sandals. The notion of Japaneseness, of national identity, was dissolved, however, by an overriding emphasis on the "look" of so-called Asian film, which is itself informed largely by Hollywood's own investments in Chinese production and distribution. By embracing shared ideas about the Orient intended for the West, and by casting mostly non-Japanese (in this case, the highly publicised casting of Chinese superstar) leads, the film's producers guided viewers away from an authentic construction of cultural difference, toward a vision of the Orient that is established in a western tradition. The background images that dominated the website, the arresting image of the blue-eyed geisha, the striking colours which we rarely see in contemporary Hollywood films and which recall the works of Zhang Yimou—these elements trade on the benchmarks of pan-Chinese cinema. The website combined these elements to move viewers into a spectatorial position which permitted them to measure *Memoirs of a Geisha* against the latest state-backed Chinese blockbuster. This has little to do with, for example, the dynamic action sequences of Lee's *Crouching Tiger*, or the combat sequences of modern day Yimou, but more with their epic love stories, the romanticised experience (for non-Chinese Western

audiences) of being Chinese; indeed, of being *not*-Chinese but, in fact, being from and of the Orient.

Consider this description of a classic scene in *Crouching Tiger*, read by Kenneth Chan, in the context of Ang Lee's "self-Orientalism:"

> … the camera's seductive gaze on Zhang Ziyi's face as strands of her black hair, blown by the gentle breeze, softly caress it, all captured in slow motion in the now-famous fight scene on a bamboo treetop. (2004: 6)

Lee's visual style and the impressive imagery of the exotic landscape in which Zhang and Chow Yun Fat duel, renders the fight largely immaterial. But compare the moment which Chan describes with the film poster for *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Figure 1.0.). The key art conveys the romanticism of the aforementioned scene through a number of visual elements: the tight close-up on Zhang (emphasising her kissable red lips, the uniqueness of her bluest eyes); the expression which connotes vulnerability beneath the spotlessly white foundation; and the black strands of hair that drift teasingly across her face. This key art appeared as the signature image in all of the film's print advertising, including Netflix envelopes, and in the wallpapers, screensavers and buddy icons available on the website.

It is this sense of appropriating the look, the stars, the spectacle of film as it originates in Asia—of producing a version of the exotic Far East for a global audience—which becomes crucial when reading the website as an image-making tool. Again, consider the function of Zhang and Michelle Yeoh, stars defined equally by their acting talent as well as their beauty, and whose images graced the backgrounds of the six different webpages contained on the

Figure 1.1. The ad image used repeatedly in the West for *Memoirs of a Geisha* (© Sony Pictures Entertainment).

theatrical model website. In addition to being highly desirable, both leading ladies received top billing in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the highest grossing foreign language film to ever play in the States. The film won four Oscars, including Best Foreign Film, at the 73rd Academy Awards in 2001, and was nominated for six others, creating, obviously, a strong marketing hook for the film's DVD release, but also increasing the marketability of the two actors. For some western and international audiences, Yeoh and Zhang are synonymous with the film. In addition to co-ordinating these marketing hooks, the *Memoirs* site evoked the feminine-style and mood of lovelorn suffering, the melancholia and romantic longing, which runs throughout *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. The photographic image contained in the Story sub-menu section of the website traded explicitly on this connection: Yeoh is posed as the more financially and emotionally successful adult woman, whilst Zhang, in her role as the youthful student again, stands across the room, awaiting permission to be seated. Similarly, the Production Notes background image showed the two actresses together again, this time before a desktop mirror as they are about to apply their white-face foundation. The photograph of Zhang found on the Photo Gallery page traded on the same cinematic mystique which has long been the currency of Chinese director Zhang Yimou, all but quoting the long-sleeve dance scene in *House of Flying Daggers*, and recasting it against artificial snowfall.

Furthermore, the Photo Gallery, ordinarily a key attraction of any movie website and often painstakingly crafted by the marketers to show the film in the best possible light, was a celebration of glamorous East-Asian faces, of the seductive appeal of exposed necks and dazzling colour. The look was sophisticated, elegant, the majority of the pictures showcasing *Memoirs'* fabulous women. In many of these featured images Zhang appeared as a

semireligious icon: one downloadable picture featured her dancing on a narrow runway, the flowing sleeves of her *furisode* rippling through the air as she performs for a captivated audience of men and women; in another, a conventional set-up bathed in the warm glow of paper lanterns, Zhang stared plaintively offscreen, a dramatic pose which seemed utterly forlorn. In summarising the critical views of some Chinese academics, with regards to the international hits of Zhang Yimou, Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar have described Gong Li's role in Zhang Yimou's films as a "male sexual fantasy served up … as an exotic delight to tempt" Western male audiences (Berry and Farquhar, 2006: 127). Here, the racy production still of Gong Li posing as a vampish seductress looking backwards over her shoulder appeared to conform to the same established custom of Orientalism.

It is significant that the online marketing met and extended the wishes of the director, whose understanding of the particular peoples, of the regional and national specificities of China and Japan were at the time openly challenged in the media: "I don't go into that world of Japan and China, that's something I can't speak about because I don't know the relationship there. That's not what I'm doing, I'm creating a work of fiction as a filmmaker" (quoted in Wallace, 2005). This thinking is problematic because it affirms, again, Said's original division of the East and the West. In the website, the background image of Ken Watanabe wooing Zhang under the cherry blossoms was only of significance to those who understood what it meant for a Chinese actress to be Japanese and appear in public courting a Japanese man. The website, like the film, was made according to a more palatable Western sensibility, one that mutes the diversity of regional Chinese, and Japanese, voices. It is a viewpoint that was reinforced in the Production Notes section, which avoided the issue of the actresses' Chinese nationality, instead referring to the women as "superstars of Asian film"—Asia as undifferentiated and homogenous (cf. Said above)—and emphasised their

status as glamorous transnational icons. Here, then, the website's press materials articulated the filmmakers' vision for the Orient—a model for the world which claimed immunity from criticism by virtue of its status as fable.

Darrell William Davis, in his discussion of the films of Japanese filmmaker and television celebrity Kitano Takeshi, has described Orientalism thus: "The Orient is always feminised for the West. Women and children are used to domesticate an invocation of highly charged Japanese traditions" (2001: 72). Davis suggests that this feminisation of the Orient provides a perfect fit with the consumption patterns of Western audiences, and he adds that, against the sub-cultural, mindless "misogyny and xenophobia" of Kitano's domestic television persona, which further distances him from the global mainstream, this coded Orientalism is like a commercial antidote, aptly packaging Japanese tradition for international audiences in a timeless and consumable way. In this light, *Memoirs of a Geisha* becomes a curious, postmodern construct belonging to a broad "textual dialogue," described by Dennis Porter, "between Western and non-Western cultures" (Porter, 1983: 179). Together with its electronic marketing and high-street tie-in campaigns, the film imported a western understanding of the East Asian collectivity. It reduced the Orient to a promotional category, that of Japaneseness, and yet this itself bore little relation to a single national territory (i.e., Japan). The electronic marketing, like the film, was a product of the globalisation process, conflating the faces of China, Japan, Malaysia and Korea, whilst loosely acknowledging regional and local ethnic differences in order to bring the very best, and beautiful, together into a pan-Asian cultural unity. The website left audiences without an accurate, or very real, vision of Japanese cultural identity, let alone what it meant to live as a geisha; it is perhaps enough to say that the filmmakers did not intend for us to even make such enquiries. Site visitors who took the trouble to read-for-connoisseurship might have discovered that the

film asked to be read as a fabulist tale only, one that softened the geisha for the modern audience, softened even the job of becoming a geisha for its actresses. Meanwhile, the emphasis in the site's key visuals on evanescence, feminine beauty, and stylistic melancholia even, marked a broader dependence on populist Orientalist creations of the Orient, by the Orient—at the level of the Sony marketing team, at the executive level of the film's producers.

Conclusion

The official website, referred to in the discussion above as the theatrical model, showed that the marketers avoided campaigning on the website or including any direct appeals to fans which may have relinquished some aspect of ownership of the property to an existing fan base or brand community. This indicates that the network building strategies which New Line Cinema actively encouraged around *The Lord of the Rings* books for its film adaptations did not become a central marketing strategy for online promotions of films based on pre-sold elements, nor in this case of the prestige picture. The website showed that electronic marketing was successfully integrated into the marketing plan as a marker of excellence and quality. This was aided by its emphasis on a conventional presentation style and the pan-Asian look of the film which helped to sustain the prestige of the film for online fans of the book and novices. However, these elements replicated pre-existing Orientalist discourse. The website promised to shelter users from the commercial world of the high street—where the *Memoirs of a Geisha* brand was commodified in the form of purses, cosmetic bags, rice- and sake-based skin care treatments, and sash-tie tops and dresses, in a trend known as Geishaisation—but its promotional materials, such as production stills and text documents provided by the publicity department, together with the website's design/presentation style furthered the production of Orientalism. The website

communicated the film and the director's ideas to an American audience efficiently but in so doing the marketing reinforced a vision of East Asia which is largely imaginary.

Facing Truman: Parallel Development Films and the Web

The commissioning of similar projects at separate studios is often referred to in the entertainment news media as a "phenomenon" of "competing projects" (Ascher-Walsh, 2004). The phenomenon is understandable given the increased power of film marketing departments and consolidation of entertainment conglomerates. Film divisions develop motion pictures according to established formulae and shared economic rationalisations, and since film projects are often broached and finally developed by the same elite stars and directors (and increasingly, writers), it is common for similar movie ideas to be set into parallel development within the small number of Hollywood film companies. These coincidences typically affect movie blockbusters, merchandising vehicles (CG animations), and genre films (Hornaday, 2006). Distribution companies invariably come to a mutually beneficial arrangement—carefully sidestepping anti-trust legislation in so doing (cf. Epstein, 2005)—where one of the rival films is released to market first, and the other, whose distributors carefully monitor the original film's performance and appeal to different audience segments, is released at a later stage in the year, typically in a different season (Peters, 2006; Epstein, 2005: 105).

Industrial co-operation results in a continuity between the studios involved in bringing parallel development films to market—this is critical for online marketing campaigns. There were eight cases of major parallel development productions between 1994 and 2006 and all conformed to the specific marketing practices I am about to outline. Briefly summarised, the visibility of the intended audience dictated the approach. The first films to be released (first-

to-market films) attempted to cross-over by promoting and linking the film to related extensions—extra-filmic sources that provide a larger context for viewing the film—in order to target and leverage an audience. Their deferred counterparts (the second films to be released) forged the link with populist elements, including star and production design, which their predecessors tended to de-emphasise.

This section considers the different marketing approaches for two prestige pictures that were placed into parallel development. It explores the online marketing to see if strategies developed to advertise parallel development films in the blockbuster and genre film categories were also used to promote prestige pictures with identical topics, events and characters. Special attention is directed to the specific rhetorical appeals which framed these two works. Unlike *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the critical issue here is not commodity and brand populism, but content, educational narrative and continuity. My examples are the websites for Sony Pictures Classics' *Capote* and Warner Bros. Independent's *Infamous*.

First-to-Market Films

Between 1994 and 2009 sixteen parallel development films were released nationwide by the major studios. The sample of films examined includes eight cases of a first-to-market film and eight cases of a deferred film. I propose that the following films be classed as first-to-market: *Dante's Peak* (Roger Donaldson, Universal Pictures, 1997), *Antz* (Eric Darnell and Tim Johnson, DreamWorks, 1998), *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, Paramount Pictures, 1998), *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, Paramount Pictures, 1998), *Mission to Mars* (Brian De Palma, Buena Vista Pictures, 2000), *Finding Nemo* (Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich, Buena Vista Pictures, 2003, US/Australia), *Capote* and *The Illusionist* (Neil Burger, Freestyle Releasing, 2006, US/Czech Republic). The following, released shortly after the

first-to-market films or within the same year, I classify as deferred films: *Volcano* (Mick

Jackson, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1997), *A Bug's Life* (John Lasseter and Andrew Stanton,

Buena Vista Pictures, 1998), *EDtv* (Ron Howard, Universal Pictures, 1999), *Armageddon*

(Michael Bay, Buena Vista Pictures, 1998), *Red Planet* (Antony Hoffman, Warner Bros.,

2000, US/Australia), *Shark Tale* (Bibo Bergeron et al., DreamWorks, 2004), *Infamous*, and

The Prestige (Christopher Nolan, Buena Vista Pictures, 2006, US/UK). I include in the

discussion that follows examples of a ninth case of parallel development involving *The Cave*

(Bruce Hunt, Screen Gems, 2005, US/Germany) and *The Descent* (Neil Marshall, Lionsgate

Films, 2005, UK) because *The Cave* was released and marketed by Screen Gems, a

subsidiary of Sony's Columbia Pictures. Although *The Descent* is a British film, it was

marketed in the States by the independent company Lionsgate, thus its electronic marketing

is of some relevance to this discussion.

The difference in marketing approaches between first-to-market and deferred films is the

first-to-market films present "reality-based" arguments or cases to interest audiences in new

film concepts. First-to-market films achieve this consistently through an emphasis on

educational narrative and reality-based production, thus creating the perception in their

electronic marketing of real-world accuracy. This approach is quite different from the

marketing approaches associated with deferred films, which, mostly out of necessity, avoid

communicating or reinforcing the same pieces of information to the public in order to

present an image of the deferred film as more dramatic, more fictional, and hence more

exciting or worthwhile as an entertainment.

The websites for first-to-market films assume that visiting web surfers want to learn about

the particular aspects of a film which ground the fictional story in some reality, which give it

social, cultural or even scientific credibility. As novices (and impressionable younger viewers) who know very little about the potential dangers of exploding volcanoes (*Dante's Peak*) and solar system collisions (*Deep Impact*), or environmental damage to the oceans (*Finding Nemo*) and manned spaceflight (*Mission to Mars*), site visitors are encouraged to browse the sites of first-to-market films with a clear goal in mind: to discover a new subject, to understand the film's contribution in a social/cultural/political context, and to participate in further related activities beyond the movie website itself.

In most cases, the marketing appeals of the first-to-market films were made in a real-world context, with the objective being, again, to establish the film as a credible and authoritative work. The marketers achieve this through an emphasis on outside collaborations and consultation. Visitors to the *Dante's Peak* website were addressed as budding volcanophiles of all ages and referred via a comprehensive links page to the relevant institutions, such as the Michigan Technical University Page Registry (McNary, 1996). The *Finding Nemo* webpage linked users of its key resource, a child-oriented underwater classroom, to Jean-Michel Cousteau's Ocean Futures Society and recommended that interested users learned more about the environmental messages (global warming) so pertinent to the film by volunteering to help preserve the environment. *Deep Impact* and *Mission to Mars* were marketed as serious well-researched works rather than as derivative or fantastical science-fictions. In both cases this was due to the partnerships the films' producers had formed with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), which offered technical support on set and special access to facilities and equipment (Kirby, 2003). This level of co-operation and technical support gave both first-to-market films authority on their subjects, and in marketing terms this translated into an advantage for the marketers. The *Mission to Mars* website is a good exemplar. It gave users access to authentic sounds and images

specially sampled from NASA's Mars Polar Lander (Wong, 1999). The website's interactive

section *Mission to Mars Adventure* was predominantly science-oriented, involving users in

educational tasks which familiarised them with molecular compounds (the formula for

Silicon Dioxide), the Martian terrain (using NASA imagery), mission planning and the DNA

strand. Rather than explore the game as a gamer the user's role became that of a puzzle-

solver with some degree of computer literacy, or of a budding scientist.

These films clearly benefited from the partnerships established with science consultants, and

their marketers use the information gathered from consultants to market the film as

"realistic" and authoritative. However, *The Truman Show* is a fantasy film about an

insurance salesman (Jim Carrey) who has no idea that he is the star of a 24-hour reality

television show and that his friends and family are all actors. The film could not call so

easily (as producers of big budget science-fiction films could with science advisers) on

outside consultants, for instance in the entertainment media, to discuss reality television as a

surveillance format or 24-hour social experiment. In order to find its audience the marketers

conceived an official website (*http://www.trumanshow.com/*), which promoted the film in

conventional terms as a fictional entertainment, and a grassroots website

(*http://www.freetruman.com*) which added "realism" and sufficient credibility to the film-

world through the invention of a radical non-profit organisation called the Truman

Liberation Front (TLF). More precisely, the TLF website claimed that *The Truman Show*

was a grim reality, and the organisation's project, or "manifesto," was to provoke, lobby and

to boycott OmniCam, the fictitious conglomerate responsible for producing the reality

television show (and it follows the official website, which, armed with information from the

TLF, users now believed was a product of OmniCam). Absent interactive or gaming

elements, the site functioned wholly in a teaser capacity, but it nevertheless invited film

neophytes to view the protagonist's fantastical predicament in a real-world context, one which in fact posited the film's actual distributing studio Paramount Pictures as "Your Enemy" (Milvy, 1998). Alternatively, the primary appeal of Sony's website for *The Cave*, a horror-thriller with no major stars, was made through a digital advergame entitled Escape the Cave, the apparent goal-directed aim of which was actually unclear to users who may have expected a survival game but encountered instead a game that was more instructional. Both appeals mirrored the other in that they established an *other*-world context through their specific appeals to different constituencies. The sites moved beyond a fundamental reliance on imagery to focus on more narrational, and hence less genre-oriented, appeals.

Site visitors were, thus, invited to view the first-to-market films with a serious eye and a thirst for knowledge. These websites prioritised authenticity at the level of story, character and situation, and in all cases, distanced the films from the spectacle of fantasy cinema. This tone of address corresponds closely with the specific appeals of the campaigns, which targeted the core grassroots audience in order to increase awareness of a film and to enhance the credibility of the film property by involving other industries, thus building a profitable market for its exhibition. This dimension was made particularly clear in the opening Splashpage for *The Illusionist*, which advertised its single Academy Award nomination and incorporated passages of text drawn from critics' reviews (including *USA Today*, the *Chicago Sun-Times* and *The New York Times*) to de-emphasise its status as a mass market entertainment. In the cases of *The Truman Show*, *Mission to Mars* and *Finding Nemo*, the appeals were strengthened by the films' perceived social, scientific and economic relevance.

Deferred Films

The deferred film, often thought of as the imitator in the context of parallel developments, appears to avoid the specific cross-over appeals of its predecessor. I suggest that this is due to the fact that a market for the deferred film exists because of the campaign work conducted for the first-to-market film. Marketers seemed, therefore, to withdraw from making the same appeals to cultural or social legitimacy evidenced in the first-to-market films, promoting instead the generic elements of a film, principally stars, visual style and genre type. The film *Red Planet*, for example, was aimed at a general audience but the website was designed exclusively for young internet users with very little interest in study or exploration beyond gaming. Each page used futuristic sound effects, a system interface which invoked other popular genre movies—including the influential *Alien* (Ridley Scott, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1979, US/UK)—and the homepage was animated with busy tickertape lights. Both *Mission to Mars* and *Red Planet* are action-oriented films—their storylines involve rescue missions, crash-landings, malfunctioning computer systems, deaths and attacking insects—but their varying approaches were developed in the marketing to form two very different appeals.

More broadly, the websites for deferred films marked their appeals through a reliance on major stars and high impact visuals. The Dial-Up era sites for *Armageddon* and *Volcano* were reliant on key advertising graphics showcasing their special effects (the Chrysler building crumbling to the ground) and promotional features with key stars like Bruce Willis and Tommy Lee Jones (Eller, 1998). Those for *Shark Tale* and *The Prestige* conformed to the same strategy, with the former showcasing its impressive cast in a dialogue-heavy audio file embedded on the homepage, and the latter, an introductory video which asked website visitors "Are you watching closely?" The *Red Planet* webpage conceptualised the film's

technological future as a talking interactive encyclopaedia, a conceit clearly targeted at a younger audience interested more in gaming opportunities than in learning or study. Disney's website for *A Bug's Life* developed an expanding range of games and activities for its core customer base (families with young children) hoping to create amongst its users an affinity for the main character Flik. Thus, with its games, interactive consoles and varying forms of direct address, the deferred film used website promotion to advertise its entertainment value, immediately establishing an amusement park sensibility which traded on film sounds and stylistic design. Unlike their first-to-market predecessors, deferred films rarely pointed users away from the film itself because few attempts to increase awareness of a scientific or environmental issue were made. The official North American webpage for *The Descent*, a low-budget horror from a British director, is exemplary in this regard. The film has no major stars but its marketers assumed that fans valued the traditional immersive pleasures of horror-suspense, luring them through a generic website with sinister imagery and animated page transitions.

Finally, the differences in presentation between first-to-market and deferred films suggests that a form of reconfiguration is undertaken in terms of promotion. I do not claim that the marketing appeals for one website govern the web strategies of the other in a strict methodological sense, but rather that it is clear the deferred film breaks decisively from its predecessor, and in doing so issues of narrative realism and reality-based production take a back seat to the appeals of stars, visual effects, production design, genre and spectacle.

Case Studies: *Capote* and *Infamous*

Both *Capote* and *Infamous* fit into the category of "competing projects" for several reasons. Both films examine the events surrounding the writing and publication of *In Cold Blood*

(1966), a non-fiction novel written by the American author Truman Capote about the murder of a Kansas family in 1959. Both films dramatise the emotional torment and personal anguish which haunted Capote in the six years it took to complete the book. *Capote* was directed by Bennett Miller and written by Dan Futterman. It drew on the personal interviews and work of Gerald Clarke, whose biographical study *Capote: A Biography* (1988) formed a basis for the screenplay. Sony Classics distributed *Capote* in the States with an R rating. In September 2005 it screened in specialist venues before receiving its nationwide release in February 2006 (its widest release was 1,239 theatres). It grossed $28.8 million domestically. Similarly, *Infamous* drew from the work of another Capote biographer, George Plimpton, specifically his *Truman Capote: In Which Various Friends, Enemies, Acquaintances and Detractors Recall His Turbulent Career* (1998). The film was written and directed by Douglas McGrath. It was released in October 2006 by Warner Independent in a maximum of 179 theatres. Its total domestic gross was $1.2 million. *Capote* grossed $49.2 million worldwide, while *Infamous* grossed a total $2.6 million.

Capote (First-to-Market Strategy)

The *Capote* website is a strong example of prestige marketing in the Broadband era. It is exemplary in this regard for the ways in which it pulled together Dial-Up- and Broadband-era strategies to target relevant demographic groups for the prestige film, taking the first-to-market strategy beyond the youth market. Its appeals to audience interest were made on two levels: through its star and a strong emphasis on story. It paid particular attention to the physical and behavioural transformation of Philip Seymour Hoffman as character actor into Truman Capote, emphasising his dress, his class, his demeanour and elocution. At the same time it strongly advertised certain classical aspects of the film, such as narrative, genre convention, and psychological states of the characters. The strongest of these two

approaches, promoting the star, held the most commercial potential—accordingly, the website asked that we gather information on and comprehend the film's sober murder mystery in the context of Philip Seymour Hoffman's sensitive characterisation. As Miller described it:

> The style is meant to sensitise … to bring focus and magnification to the subtlest aspects of the story's undercurrents, to scrutinise the performances. The responsibility was on Phil [Hoffman as Capote] to bring us in to Truman's internal decline … The style of the film put Phil under the lens of a microscope but it was on him to deliver.

The promotional intro, the diegetic music available in the main sections of the site and the carefully selected photographic materials positioned throughout were designed to bring the film in alignment with the director's vision. Miller intended to sensitise the viewer with an "austere prose style of filmmaking" and in doing so he aimed to reveal the damaging undercurrents beneath Capote's apparent normalcy (see Futterman and Miller interview on the website). We see this approach reflected in the construction of the website.

Users entered via a white HTML splashpage, which featured the campaign poster of Hoffman in full period costume (late 1950s three-button suit, bow tie, black-rimmed glasses, with cigarette). Like other examples of prestige picture marketing, the splashpage called attention to the film's cultural legitimacy by linking its star to various prestige signifiers. In its post-awards season format, the site listed the film's Golden Globe, SAG and Academy Award wins, in a separate webpage labelled simply View Awards and Nominations. The trademark statue of the Academy, a powerful prestige signifier denoting "outstanding" superiority above all other works of the cinematic year, appeared beneath the film title and

alongside the caption "ACADEMY AWARD WINNER! BEST ACTOR PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN." With these impressive credentials earmarked clearly from the outset, the site then moved its appeal away from Hoffman's star status and alerted us to focus on Capote's moral decline and the Kansas murders as the key sources of pleasure.

Visitors entered via a simple Enter Site hyperlink. An all-Flash webpage loaded inside a new browser (a pop-up) window, prompting a short movie introduction. The movie featured illustrative audio excerpts, still imagery and normal text to frame the web experience. Beginning with a plaintive piano melody set to a black screen (using original music composed by Mychael Danna), the introduction faded up on a black-and-white still of Capote (a repetition of the poster image) and a background graphic, different to the one in the poster, depicting a rural Kansas landscape. Danna's score continued throughout as a dialogue box emerged and five audio clips excerpted from the movie began to play. The box transcribed Capote's dialogue for those users who found his lilting voice and slurry imitation difficult to fathom.[14] Blurring into white at its conclusion, the introduction then segued into the homepage, where the piano melody briefly softened and the alarming snap of typebars on an unseen typewriter spelled out the film's title in bold, black print.

The introduction contained no video and felt like a deliberate regression to the technological impoverishment of the web in the Dial-Up era. Indeed, it served as a particularly classical form of consumer enticement. I would think that teen audiences accustomed to the "super

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[14] Capote's dialogue was presented in isolation. Excerpt 1: "On the night of November 14th, two men broke into a quiet farmhouse in Kansas and murdered an entire family. Why did they do that? Two worlds exist in this country: the quiet conservative life and the lives of those two men—the underbelly, the criminally violent. Those worlds converged that bloody night." Excerpt 2: "We're not so different as you might think." Excerpt 3: "If I leave here without understanding you the world will see you as a monster. Always. And I don't want that." Excerpt 4: "It's as if Perry and I grew up in the same house. And one day, he stood up and went out the back door, while I went out the front." Excerpt 5: "It's the book I was always meant to write." The introduction then closes.

charged" noise-aggregator sites of *The Dukes of Hazzard* (Jay Chandrasekhar, Warner Bros., 2005, US/Australia) would turn away from the site immediately. This served the film's promotion well. It is assumed that visitors encountering the *Capote* site for the first time would wish to see and hear Hoffman imitating Capote. His vocal impersonation, the cadences and rhythms of his speech, were very persuasive. This was crucial to the website's appeal and its objective to sensitise an audience. Without revealing too much about his performance (including the fundamentals of characterisation, such as the way he walks or interacts with others), the introduction conveyed his actorly seriousness by virtue of his approach to the role, and by implication the hours of offscreen research that went into adequately becoming his character for the screen. The emphasis on audio fits well Richard Dyer's observation in *Stars* (1998) about the speech of character: how speech indicates personality through information that is revealed directly or indirectly. Particularly, Dyer writes that:

> … we are more inclined to trust our perception of what a character betrays about him/herself indirectly than what a character says about him/herself directly. A special case of the [latter] is voice-over, whether in the role of narrator or just as a device for the expression of inner thoughts. These we are more inclined to believe … in the convention of the (more or less) omniscient narrator and … the truth of the "private." (1998: 112)

In the first and fourth excerpts, Capote is quite literally narrator; he is also private confidant in confessional mode for the second and third excerpts; finally, self-conscious (but also we believe sincere) author in the fifth. This blending of devices set up a strategy to create, even if only temporarily, a *closeness* with the character which, it was assumed, would be felt not

just by those who were familiar with the *In Cold Blood* story, but by an audience meeting him for the first time. The introduction is particularly illustrative of this appeal: it offered a protagonist who is authoritative on his subject (we are more likely to trust his observations) and who, in identifying some aspects of the killer's personality in his own outsider composition, appears to be sincere about his own involvement in the case (the introduction did not include information on *In Cold Blood*, but that Capote was indeed writing a book). Secondly, the selected clips invited a reading of these specific cinematic instances as personal lamentations: over the loneliness of modern life, over the absences in his life. Finally, the intro set up the generic ingredients of the basic detective story (a family of four murdered: who were the perpetrators, why did they do it, what actually happened "that bloody night?"). Yet it did so in ways that linked the complexities of Hoffman's Capote rather misleadingly with the self-destructive impulses of one of the murderers, Perry Smith (Clifton Collins Jr.), in whose image Capote sees a mirrored self. Therefore, the website already anticipated the ways in which it must demonstrate strong ties to characterisation, rather than star image, in order to move beyond style alone.

The homepage provided ten content areas for further investigation, each listed vertically on the right side of the page. These options were: The Film, Cast and Filmmakers, The Director, Gallery, Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*, Movie Trailer, Reviews, Festivals, and Links; a horizontal toolbar at the bottom of the page offered Theatre Showtimes, Download the Press Kit, and Privacy Policy/Terms and Conditions links. The embedded sound file, which began playback during the movie introduction, continued throughout the website on a looped cycle, establishing a reflective, despondent tone from the outset. Unlike the musical accompaniment to *Infamous*, Danna's sample score is elegant and unintrusive, enhancing the producers' artistic vision and unifying our experiences across the website.

Page transition was slow but elegantly designed, involving two processes: the featured page elements (thumbnails, text, presentation windows) disappeared immediately, and the background image then blurred, before fading to white; loading reversed the process, resetting the page elements accordingly; the vertical hyperlink menu and title of the film remained on the screen throughout this process.

The use of imagery with deliberate affinities to the crime or murder mystery genre teased more general and cine-literate audiences with the promise of a crime story and the potential revelation that the characters may penetrate a tantalising criminal underworld. In the introduction, Capote's bifurcation of the country (Kansas) into two hermetic worlds of their own, "the quiet conservative life" and an apparently well concealed criminal underbelly, established his scholarly authority and intelligence as an investigatory observer. The website trades on the information imparted in this intro and relies on the audience registering his observation that both worlds "converged" on the night of the murders. Since the landscape is given so much visual emphasis on the Main, Film, Gallery and Movie Trailer pages, there is an assumption that we can see this convergence—we see, perhaps as Capote does, evil and criminality woven into the fabric of this conservative world—because the intro has appropriately sensitised us. In genre terms, the country signifies a journey away from the great American civilising process. It trades strongly on some of the same themes of *Badlands* (Terrence Malick, Warner Bros., 1973): an archetypal rural retreat; the intrusion of the American civilising process on rural life; the sudden outburst of great cinematic violence. Indeed in that film the Northern Midwest is almost re-oriented away from small-town comfort and familiarity to serial-killer wasteland. In other words, the website's

imagery is selected on an assumption that a general, older audience will connect *Capote* with the strengths of other crime films.

There is, secondly, the familiar trope of the pursuer in this case metaphorically chasing his quarry. The lone detective warily stepping away from his car, a ubiquitous generic image, is in *Capote* re-visioned as an author who seeks the enlightenment and justice of an ordinary cop on his quest to righteously "solve" a murder. Another image, found on the *In Cold Blood* webpage in which Capote converses with Perry Smith (Clifton Collins Jr.) in his cell, alluded to *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, Orion Pictures, 1991), thus connecting the personal confession made in the introduction, we suspect, with a darker psychological core. There is, therefore, the suggestion that intertextual allusions (in which Capote was often found in this way, crime investigator-like, in open farmland) provided the validation that potential genre audiences were looking for. The final conceit that Capote and Perry's minds (an outcast mentality), backgrounds (suicide features in their childhood), perhaps their consciences also, are compatible permitted an understanding for genre fans and broader audiences that their relationship could be viewed in classic genre terms, i.e., the affinity which develops between sleuths and their quarry, cf. *Manhunter* (Michael Mann, De Laurentiis, 1986) and *Red Dragon* (Brett Ratner, Universal Pictures, 2002, US/Germany).

But these images were not included for their intertextual allusions or reproducible nature alone. The cell image was selected for connoisseurs who read the set-up for the truism (supported by the film) that Capote was using Perry surreptitiously in order to further "his ambition of writing something life altering"—in other words, that he befriended a murderer over a five year period up to his conviction and execution, in order to write the novel that would bring him ultimate respect and acceptance (see Futterman/Bennett interview on the

website). Historical knowledge of this kind was expected of some audience constituencies, but never a youth market—the website, therefore, traded on the interests of audiences already in the know by offering a perspective shared with biographer Gerald Clarke: that of the damaged, empathetic author, whose experience writing *In Cold Blood* had a destructive impact (Krebs, 1984; Turan, 2005). The selected photograph of the two in Perry's cell exemplified this approach, not by showing a close-up of Capote that betrayed his cunning, but by revealing an apparently compassionate man in wide shot, patiently listening to the younger man sat on the bed across from him. Other background images which seemingly appealed to audience foreknowledge included the festivals (Capote alone in a club and in deep thought—the only reference to his celebrity life in Manhattan) and the director webpage (a photo of Chris Cooper in the role of the upstanding detective Alvin Dewey).

The website's promotional photographic materials therefore established the crime story for general audiences (highlighting the most accessible ingredients of an only marginally generic film) but in ways that continually reinforced, for the benefit of the connoisseur who studied the website or for audiences with substantial foreknowledge of *In Cold Blood*, something unique: Capote's living presence inside the world of *In Cold Blood*.

The most successful first-to-market film websites were those that prioritised authenticity at the level of story, character and situation. In the following section, I examine the ways in which *Capote* combined a quest for authenticity with the first-to-market strategies of the Dial-Up era. Motivated by strong economic logic, Sony Pictures Classics moved aggressively to form a partnership with *The New York Times* and acquired original materials which gave consumers a connection to the world of the author. It achieved this with two

projects: a Sponsored Archive hosted by *The New York Times*, and the Capote website's *In the Press* archives.

Truman Capote: His Life and Work – A Sponsored Archive gave strong tie-in support in the marketing campaign. It is still today stored in *The New York Times'* ads section (*http://www.nytimes.com/ads/capote/*) and contains numerous articles and press clippings, including *The New York Times* reviews of *In Cold Blood* and the original article that alerted Capote to the Kansas murders (all reprinted articles were paid for by Sony Pictures Classics). In addition, the site integrates other archived material (for instance, a testimonial by Albin Krebs, written in 1984) with an interactive showcase for the film. The showcase features multimedia content (photo gallery and a preview movie trailer), additional character information, a customised Capote crossword puzzle, and a transcript reproduced from the Bennett Miller and Dan Futterman conversation contained on the official website. The Archive was an integral component of the online marketing campaign. It connected interested *The New York Times* readers, a highly valued, affluent and sophisticated audience segment, to the core website—to the home of the core advertising message. It clearly functions, therefore, as an endorsement.

The migration of authenticated print materials downstream, from *The New York Times* itself to the official website's *In The Press* archives, are most relevant to this discussion. The site removed all diversionary distractions and impediments to content retrieval, allowing consumers to access copies of original *The New York Times* articles effortlessly from two sections of the website (Truman Capote and In Cold Blood). By contrast, the prestige site for *Memoirs of a Geisha*, which asked visitors to download press notes about the production in a file which then had to be opened with Adobe Reader, complicated the experience, and

provided little actual content to sustain the consumer's interest. Full newspaper articles from

the *Kansas City Star*, *Time*, *Hutchinson News*, *The National Observer* and the *Pittsburgh*

Press offered different dimensions to the Kansas story for users to explore. Articles from

The New York Times discussed the many years of work involved in producing the book, in

addition to highlighting other facts and trivia which may be of interest to some novice

visitors. We can therefore see an emphasis emerging throughout the archive on the effect

that *real* historical voices discussing and analysing Capote in a professional capacity have

on us as consumers. In serving as an exclusive forum for multiple interpretations, descriptive

articles and opinion pieces, the archive brought the past both to the consumer (as an

information resource) and also the film (as an endorsement). Its fundamental purpose was,

hence, to support the film's claim to historical authenticity and accuracy.

While the content of the archive was strong, expanding and deepening the visitor's

understanding of Capote and the writing of *In Cold Blood* (including its reception among US

critics), Sony integrated the content in a way that has proven difficult for others to

accomplish. In the Broadband era, the sites for biopics including *A Beautiful Mind* (Ron

Howard, Universal Pictures, 2001), *Sylvia* (Christine Jeffs, Focus Features, 2003, UK), *Ray*

(Taylor Hackford, Universal Pictures, 2004) and *Cinderella Man* (Ron Howard, Universal

Pictures, 2005) exploited the medium's video and aural potential to create lavish websites

similar to the *Geisha* model, but neglected that other dimension, the influential source at the

heart of the storytelling. The producers of the *Capote* site might well have been familiar

with the rare exception: Warner Bros.' *Charlotte Gray* (Gillian Armstrong, Warner Bros.,

2001, UK/Australia/Germany) which depicted the lives of servicewomen during World War

II. Although the film was based on a fictional character, the site made connections to

important Special Operations Executive members through the Imperial War Museum. This

collaboration allowed the site's producers to digitise and import copies of Records of Service (produced originally by the Air Ministry, circa-1959), wartime photographs and full-page *Sunday Express* (UK) articles (circa-1949) into the Real Charlottes section. *Capote* similarly benefited from showing authentic items that were referred to but possibly never directly shown in the films. The delay of broadband-enabled internet provided a context for the *Gray* site's stylistic impoverishment. By contrast, the *Capote* website exploited the period's improvements in Flash technology to open these historical materials to the broadband audience. By jettisoning the distinctive burden of *Gray*-era HTML-based hyperlinks and coding, and integrating Dial-Up era content with an interactive movie interface, these historical materials required little competency or skill to navigate.

Rob Shields has described the ontological experience of the web as "an effect of the bricolage of digital images, texts and other elements linked together by hypertext references" (Shields, 2000 cited in Herman and Swiss, 2000: 144). Hyperlink references, he believes, with their capacity to send users away to webpages located outside the conceptual ground of the website, steer us away from a regimented understanding of the operations of a webpage, encouraging us, instead, to think in terms of the hyperlink and to deconstruct every page element "in motion" (146). Even though Shields is describing a generalised internet experience that was at the time of writing pre-broadband, his description fits the way digital environments, especially official movie websites, invite interaction with their respective worlds. This does not necessarily exclude the prestige picture as a genre.

Capote became emblematic (although not an exemplar) of the new ways in which users accessed the web to consume and decode texts. Users moved freely and effortlessly between archive pages, scanning, selecting, reading, then dismissing digitised articles with ease, all

activities localised to a single browser window. This was a key characteristic of Flash technology—its design and operation supported a casual approach to web surfing which mirrored the perceived flow of information in today's high-speed communications world. The archive was designed with this sense of motion in mind, but it also ensured a degree of fidelity with the film-world which was exceptional for prestige websites. Early-adopting fans were encouraged to view this historical material as one would perhaps in an offline library. For example, the Wealthy Farmer of Family Slain feature, which was linked to the *In Cold Blood* sub-menu, contained a scan of the original *New York Times* article, circa 1963. The scan was similar to the digitised scans on the *Gray* site, or even the *Twelve Monkeys* and *Waterworld* sites of the Dial-Up era, in that many of the samples were difficult to read because of fading newsprint. It did not escape the user's attention, therefore, that some sections of the website resembled the operations and look of a microfiche reader. Indeed, visitors were first presented with unreadable thumbnail prints which when selected the website magnified to readable size.

The many options contained on the Links sub-menu and the archive appear to validate the idea, espoused by Henry Jenkins in the context of franchises and transmedia storytelling, that "the world is bigger than the film" (Jenkins, 2006a: 114). A central theme of this discussion about *Capote* is the first-to-market film's drive to "claim the ground of authenticity"—a strategy reminiscent of the Dial-Up era (Allen, 1999: 122). *Capote's* endorsement of the "encyclopaedic capacity" of digital media, specifically the internet, extended beyond a simple adjustment, therefore, to incorporate outsider fan interest (Murray, 1999). It challenged the bias towards centralisation of prestige sites such as *The Hurricane* (Norman Jewison, Universal Pictures, 1999)*, A Beautiful Mind, Sylvia, Ray* and *Cinderella Man* by broadening the scope of the digital environment. The number of links

which allowed users to choose from an impressive range of subjects—including journalism, general (and predominantly American) literature and crime—opened multiple entry-points to an imagined Capote world, even to the point of frustrating any ambition users had as consumers of coming to terms with a *Capote* master text. In this respect, *Capote* was already cannily aware of the trend towards multidirectional marketing, which was contemporaneous with emerging strategies of decentralisation.

One point that I have tried to emphasise throughout this section is the difference between Sony's website for *Memoirs* and *Capote. Memoirs'* emphasis on aesthetic spectacle was best understood in the context of its producers attempts to sell the film as entertainment fiction and not documentary. Indeed, the absence of any historical background or connections to Arthur Golden's novel is suggestive of the way that websites for prestige blockbusters sell a given film "on inherent pleasurability … and the experience of seeing that film in a movie theatre" (Allen, 1999: 123). *Capote's* imagined relation to the real-world created a depth of engagement which consumers of *Memoirs* may have desired but could not experience through its website.

On the one hand then, *Memoirs* sold itself on the inherent pleasurability of a film event which was designed to impress through its sheer artistic merits and entertainment value alone; and on the other, an emphasis on contextualising devices (such as the microfiche aesthetic), historical background (in the archive) and links to external information services on the *Capote* site helped to shape our understanding of the film in relation to the *real*, thus enhancing its credibility as an entertainment worthy of our critical respect. The largely singular experience of Warner Bros. Independent's (WIP) *Infamous* website was, by contrast, emblematic of marketing approaches of the deferred films already outlined, and

more disposed to focusing our attentions on the appeals of its stars, production design and genre.

Infamous (Deferred Film Aesthetic)

Although the website for the second film similarly avoided fixing the character of Capote from the outset, it did mark a noteworthy change of emphasis from the Sony site. Truman Capote became notorious for cultivating intimate friendships with the East Side "smart set," or society women of New York, whose gossip and confessional tales about adultery he recombined in several novels, specifically the published excerpts from *Answered Prayers* (Brown, 1987). This aspect of his personality, the social journalist in his lavish surroundings, was absent in the *Capote* marketing approach, but was distinctly pronounced in *Infamous*. The electronic marketing (in contrast to the print advertising) was motivated in large part by this approach.

Visitors accessed the *Infamous* website via a conventional splashpage with credits list and poster for the film. The homepage loaded a striking image of Capote in tight close-up. In the image, Capote's chin is raised and his proud face angled slightly upwards, as if self-consciously posing for an informal portrait. He appears contemptuous, holding us, the site visitor, under his watchful eye (he was the only character on the homepage to meet our gaze). Dressed in a pristine (and presumably expensive) tuxedo, the character's large-frame, black-rimmed spectacles signified a stereotype (the intellectual, the studious reader), but, filtered through the technological potential of the internet and its fantasy reality, his lenses are animated, highlighting the twinkling bright lights and gleaming dazzle of the Manhattan cityscape behind him. Thus, the website literally brings the stars together in Capote's eyes, making him an incomparable icon. Subtle changes in the iconography of the character and

substantial alterations in the conventions of *mise en scène* indicate a reversal of the Sony marketing approach (which emphasised the character's interiority and restraint).

From the homepage menu bar, users could select from six options: Cast and Crew, About the Film, Gallery, Downloads, Multimedia and Trailer. Two supplementary options were positioned below the menu bar in an italic gold font: Sound on/off, and Soundtrack. Page transition occurred in several stages: the smaller page elements (images, dividers) and hyperlinks disappeared; the background image faded from colour into a greyscale register; a complete fade to black then signalled the transition. An embedded background music sample played repeatedly throughout the site.

Theorists including Lisa Kernan (2004) have drawn on Tom Gunning's (1990) famous work on the early days of cinema, the "cinema of attractions," to make sense of contemporary advertising in the New Hollywood. As he wrote:

> Making use of both fictional and non-fictional attractions, its [the cinema of attractions] energy moves outward towards an acknowledged spectator rather than inward towards the character-based situations essential to classical narrative. (58-9)

Kernan saw almost identical strategies at work in the address and "ideological thrust" of the modern film trailer. According to Kernan, trailers rely on persuasion and classical rhetoric—the rhetorics of genre, story and stardom—to "reframe their original fictional film narratives into a (window) shopper's world" (2004: 6). We see the rhetoric of stardom in operation most clearly when a trailer accentuates the heart-throb status of an actor, or the romantic/erotic side of an actress, or when the marketing asserts the excellence of an

impressive support cast. In this regard, the website is no different to standard coming attractions advertising, maximising the marketability of the star ensemble to increase its identification points. In doing so, the *Infamous* site focused its appeals in one key area.

Firstly, in marking a difference in emphasis from the trailers, the website isolated its female stars. Capote was flanked on the homepage by two popular actresses. Sandra Bullock, who had not been previously identified as a "serious" actress, was known for her roles in the commercial hits *Speed* (Jan de Bont, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1994) and *Miss Congeniality* (Donald Petrie, Warner Bros., 2000, US/Australia). Hope Davis was less well known than Bullock despite appearing in popular thrillers like *Arlington Road* (Mark Pellington, Screen Gems, 1999), but lent credibility for her performances in specialist films like *American Splendour* (Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini, HBO Films, 2003). Two highly acclaimed actresses who achieved iconic status at the global level were also present: Italian actress Isabella Rossellini and New York City-born actress Sigourney Weaver.

As an especially populist determinant of scale and artistry, stars commanded high levels of awareness in the marketplace, to the extent that "stars and directors have become their own marketable sub-industries" (Grainge, 2008: 46). But as mentioned in the introduction, serious or legitimate stars who appealed to the elite constituencies of trade publications and Academy members—such as George Clooney and Gwyneth Paltrow—bring cultural legitimacy to a film as well as high awareness levels by virtue of their work as directors, actors or producers beyond the commercial studios and the film industry. Like the electronic marketing for *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the website offered interested users additional material about its highly esteemed stars—typically on their training (at RADA in the UK, for example, or in the case of Peter Bogdanovich with acting teacher Stella Adler), theatre

experience and background in specialist/independent films—and arranged this information to frame the film. Thus, parallels were drawn with, for example, Sigourney Weaver's Oscar nominated performance in the high-concept science-fiction film *Aliens* and her "Tony Award nomination for her starring role in *Hurlyburly* (Anthony Drazan, Fine Line Features, 1998) on Broadway."

In this sense, the cast details for *Infamous* contributed in no small part to our conception of the film in theatrical, legitimate, or high art terms. Thus, rather than weaken the integrity of the film, this reliance on the rhetoric of stardom, described by Kernan in the debate about trailers as an "interconnection of multiple stars," successfully combined recognition with prestige, framing the movie in sophisticated terms for an educated adult audience (2004: 71).

The rhetoric of stardom was also strengthened here by the connection between Capote as literary celebrity and the Manhattan social scene. This crucial linkage permitted a desirable shift in tone away from the all-encompassing visual bleakness of the crime story, to the noisy clatter and dynamic world of the film's female characters—in other words, more the part of the story which we do not know.

I use the word desirable because a concordant shift in the marketing focus away from the promotion of the crime film, whilst retaining certain continuities with the broader narrative, permitted a new emphasis on the film's appeal through period design and the obvious glamour of its famous women. The Downloads section of the site (the fourth option of six) featured a photograph of Capote and Rossellini's character Marella Agnelli together in a high-class restaurant. The colour signature, a sharp maroon, was determined in many respects by the props strategically placed on the set (a crystal glass on the table, Capote

nursing his red wine), the set dressing (the colour of the furnishings, which the site designers have manipulated with artificial motion blur) and actor's make-up (Rossellini's power-red lipstick, her blusher, all offset against her fair skin). This colour patterning extended to the set of thumbnail wallpaper samples which the site provided in the Multimedia section.

Consider also the Gallery webpage. In contrast to websites for *Memoirs of a Geisha*, or the Second World War film *Letters From Iwo Jima* (Clint Eastwood, Paramount Pictures, 2006) which referenced publicity stills through a standard panel of four viewing windows, *Infamous* contextualised its additional photographic materials within the diegesis. For example, the Gallery webpage was configured to reflect the *mise en scène* of Capote's living quarters by reproducing the colour signature and period details of Laura Ballinger's art design. Here, the webpage was merely a wall of framed photographs, with Capote seated in one corner; each frame contained a publicity shot which when selected loaded a secondary webpage displaying the photograph in full screen ratio; at the centre of the wall space an original painting of the author in his younger years. Such stylish uniformity across all of the site's webpages, though patently artificial, helps to focus our attention on the authentic production values of the film and the narrative emphasis on star/celebrity. The use of music was in keeping with this spirit.

The website sampled the jazz song "What Is This Thing Called Love?" which is performed in the film (and recorded for the soundtrack) by Gwyneth Paltrow as Kitty Dean. The actress' brief appearance here in the form of an audio clip suggests that the star's vocal talents would be of some interest to audiences. In the context of a website that based the majority of its appeals on the iconographic signification of its stars, the introduction of Paltrow-as-vocalist in this manner asserts the film's pedigree, its class, its prestige. The

music sample promoted a film-specific moment in which the actress appears onstage but falls silent midway through her performance. Yet more specifically, for the marketing, it reiterated a trailer-specific moment in which her appearance onstage against a glittering backdrop is sufficient alone to denote classy, upscale, bourgeois sophistication, thus exposing a fundamental disconnection with narrative causality.

Shortly after the chorus line, the Kitty Dean-sample playing on the website was replaced by a second audio clip, this time taken from the instrumental section of the same song. This fifteen second section accordingly became the embedded background file proper, and played on a continual loop until users opted to turn it off.

Effects and dialogue, in addition to greatly amplifying our sense of the historical period in which the film is set, allowed for the migration onto the homepage of several entertaining audio clips culled from the trailer. Following the introductory chords of Paltrow's song the profile images of Capote, Lee, Slim Keith, Marella Agnelli and Babe Paley materialised on the homepage in a flash of white, accompanied by a percussive sound of exploding flashbulbs. Users left to their own devices found that they could trigger audio files by highlighting special characters with their mouse cursor. Capote, for instance, intones devilishly, "Let's go around the table and you can *all* tell me whom you're having *affairs* with." When activated, Nelle Harper Lee asked of Capote, "How do you get your New York ladyfriends to tell you everything?" (comes his answer, "I figure out what they need and I give it to them"). Slim Keith's dialogue combined elements from two scenes: the first included Capote and another woman guffawing like cartoon characters, and the second utilised dialogue from an exchange with Capote (who asks standing at a news-stand, "You

never confide in me, why don't you?") and Slim Keith (who replies, "Because someday

you'll *use* it").

It is interesting that these four audio clips inferred a playful adult constituency, with only the

fifth (Marella Agnelli asking of Capote, "Do you feel that your book is worth a human

life?") making a connection to the book, to the murders, or to the implied seriousness of the

overall project. It seems to be the assumption of the website's producers that the different

audience subsets that attended *Capote* a year earlier could find in Capote's more carefree

scenes with socialites Slim Keith (who was married to director Howard Hawks and

Broadway producer Leland Hayward) and Babe Paley (wife of CBS chief executive William

S Paley) and publisher Bennett Cerf (co-founder of Random House) the most persuasive

argument for attending. Thus, the website's high impact playfulness, its amiable sense of

interactivity, and its emphasis on stardom, while upholding "the phenomenon of culture,

celebrity and outrage that [Capote] was," belied the film's integrity as a prestige item

(Thomson, 2006).

This, I suggest, is where *Infamous* failed in its appeal to the existing *Capote* audience.

Interest in Sony's film was enhanced by the thriller and murder-mystery conventions

worked into the trailers and website, and by the thematic emphasis on the *Capote* character's

personal quest for identity during the writing of *In Cold Blood*. In the case of *Infamous*, the

strong emphasis on opening up a fresh point of identification with Capote through playful

interaction was conceived as a suitable counterpoint to *Capote's* more philosophical tone.

The website resolutely centred on Capote's involvement with the New York smart set, a

strategy which adequately reflected the film trailer's (if not the film's also) thematic

preoccupation with style, glamour and excess. In this way the marketing turned away from

documented reality (which typified the *Capote* site) to focus on gender and sexual difference. Website imagery and download materials emphasised Capote's dependency on the Swans. This reflected a key narrative concern which proposed that it was easier for Capote to find personal happiness in platonic friendships where he could behave like a woman, than it was for him to experience intimacy as a man. Overlooked in this strategy is the character's emotional relationship with another male character. Although it is clear from the trailer that the character's sexuality was an important narrative concern, it seems to be the assumption of the *website* that Capote's emotional and physical attraction to Perry Smith, a crucial narrative development itself and one that was not overlooked in the *Capote* website, was of less interest to audiences.

Conclusion

Having explored all of the texts, download items and links available on the *Infamous* website, visitors were left with, ultimately, the image of a troubled, feminine man who was dependent for emotional support on the society women he would later betray in print. We are asked, therefore, to read the character's infamy not in the uncommercial terms of his homosexuality, but in terms of his dependability, and trustworthiness within his social circle. The quintessentially star-based website for *Infamous* was clearly attuned to its own rhetorical appeals, validating emphatically the primacy of its star line-up. Such approaches work well, and perhaps best, with general, "mass" audiences, and less so with fragmented and difficult to mobilise art-house crowds, who tend to be older consumers and seek out movies with more complex worlds and characters than mainstream audiences of genre film or movie blockbusters. The widening of the web's range of possibilities has created a different order, wherein film, to draw from Paul Grainge's discussion on brand regimes in

the era of *The Matrix* (Andy and Lana Wachowski, Warner Bros., 1999, US/Australia), has "increasingly come to be understood as something environmental" (2008: 66).

In addition to its transmedia structuring (and the concentration of so much information on its few electronic pages), Sony's website for *Capote* allowed consumers a register of feeling that I have not seen articulated in reviews about the film without some vital qualification. A *New York Times* review pays heed to Capote's "neediness and vulnerability," but only on those terms; the rest of the review infers that he was vain, self-confident, narcissistic, "sure of who he is and sure that he will soon prove himself to be … the most interesting person in the room." It adds that he was a drinker and tease, a whiner who worked "with methodical intensity and ruthless discipline" (AO Scott, 2005). The *Capote* website is remarkable, then, because it blocks out the character's celebrity and vanity by appealing to connoisseurs and genre fans. There is the assumption behind the site that an audience wants to see something novel, a truer, more tentative, private self to the character in preference to the "self-absorbed spotlight-seeker and guileful manipulator" described by *Variety*, among others (Rooney, 2005). Consequently, we take the film to be about the characterisation of Capote in terms of his personal anguish which seems to stem from a saddening worldview.

The marketers were, thus, able to communicate something more than film information through the *Capote* website. It is not that *Capote* became something environmental in the sense that users inhabited the space of a murder scene accurately reproduced from the film; rather, it addressed the root of the tensions running throughout the film proper, reminding users as they explored the site that the character was battling to reconcile his way of thinking, his outcast mentality, with that of a murderer. This approach was well stated in *Capote*. The website asked users, finally, to organise their energies in productive directions

(as audiences were often encouraged to do by websites of the Dial-Up era) to investigate further the real-world context of the film story using digital copies of authentic primary sources recovered or restored from the period. This in contrast to the *Memoirs of a Geisha* website's strategy of privileging the production design and look of its stars over "outreach" initiatives to utilise fan support and interest.

Participatory Culture

I do not regard *Capote's* use of the web, or engagement of the consumer as an active participant, as the industry standard for prestige pictures. A more recent film such as *The Good German* (Steven Soderbergh, Warner Bros., 2006) assumed that consumers tempted by the appeals of a period war drama starring George Clooney and Tobey Maguire were well aware of the negative implications of a history learning section entitled Berlin 1945. Here the emphasis shifted back on to media commodification, indicating that history and knowledge were incompatible with the younger web audience. *Capote* is an especially suggestive and exceptional illustration then of the "infinite potentiality of connection"—to reference terminology used by Steven Jones (Jones, 2000) in his discussion about the web's Dial-Up era bias towards time—insofar as it reflected an assumption that the new "forms of transmedia flow" (searching, downloading games, seeking out stories in related online media) were beginning to filter upwards into those websites which were designed for older, more affluent, educated web users (Jones, 2000: 174; Grainge, 2008: 60).

Aesthetics are not so much the issue here, as is the distinction which the studios made regarding blockbuster and prestige audiences on the web. We may, for example, go to the website for *Ray*—the biopic about R&B musician Ray Charles—seeking a less journalistic, more analytical account detailing the inception, recording and historical legacy of the

controversial song "What'd I say." We may wish even to access a recording of the song through the site, if we are lucky in its original (seven and a half minutes) and recorded (Parts I and II, three and a half minutes in length) versions. Yet as we continue to encounter more and more prestige websites that, like *Ray* and its accompanying *About Ray Charles* website, seem to be designed around the issue of containment (of an idea or a cultural commodity or historical figure) we go to them less and less as interested parties for our own edification. It is notable that we might better spend our time searching through Google, or reading the *Mix Online's* classic tracks article on "What'd I Say" instead, particularly as the perceived reliability problem of the web has been significantly muted by the emergence and permanent online presence of so many predominantly US-based, elite cultural institutions.

However, grassroots experimentation on the web—in extending more fully the studios' commitments to inhabitable world movies—inspired a reappraisal of the prestige picture in light of the web's increased significance as a medium for consumer participation. It is not so much that we as consumers are beginning to relate to movies in ways that detract from the marketing message—this is, as we have seen in Chapters Two and Three, a necessary compromise which online media producers are obliged to make. It is, rather, that media producers no longer ignore the personal interests of consumers. What makes this development particularly important for the prestige picture is that it involves making connections and appeals with a broad range of moviegoers who do not fit explicitly into the standard pre-sold target audience—consumers who themselves may be involved in the art and literary spheres in non-commercial, non-professional or indeed commercial capacities.

Capote's conceptions of its non-core audience demand some consideration before we finally turn to *Syriana* to consider its marketing. While cultivating the interest of pre-sold audiences

(through appeals in the archive) and relying on contemporary star rhetoric to stimulate the interest of a broader general audience as well as cinephiles, Sony researched and incorporated a series of referrals in the extensive Links page of the *Capote* website which it tailored to specific audience segments. These segments can be grouped, abstractly, into two categories: the educated reader, who does not fit the profile of the pre-sold audience member; and young moviegoers aged 18 to 34 who have heard of the film because of their primary interest in the star or their critical engagement with American cinema.

Several strategic referrals made to literary classics webrings, amateur playwrights support services, as well as short story showcases are familiar and clear connection points enough. Appreciation and discussion sites dedicated to an author or specific literary genre have long been a staple of online participatory culture. Less familiar perhaps to 2005 audiences were the links to free online literature libraries, services which mainly served as computer-mediated storage and presentation spaces for easily retrievable out-of-copyright books. Many of these appeals helped to cohere grassroots communities across a broad spectrum of amateur playwrights and writers, aspiring and freelance journalists, or art and literary enthusiasts. Little was expected of these amateur writers and artists in terms of audience hype or infectious word-of-mouth buzz, but the website made worthwhile gains for longer term commercial opportunities by showing an interest in their shared investment in the art and literary universe. By contrast, the *crime* links section imposed a clear separation between grassroots creativity and objective academic study. These connections had little association with the film itself and shared only a thin continuity with the factual journalistic voice advancing the non-fiction novel, yet the links included here—targeting principally those viewers of college and university age with specific scholarly interests in the social sciences—were clearly intended as a springboard for unfettered intellectual inquiry.

Connections were also made with a secondary non-specific audience segment, based on similar social science appeals. These appeals were made on more avocational terms and tended to give less critical consideration to violence and cruelty in open society. One specific link which I initially found disturbing connected the user to a private investigation service, where users were confronted with assertive appeals: "Here is where you can find a private investigator in your area to help you with your case: Get the RIGHT PI for YOUR case!" This does not, of course, mean that consumers were literally hiring their services! I would suggest that amateur creators or more straightforward consumers of crime fiction were using the site as a research tool which helped them to reshape their understanding of the material accordingly.

We can, therefore, see from the way in which different audience segments are targeted through a range of non-filmic adult appeals that participatory culture on the web is beginning to extend in perhaps unanticipated ways to prestige audiences. This discussion, though far from exhaustive, highlights the strategic partnerships which Sony Classics forged with other online services in order to bring new content to a slightly more educated, affluent and older internet user. Although the *Capote* website did not formally provide a cyber space where amateur writers could share their short stories and plays, and students and researchers participate in debates about the criminal justice system, being affiliated with this broad range of activities alone and providing referrals to spaces where those social activities were actually held improved *Capote's* status in the cultural marketplace. Within these different spaces, the film can be seen to represent the consequences of violence in a serious and thoughtful manner, and perhaps it was admired by grassroots creatives for doing so. More than this even: older, upscale, sophisticated consumers are assumed to have creative interests of their own which find expression on the web, a privilege which in the 1990s and

early 2000s the industry had only bestowed on predominantly youth-based fantasy-oriented fan clubs. The turn to participatory culture and the interests of adult consumers who one presumes wish to gain entry into the professional sphere with their own personal works suggests that a concerted effort has taken place to begin extending the subsegmentation, targeting and positioning programs popularised for *The Lord of the Rings* audiences (Pullen, 2006: 173-4).

In the last section of this chapter I shall look in more detail at the way in which *Syriana* supports this statement. Though largely unsuccessful in other aspects of its online marketing, the *Syriana* website positioned itself as a site for older, educated consumers and it encouraged these users to further their understanding of political, ideological and educational matters using a variety of add-on features and downloadable extras.

Syriana From Script to Website

> I was writing *Syriana* [and] feeling disconnected from the material, like it didn't have the heart. So I was talking to a friend of mine … I described my son having had a nightmare. I picked him up, and he immediately said, "I want to look out the window" … it was around the time that his mother and I split up. We were alone. She wasn't there. I held him in the window for two hours and we looked out at the streetlight. It was really powerful for me. And [the friend] wrote me back and said, "That's what the movie's about. That's what you're trying to do." And I was just, "Oh, yeah."
>
> Stephen Gaghan (2005a)

Stephen Gaghan's statement raises two issues: his wish for *Syriana* to be something other than a mainstream entertainment—the desire, that is, to confer more than merely the

unalterable law of big oil and the heavy-handedness of government. His anecdote about sharing a tender moment of fatherly intimacy with his son in the mother's absence reflects a powerful desire to want to move *Syriana* beyond the precise and definite language of his screenplay, to move it into a realm where we as audiences can feel for the characters in a personal, emotional and cultural (i.e., political/ideological) sense.

The second issue concerns his particular cinematic vision of a harsh, real-world reality. What binds this private experience between father and son with the movie is not necessarily a sense of paternal responsibility (the therapeutic comfort which the parent provides the shaken child in the wake of a nightmare, and in a home environment that is now irrevocably changed) but rather a moment of stillness. We know that Gaghan and his son must have seen the same objects, regarded the same light, but we cannot know the importance of that moment for we did not share in the same communion, or grasp how fundamentally irrelevant time could have felt as the two focused on the present. In the same way, when we sit through a screening of *Syriana* we see things that are concrete, and familiar, and irrelevant, just as we see similar things in standardised blockbusters. But the assumption that we are finally *looking* at a mass medium entertainment like *Syriana* becomes very relevant. Gaghan, in collaboration with George Clooney and Steven Soderbergh as the project's originators and executive producers, understand that audiences will not leave the cinema feeling like changed people, but for them the point is that, for two hours, audiences can join them in communion.

This, of course, presented a significant problem for the film's marketers. What place, if any, can such a "moment of stillness" find in the mediated environment of online movie promotion? This section argues that the director's authorial statement was not addressed in

the marketing, but that, instead, the marketers developed a campaign with paradoxically opposing appeals. This was due largely to the studios' affiliation with Participant Productions, which connected the film to its own social action appeals, housed on its website Participate.net. My questions for this section concern the overall clarity of the marketing message, given that Participate was such an active organisation, and the extent to which the director's personal ambition for the film as art (rather than as a work that inspired agitprop) could be articulated by marketers in its electronic marketing. My contention is that the website, in tying to the political action site of its co-producer (a contractual obligation), skewed the focus away from the film's unmarketable moment of stillness to a generic and more topical focus on oil and its environmental implications. It then recovered this situation by targeting cinephiles and fans of genre film, via conventional appeals to cinematic connoisseurship. Attempts were made by the marketers to alert our focus to the story, and hence to the generic attributes of the film (to which its effectiveness as a conspiracy thriller was inextricably connected).

This final section will then examine a collection of applications that were provided to audiences in two key stages of the website's multistage life-cycle. Both applications were linked to an appeal that was designed to increase awareness of environmental issues and inspire corresponding action. It is on these terms—*Syriana's* adult business, intended for adult audiences—that the campaign seemed to settle, though I argue not entirely satisfactorily.

Syriana's multistage life-cycle was more clearly delineated than the other prestige campaigns discussed in this chapter:

- Teaser (October/November). In this early stage, the site's primary purpose was to heighten visibility of the theatrical trailer, which played for all audiences as a direct stream on the homepage. Beyond this, the site was well aligned with the offline strategy in providing very few resources that were not already well circulated: a small photos section, a download of the poster, and a synopsis which introduced the main characters: Bob Barnes (George Clooney), Bryan Woodman (Matt Damon), Bennett Holiday (Jeffrey Wright), and Wasim Ahmed Khan (Mazhar Munir). "Coming soon" incentives (video, reviews and soundtrack) were positioned clearly on the homepage, thereby increasing the chances of interested visitors returning.

Theatrical:

- Stage One (November/December). To encourage word-of-mouth support ahead of its nationwide release, the website was recalibrated for its platform release in late November. In this format, the site included promotional (Stars, Filmmakers, Poster, Soundtrack), contextual (Characters, About), and participatory (Reviews) features which were easily accessible via the menu bar which appeared under the film title. In addition, users were invited to pursue a social appeal (which linked to the community project of the film's co-producer, Participant Productions) and could access a valuable application (an mp3 roundtable discussion with the filmmakers), which users could download without much exploration of the homepage.

- Stage Two (January/March). The film's screenplay was published to the website on 30 December. This was a vital part of the awards season viral marketing campaign. Interested site visitors could also access a new podcast about creative screenwriting. A second community appeal, which linked to Participant's community forum, tied in to a

visible brand (the Segway Human Transporter) thus providing a connection between the film's marketing message and a purchasable economy-saving commodity.

- Home-video (March/present). In the aftermath of the Academy Awards, an animated Flash graphic advertised George Clooney's award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role and Stephen Gaghan's nomination for Best Original Screenplay. Additionally, a pop-up window listed the film's achievements at the Academy Awards, the British Academy of Film and Television Awards (BAFTA), and the Golden Globe Awards. A DVD link on the homepage ("Making an impact on DVD from 10 July") directed visitors to the Warner Bros. Shop and Amazon.

Due to the inordinate complexity of the narrative, and the growing perception amongst broad sections of the audience that *Syriana* was a left/liberal picture in political terms, the film posed several problems for its online marketers. Certainly the design and "look" of the website was unlike any of the case studies we have already discussed above. Appropriately, the film's poster—an image of star George Clooney, bound and gagged—was used throughout the website but with no other graphics, transition design, audio or background imagery. This in stark contrast to the *Memoirs of a Geisha* website, which used 6 different backgrounds in the hierarchy, the *Capote* website, which used 10 backgrounds, and the *Infamous* website, which used 3 background images and 3 patterned wallpapers. This helped to establish one important aspect of the story: freedom of speech in the 21st century. This critical issue—the physical oppression of speech, the metaphorical hand clamped over mouth—originated, therefore, not with the website's designers but with designers of the Cimarron Group which developed the original artwork (and which won the best drama award for its artwork at the Hollywood Reporter's 35th annual Key Art Awards in 2006)

(Siegel, 2006). The generic space of the website was strongly influenced if not entirely determined by the poster design. The representational cue of blood, of by implication violence, which is evident in the poster image—although subtly altering our orientation, moving us and it towards the thriller or crime film (but not permeating its genre boundaries)—is suggestive of bodily rupture, of literally blood split. If this graphic achieved anything for visitors it was to heighten the user's consciousness of the material state of being. Here, the figure on the computer screen (implicitly, the average American) was deprived literally of sight and speech, restricted to a narrow range of core senses.

The issue of oil—its ownership, its redistribution around the globe, and its corrupting influence on governments, business and individuals—from which all geopolitical analysis in the film stems was first introduced to site users via specific appeals to political action. In phase one of the website's theatrical version, the first of ultimately three links in the site's life-cycle to Participate.net appeared prominently alongside the trailer which streamed on the homepage. The appeal—"CLICK HERE TO GET INVOLVED," in capital letters—was appropriately worded to incite some form of consumer action. During 2005-6 the website, which ran in conjunction with takepart.com, was the community network of media company and *Syriana's* co-producer Participant Productions. Visitors in 2005, linking from the *Syriana* website, were presented with a *Syriana* Change content area which was sponsored by the National Resources Defence Council (NRDC) and the Sierra Club—American environmental organisations dedicated to curbing global warming and reducing the nation's dependency on oil. Some eco-neophytes may have regarded the Participant website as largely irrelevant, having little to do with the film website and its marketing, but interested users discovered other social issue movie titles financed by the same company. These

included for the time *Murderball* (Henry Alex Rubin and Dana Adam Shapiro, Paramount Pictures, 2005) and *Good Night and Good Luck*.

At the foot of the Participate website's branded content area were several appeals to direct action: "Tell Congress it's Time for an Oil Change," "Join the Virtual March on Washington," and "Donate Now to Projects Creating An Oil Change." One such appeal, the "virtual march," linked to a simple overview page describing the protest's objectives; included: "to urge the president [sic] to initiate a real plan of action to address global warming." Framed by the *Syriana* poster, which provided continuity throughout the Oil Change appeal, the various action pages (six in total) were designed for eco-novices, assuming that popular, conscientious audiences for whom the film held a special appeal merely wished to browse some of the community solutions advocated by members, or seeking clarification on issues which some still held to be contentious. For instance, the "Make Your Holiday Shopping Meaningful" appeal (so titled because the film was released in December) combined the informal language of a junior high or high school study guide— "Let's make driving cool again"—with a special application that was assumed to be of interest to motorists (an emissions calibrator). A discussion section, which contained a blog posts thread with linked to other knowledge databases and conventional bulletin boards, showed the film in both a promotional light (which assisted viral marketing) and in a critical context with regard to the geopolitics of oil.

For its part, the *Syriana* website advertised a purchasable item on its homepage with the potential of appealing to millions. As the theatrical website moved into its second phase for awards season, this second environmental appeal again linked to Participate where visitors were invited to fill in a competition form to enter a special prize draw. Significantly, the

item was a Segway (an energy-efficient alternative mode of transportation to the car), so that immediately interested visitors were privy to the significance of oil as perhaps the key motif of the film (and perhaps ironically to their own identities as consumers/objects of marketing). Further exploration of the *Syriana* website's homepage and its visual display refined this view, creating an interesting dynamic between the film's story (a critique of American foreign policy) and the environmental message of its sponsors.

The official website framed both the off-site Change and Segway appeals to newcomers thus: "OIL CHANGE: A CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE OUR DEPENDENCE ON OIL." The marketers, fulfilling commercial agreements between Warner Bros. and Participant Productions, securely anchored the *Syriana* website to the latter company's challenging appeals. For Gaghan personally, these connections were obviously counterproductive. Speaking explicitly about the Participate.net links on the official movie website in 2006, he said:

> I think it's great that they're trying to create something where you can then go and look, and focus the feelings that come out of [the film experience]. I'm way more interested in human nature. The political action or whatever that comes after [is] not for me personally. I don't like it when the Hollywood people lecture about the way the world should be.

Indeed, if such appeals came from the Hollywood people (or were perceived to) then they were unlikely to connect meaningfully with the core constituency of film fans and cinephile audiences. The text-based essays located in the Synopsis and About the Film sections conveyed a large portion of story information in a relatively small space, but with little care

or attention for the reader. These extended text files posited the geopolitics of oil as a viable subject for elaboration and discussion. *Syriana*, one file began, "unfolds against the intrigues and corruption of the global oil industry." Story information then delineated the complex interrelationships between three parties: American corporation Connex-Killen, a Chinese oil company competitor, and a reformist prince of the oil-producing country that is their focus. Despite its length, this account was not exhaustive. Dial-Up era websites, such as *Desperate Measures* (Barbet Schroeder, TriStar Pictures, 1998) and *Dante's Peak*, were more comprehensive and paradigmatic of this approach, providing two and three thousand word essays for the site user's edification. However, the emphasis on narrative causality in such intimidating detail made clear, perhaps for the first time as users proceeded through the website, the very demands this film was likely to place on them as potential audiences. The marketers did very little to break up this extended narrative on the computer screen, obliging casual readers to scroll further down a featureless webpage with no links and no imagery to break the seriousness of tone.

In both phases of the theatrical website, it becomes clear that the repurposed presskit information appealed to two audience groups: fans of genre film and cinephiles. Organised into a simple information architecture that cut across four key areas of film production (planning, the casting of international actors, costume and production design), the appeals in the About the Film section assumed a familiarity with, and for some a historical knowledge of, the worldviews of early 1970s films like *The Parallax View* (Alan J Pakula, Paramount Pictures, 1974) and *Three Days of the Condor* (Sydney Pollack, Paramount Pictures, 1975), politically-oriented thrillers with a low recall in the mass popular consciousness—this in contrast to a multiplatform blockbuster, like *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures, 1975). For other audiences, the broader dialogue was framed around America's oil

addiction, the administration, US economic hegemony. Thus, the website's descriptive materials, in continuity with the codes of its visual display, modified our generic expectations as we progressed from movie poster to movie website and hence on through its pages.

Syriana emphasised corruption over conspiracy, a distinction which was more appropriate as a brand indicator or product description. For cinephiles, this distinction was a relevant one. The most widely seen conspiracy thrillers, such as *Conspiracy Theory* (Richard Donner, Warner Bros., 1997) and *The X-Files* (Rob Bowman, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1998) were self-reflexive blockbusters, steered by populist notions and conventional indicators of conspiracy writ large. Their websites, far from engaging the intellect or challenging the more serious questions of political conspiracy for an inquisitive younger audience, invited users to work through linear web-based narratives which revealed dramatic and melodramatic high-points from both films as users progressed through the websites. By contrast, *Syriana's* descriptive materials hybridised the geopolitics of oil with a sense of the film's own cultural and social importance. This is not to say that the site was self-congratulatory (a mistake which can be made in the following section); but rather, that it focused heavily on differentiating *Syriana* from a populist canon of ironic conspiracy thrillers that had little effect on its audiences. In recovering the marketing message from the rhetoric associated with the Participate.net campaign, *Syriana* became even more ambiguous, and to a degree unmarketable, as a classifiable generic type.

The application of conventional promotional discourses in *Syriana's* web advertising had major consequences for the ways in which the film was received and potentially studied by

its audiences. In the next section, I substantiate this claim by examining the last-minute decision to publish Stephen Gaghan's Academy Award nominated screenplay online.

The *Syriana* Screenplay Online

Due to intellectual property rights and piracy issues the screenplay as a promotional item specifically did not become a viable web component for mainstream consumption until the mid-2000s, at which point marketing departments began to use them for high-profile films with Academy Award ambitions. The provision of scripts online, however, did not become a permanent tradition. They were used as provisional items, temporary phenomena. By no means was the practice also fan-oriented or fan-generated; it was strongly promotional. Members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the film industry itself, were invited and expected to review the screenplay online once the balloting process began. Rather than a promotional gimmick, the practice cut down on the expense of distributing hundreds of copies to Academy members, and more importantly, it increased Academy members' points of access to the potential nominee thereby increasing the chances of the film receiving a nomination and ultimately increasing its potential ancillary revenues (Wasko, 2003).

For *Syriana*, it was hoped that established industry writers—as nominators for Best Writing/Original Screenplay—would visit the site in order to access this and other content stored on its webpages. This positioning illustrates the value that producers attached to Academy nominations and awards, who evidently now consider the official website integral to film's revenue stream by virtue of its promotional role prior to final balloting. Significantly, its strategic emergence online in late-December, several weeks before the screenplay was finally officially nominated in the original writing category, was supported

by a screenwriting podcast produced by Creative Screenwriting Magazine. This free application, downloadable through Apple's iTunes for playback on desktop computers and iPods, featured Gaghan, interviewed by Jeff Goldsmith, discussing various aspects of Hollywood screenwriting, predominantly his field research. This bonus feature, exclusive to the website, brings into relief the impact of new technologies on the official website model, and the changing nature of the relationship between prestige pictures and their assumed web audiences—the full significance of which has not been explored.

Gaghan's presence on the site in this capacity was clearly intended to extend the screenplay's appeal beyond Academy voters; however, it did not confirm the interest or participatory involvement of subscriber/members of Creative Screenwriting, as might be suggested. The print edition of Creative Screenwriting had a circulation of 26,000 industry writers (film and television), for whom the magazine, and its annual trade show, provided information on management firms and agencies, film trends, and production companies (Business Publisher, 2007). Subscription postings of this kind were downloaded directly through the iTunes store, bypassing the official movie website, thereby significantly reducing the chances of the group concerned learning of the podcast via the print or online editions. To that extent, the script-oriented content areas of *Syriana* appeared to be designed for other audiences, beyond the writers that directly constituted Creative Screenwriting's core subscription base. Other professional and aspiring writers posting on the Done Deal Pro website for instance, a similar trade service to Creative Screenwriting, appeared to have visited *Syriana* themselves, or free online archives such as Simply Scripts, to learn of its publication.

The website, rather, played upon the sellable appeal of the online screenplay and podcast for a far broader audience of committed moviegoers—for whom the cinema was not perhaps anything more (in a professional capacity) than a passionate fixation, hobby or pastime. Therefore, in the place of working screenwriters, the online screenplay held some appeal for a general audience of casual filmgoers and film students. A small list of fan and non-fan cultures and businesses online, whose bulletin boards at some point in the first quarter of 2006 promoted the release of the script online, included the MobileRead Forum (a mobile technology-oriented discussion board); the community network LiveJournal (which has more than 16 million threads); the community blog for cinephiles PassionforCinema; the business and information portal Canadian Business; and the personal blog of a commercial software marketer and engineer Deeje Cooley. While the screenplay's stylistic, artistic value (from a writing point of view) was generally overlooked in these examples, its cultural worth as an internet freebie—either to be taken advantage of by users who critique popular culture, or revered as a goodwill gesture by a major studio owned by the largest communications conglomerate in the world—was elevated above other considerations. But unlike some movie fandoms, however, community members who posted about the screenplay did so through mainstream channels, linking to the official site directly as opposed to an anti-mainstream or subcultural fandom. This suggests that interested parties, the Canadian Business firm particularly, used the film's prestige value and appeal to support the validation of their editorial positions on geopolitical matters—it was, hence, viewed as an *authentic* text.

As these examples illustrate, it is difficult to speak of a singular fandom, or fan factions, in the case of *Syriana*. The pop-culture blog Boing Boing, for instance, which has a predominantly male readership, clearly found cinephiliac value in posting links to the script

and highlighting "an interesting edit" for an early draft, but this seems to reflect a personal preference of the author, for whom all "wonderful things," we are told, were a matter of interest, not just film, and evidently not just prestige film (Boing Boing, 2006). Indeed, the post has not been commented on by a single reader in the six years since its publication and the link provided bypasses the official website. In this context, the distinctive posturing and status display of the author produces an overlap with the attitudinal behaviours of the pre-mainstream, early adopters described by Matt Hills (2006). The screenplay itself was not publicly derided and on the contrary it was respected for its authenticity—indeed, this distinction framed one of the earliest reviews of a bootleg script, which appeared on the movie news website JoBlo in the month before the movie's release.

There is to be found, not unexpectedly, a genuine purist's interest in the genesis, the craft and the final presentation of the screenplay in specific movie fandoms, not all of which ally themselves with the mainstream. Free collectors archives, such as The Daily Script, Drew's Script-o-Rama, Simply Scripts and Roteiro de Cinema, which bring a sense of educational legitimacy to the practice of accumulating online screenplays and transcripts, informed their consumerbase when the script came online and mirrored the downloadable PDF file with links of their own (often to a copy of the original file on a different server, hence the term, mirror). For these fandoms, the screenplay is the commodity; by contrast, the official website—once sold as the commodity in the broader context of web marketing—was often locked out (due to the proliferation of mirror websites containing the download link) and thus ultimately bypassed in this process.

Perhaps the most obvious mainstream application of the online screenplay can be traced to American and non-American institutions, such as schools. While the work of prestige

pictures like *Syriana* is of no lesser importance than the films of the 1990s to scholarly inquiry (chiefly at the level of pre-school, high-school or college), the promotion of the modern prestige film as a viable educational resource for students is different from the system in place for Dial-Up era prestige films. For instance, Lifetime Learning Systems, the Stamford, CT company whose educational materials the Hollywood studios and MPAA circulated to thousands of teachers nationwide throughout the 1980s and 1990s, created study guides for the official *Twelfth Night* (Trevor Nunn, Fine Line Features, 1996, US/UK/Ireland), *Mother Night* (Keith Gordon, Fine Line Features, 1996), *Shine* (Scott Hicks, Fine Line Features, 1996, Australia), and *Amistad* (Steven Spielberg, DreamWorks, 1997) websites (Belluck, 1996). Increasingly, the system was criticised for precipitating historical inaccuracies and for the unethical strategy of targeting children with film promotions, and accordingly, marketers formulated new strategies for marketing to children—yet, the study guide approach to handling films in the classroom persists (Bennetta, 1997; Briley, 1998). *Syriana* is different, for it created both a distance to students and implicit invitation. Absent a bibliography of sources or *Capote*-like historical archive, the website did not share the common generic structures of the more purposeful sites created for *Hamlet* (Kenneth Branagh, Columbia Pictures, 1996, US/UK) or *Amistad*. Its effectiveness for mature audiences thus probably arose from the fact that it grounded story information in assumed knowledge. However, certain features of the site, including its screenplay, made *Syriana* especially appealing for school teachers, and by suggestion, their school-age students who were necessarily guided to the website seeking information. The comprehensive overview provided in the characters section, for instance, contained not only a helpful list of key participants (for example, "CHRIS COOPER/Jimmy Pope: Owns Killen Oil") but entry-level information on corporations ("Connex: Powerful Texas oil company that wants to buy Killen to gain the smaller company's drilling rights in Kazakhstan").

These added features benefited cultural critics like Roger Ebert in the immediate short-term, but also benefited the longer-term discussion of the film in school environments. In the UK, for instance, the Film Education charity, which receives support from filmmakers, exhibitors and distribution firms, recommended the film for further study at GCSE and AS/A2 Level students (13-18 year-olds) and produced a *Syriana* study guide to complement a variety of disciplines (Citizenship, English, Geography, Economics) (Monahan, 2008; Gillespie, 2009).

Syriana did not, therefore, *share* knowledge (for its website was not a repository like *Capote*) but instead *assumed* this knowledge on the part of informed educated audiences across a range of overlapping, interweaving disciplines and interests. While the (temporary) inclusion of the screenplay online was largely atypical for prestige film (and definitively so for mainstream prestige films), *Syriana* went one further by orienting professional and aspiring screenwriters in its direction, including for a brief period, Academy nominators. In addition, the specific use of eco-novice and entry-level language on the Participate.net *Syriana* page was directed towards school-age children; the positioning of that website's link directly above the Download the Screenplay command on the *Syriana* homepage, suggested a connection. The screenplay's dissemination, finally, to broader audiences via mainstream and subcultural fan and non-fan factions was perhaps to be expected, but evidently not planned for.

As discussed in the last section, the electronic campaign for *Capote* incorporated as much background and research information as possible on its film subject in order to ground the film "authentically" as a real-world production with social and cultural legitimacy. *Capote*, a prestige film intended for mature and educated audiences, incorporated valuable tools of

connoisseurship for the interested visitor, including a Sponsored Archive and In The Press library section. In each case the website brought viewers into contact with the "reality"—reality in the sense of an original 300-word news story printed in *The New York Times* over fifty years ago—and left them to speculate about the film, to wonder how close it came to corresponding with that reality. In contrast, *Syriana* posed multiple problems for the marketers who created a viable web presence for the film but ultimately not a satisfactory one. Consequently, the website failed to broach important issues raised by the film or to engage consumers in a shared public forum. These issues—which included the depletion of fossil fuel resources, corruption at the highest levels of government, and a hope for environmental, economic and political change—were identified on the website but not without recourse to the lengthy production notes generated by the publicity department.

It failed, also, to adequately deal with or convey something of the "moment" discussed at the beginning of this section. The moment of stillness which Stephen Gaghan articulated in his authorial statement and which US audiences were expected to share as spectators was intended as a positive moment for reflection on the cusp of radical change, based on an assumption that American economic and political hegemony had been profoundly historically affected by America's protracted military interventions in the Middle East. Through an emphasis on connoisseurship and screenwriting materials, it did at best modify the "moment", allowing for the dissemination of these key materials through US mainstream, non-mainstream, interpretative communities and non-fan communities for the singular purpose of facilitating its own roundtable discussion. Ultimately, perhaps, *Syriana* achieved some success by simplifying the marketing message to these viral concepts: the oil and the screenplay. But neither strategy reflected adequately the film's concerns or its complex ideas.

Conclusion

The perception is still upheld within the industry that adult audience subsets, though not necessarily less tech savvy than younger audiences, are less inclined to extend their online loyalties to the sort of exploratory behaviour which sites for high-profile, non-prestige blockbusters like *Night at the Museum* (Shawn Levy, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2006, US/UK) demanded of their constituencies. The site for *Night at the Museum*, a Ben Stiller comedy which was marketed to families and younger children, positioned its young web visitors as interlocutors in the name of fun—conversational partners with whom the museum's toy buggies and capuchin monkeys could communicate, primarily to pester or to nuisance. The amiable interactivity which characterised the *Infamous* website appears, by comparison, to represent the limit of textual inhabitation for a prestige film which was marketed in largely generic terms. To align a prestige film like *Infamous* with comparable blockbuster strategies, to embrace what Paul Grainge terms the economic "principle of immersion" for the sake of harnessing or appealing to the youth market of movie blockbusters would be to misrepresent the prestige film's very terms of address (2008: 57).

The heightened visibility of the modern prestige film on the web was aided and facilitated by the appropriation of other simpler (though less interactive in nature) generic appeals from the strategies established for movie blockbusters and genre film. The proliferation of music tracks on prestige film menu pages—including *Seabiscuit* (Gary Ross, Universal Pictures, 2003)*, Sylvia, Girl With A Pearl Earring* (Peter Webber, Lionsgate Films, 2003, UK/Luxembourg)*, Pride and Prejudice* (Joe Wright, Focus Features, 2005, France/UK)*, The North Country, Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, Focus Features, 2005, US/Canada), *The Pursuit of Happyness* (Gabriele Muccino, Columbia Pictures, 2006) and *Flags Of Our*

Fathers (Clint Eastwood, Paramount Pictures, 2006)—is a highly illustrative example of the cross-pollination at work between the movie blockbusters, genre film and prestige picture websites of the Broadband era. Aggrieved mature audiences, it was suggested, could simply remove this impediment by selecting the Soundtrack Off button and they were now expected to do so.

This thinking was predicated on an assumption that the more mature and educated audiences of the prestige picture were responsive to participatory website appeals as opposed to interactive ones. In *Convergence Culture* (2006), Henry Jenkins draws a key distinction: because it is rooted in the specific design and technological capabilities of the day, interactivity "is prestructured by the designer," hence, "the constraints on interactivity are technological" (135). Through participation, the consumer takes media content into his/her own hands and is socialised into imagined web communities where media producers are less well positioned to promote themselves or protect media content (Pullen, 2006: 173-4) . Yet it was also assumed throughout the 1990s and for most of the early 2000s that traditional participatory culture was the sole preserve of fan groups aged 15 to 28. In terms of media content, it was understood that prestige audiences only had the time online for a trailer, short factual accounts describing the way movies were filmed, and testimonials from trustworthy publications. Sites like *Capote* and *Syriana* indicate that the major studios, having finally harnessed and brought into the fold "many aspects of 'fan culture' that would have seemed marginal a decade ago," were in the Broadband era exploring the different interests and responses of the more mature audiences connected with prestige cinema (Jenkins, 2006a: 291).

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

In this study I have explored aspects of the historical development and practical application of motion picture websites in the Dial-Up and Broadband eras of the internet. The existing film studies literature made several statements about the development of online marketing which this study has tried to address, clarify or correct. It has also combined aspects of marketing theory, such as the online brand community and word of mouth, with the existing film studies literature in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of interactive movie marketing. In this section, I raise again the key research questions outlined in the Introduction and discuss some of the main issues and implications raised in this study.

Why did the studios promote their films online? In 1994, the first year of internet marketing, film websites were used as research tools to evaluate the characteristics of online audiences and to test the internet's early electronic commerce (e-commerce) potential. These websites were useful elements in the marketing programme for mainstream films but were not imperative. They received their official launches approximately seven days before the start of a film's theatrical run and served therefore predominantly theatrical audiences for a short period in the commercial life-cycle. Once a film had earned its maximum box-office revenue within its first two weeks on general release (Wasko, 2003: 105-107) its website was either downscaled and incorporated into a corporate website, or it was taken offline entirely. By 1996 this strategy had changed and the marketing function of websites had been modified fundamentally to support ancillary revenues in non-theatrical markets. In the marketing literature, Zufryden's (2000) important study on website promotion and box-office performance in 1996/1997 found that websites certainly raised awareness of films, and it

concluded that websites were a useful source of data for the studios in the prediction of future successes. I suggest that in this early period of the Dial-Up era the majors viewed the internet less as a theatrical marketing tool, but more as a tool for supporting and sustaining (as internet security protocols improved) ancillary revenues derived from the home entertainment market. Of the six major studios, Warner Bros. was the most likely to keep the websites for its films operational, absorbing the relatively low costs of online maintenance in order to link interested consumers in the home to its online retailer—the Warner Studio Store. Notably, the Warner Bros. subsidiary New Line Cinema also maintained many of its websites (until the mini-major's full merger with the parent company in 2008). This served to promote the New Line Shop which online consumers could access to browse the entire home-video catalogue from the comfort of their living room. In addition to connecting consumers with the studios' own e-stores, Dial-Up era websites gave marketers access to valuable data on their visitors. Marketing scientists used data from these websites to monitor and analyse important variables regarding consumer behaviours—for example the long-term practices of consumers interested in aspects of a film brand, such as its soundtrack.

My research shows that throughout the Dial-Up and Broadband eras the majors used their most high-profile movie blockbusters and blockbuster franchises to drive a higher number of offline and online transactions for audiovisual entertainment. Movie websites, and website campaigns, became crucial in this regard. For example, the *Star Trek: First Contact* (Jonathan Frakes, Paramount Pictures, 1996) website, which received 5 million hits in one day upon its launch, included multiple links on its homepage and throughout the site to the Star Trek: Continuum. The Continuum was a studio-monitored brand community, hosted on the Microsoft Network, which advertised Paramount Home Video's latest releases in the *Trek* canon and informed fans worldwide where and when to expect the next television

broadcast of their favourite *Trek* show. Both sites linked visitors to the Paramount Digital Entertainment site where further information on merchandise and ordering from its Home-Video and Studio Store were provided.

For whom are websites intended? In 1992/3, the major studios collaborated with early start-up companies, such as Hollywood Online and Entertainment Drive, who produced online variations of the standardised electronic press kit for a subscription audience. The production, online distribution, and dissemination of electronic and interactive press kits established standards of quality, delivery and commercial demand which the studios sought to control. The majors responded immediately by focusing on consumer behaviour and expectations, and on the potential growth of the internet as a delivery and sales mechanism for future audiovisual entertainment. This resulted in a form of website design and production that was geared towards film connoisseurship, with rare diversions into the more commercially-centred field of cyber exploration and cinematic reproduction. To that extent, the earliest motion picture websites adhered to the normalised tradition of press kit provision, attracting the interest of specialised online consumers who sought studio-sanctioned movie content. The question quickly became one of product differentiation, as major marketing strategies implicitly privileged (and subsequently promoted) the website as a key resource for brand communities and a driver for home entertainment sales. Throughout the Dial-Up and Broadband eras we have thus witnessed a constant movement in audience constitution away from "the relatively privileged few" to a balanced mainstream of mature and younger audiences. In the early 2000s, the growing proficiency of consumers with web technologies meant less reliance on "helping hand" portal websites and spurred the development of "websites looking for profitability from these users" (Broersma, 1999; Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 258; Lambiase, 2002: 253).

Does the studio paradigm for website promotion support the marketing programme? One

implication of this research is that website developers have largely failed to motivate large

numbers of internet users to visit their local multiplexes and purchase tickets on the opening

day of the theatrical run. This cannot be tested without empirical data. However, the

research supports the suggestion that film websites successfully combine and expand upon

the characteristics of traditional, old-media marketing practices. To this extent, website

promotion does provide similar benefits and outcomes to TV-spot or outside billboard

advertising, but more crucially it sustains the life cycle of film beyond the theatrical run and

this clearly differentiates the internet from TV-spot/billboard advertising. The websites for

the blockbusters *Shrek 2* (Andrew Adamson et al., DreamWorks, 2004) and other titles

discussed in Chapter Three including *King Kong* (Peter Jackson, Universal Pictures, 2005,

US/Germany/New Zealand) and *Night at the Museum* (Shawn Levy, Twentieth Century-

Fox, 2006, US/UK) combined conventional appeals to promote the Trailer and the Talent

with interactive appeals (the Game and the Shop) designed to serve returning web users and

viewers. Indeed, as a means of communicating and signifying to others the potential value of

film consumption, movie websites successfully combined, but could also discriminate

between, the persuasive characteristics of a range of media—from the high concept visual

style and one-to-many marketing approach of the billboard to the "promise of the cinematic

experience" implicit in the trailer, from the transformative and experiential pleasures offered

by videogaming to the one-to-one rhetoric of cinephiliac devotion in authentic fandoms

(Kernan, 2004: 209; Murray, 2004: 19). Given the industry's intense desire to connect with a

web audience defined by geographic, cultural and demographic diversity, the websites for

such tentpole releases as *Spider-Man 3* (Sam Raimi, Columbia Pictures, 2007),

Transformers (Michael Bay, Paramount Pictures, 2007) and *The Simpsons Movie* (David

Silverman, Twentieth Century-Fox, 2007) were designed to encapsulate all of these appeals in order to win back young audiences, if only for a brief time.

Improvements in relations between site vendors and the studios, who in rare instances organised face-to-face meetings for creative directors or project managers with the filmmakers themselves, meant that websites increasingly enjoyed new levels of textual and tonal continuity with their film referents. For instance, director Paul Thomas Anderson "knew exactly how he wanted" to promote *Punch-Drunk Love* (Paul Thomas Anderson, Columbia Pictures, 2002) to an online audience, and thus worked with the site's designers to make "the marketing an extension of his vision for the film" (Shaw, 2009). Anderson's involvement also ensured the valuable contributions of composer Jon Brion and digital artist Jeremy Blake, who produced web content in direct collaboration with vendor One Ten Design. Thus, the chief selling point for websites particularly in the Broadband era was the impressive sense of a textual authenticity, a fidelity to the filmic narrative, which benefited the home entertainment industry as Broadband era technologies improved.

How did the studios leverage the internet for films that were less ideally suited to a digitally networked environment? This study has focused primarily on movie blockbusters and mainstream Hollywood films. Case studies have included *Batman Forever* (Joel Schumacher, Warner Bros., 1995, US/UK)*, Star Trek: First Contact, Godzilla* (Roland Emmerich, TriStar Pictures, 1998, US/Japan), *The Bourne Supremacy* (Paul Greengrass, Universal Pictures, 2004, US/Germany) and *King Kong*. However, the final chapter examined the websites for four prestige films—*Memoirs of a Geisha* (Rob Marshall, Columbia Pictures, 2005)*, Capote* (Bennett Miller, Sony Pictures Classics, 2005, US/Canada)*, Infamous* (Douglas McGrath, Warner Independent Pictures, 2006) and *Syriana*

(Stephen Gaghan, Warner Bros., 2005)—in order to provide a different context for evaluating the promotional value of websites launched for non-blockbuster, semi-independent American films. These case study websites demonstrated the potential, as well as the difficulties, of attracting more upscale adult web users with middlebrow forms of advertising. The size of the fan community surrounding *Memoirs of a Geisha* did not seem to influence the online marketing campaign which communicated very little information about the film or its release to users of the website. The *Syriana* website ultimately failed to convey the director Stephen Gaghan's authorial statement (his social message) to its cine-literate audience, but it afforded like-minded users new opportunities to share screenwriting materials which facilitated a roundtable discussion beyond the website itself. The *Infamous* website showed clear continuities with the strategies characteristically used by the major studios for blockbuster and genre films locked in parallel development with other rival films. However, the marketing practices used to present it in the deferred film context (opposed to *Capote*'s first-to-market film) were less appropriate and less successful than the approach used for *Capote*. The *Capote* website's character-based and genre-based appeals to connoisseurs helped to create a sense of Capote's living presence within the world of *In Cold Blood*, the novel which becomes the focus of the film. Its *Sponsored Archive* and *In The Press* sections prioritised authenticity at the level of story, character and situation, and this supported the film's claims to prestige implicit in the website's opening pages.

I have also shown how the strategies of movie blockbusters and genre film influenced, both positively and negatively, the literally worldwide web promotions of movies intended for global consumption. *Memoirs of a Geisha* made a concerted effort to target generalised audiences from different cultural backgrounds, commissioning several variations of its mainstream North American template in addition to localised websites and portal content

areas. In responding to specific ideas about international markets, and implicitly the cinema projects of these markets, the studio (a subsidiary of the Japanese corporation Sony, which is based in Tokyo) sanctioned the production of Japanese and South Korean websites. The sites were conceived based on an understanding that local audiences in these large Eastern markets respond well to promotions in their own cultural idiom. However, certain problems persisted. The marketing communicated ideas about the film (and ideas articulated with some conviction by its director) which furthered the production of Orientalism and thus replicated a vision of the Far East which is imaginary.

Were motion picture websites an effective form of internet advertising? In 1994, Paramount Pictures, followed shortly thereafter by the other majors, established ties immediately with the home entertainment industry by offering consumer services, including online catalogues, for online shoppers on its earliest websites. This interest in the web as a driver of revenues in ancillary markets steered the development of motion picture websites throughout the Dial-Up era. The introduction of DVD to the commercial marketplace in 1996 strengthened these ties, and in order to support home-video's tremendous profitability it became common practice for website and home-video developers to share and cross-promote exclusive content. Websites offered limited extras which regularly appeared later on the DVD, while the DVD carried special features which consumers could only unlock with access to a DVD-ROM drive and the internet—this ploy, more pointedly, returned consumers to the website itself. For example, both the UK and US editions of the 2001 DVD release of *Se7en* (David Fincher, New Line Cinema, 1995) provided an online gateway which enabled users to access previously unavailable features contained on a special "John Doe" website.

However, Hollywood's use of the web as a driver for home entertainment sales was always problematic in the 1990s. Websites of the period 1994 to 2001 were predominantly characterised by a marketing emphasis on narrative, stars, genre and merchandise, and a developing interest in personalised media and gaming. Slow internet connections and poor compression technologies challenged the industrial dependency on graphic imagery and its clean replication in studio marketing campaigns, thus forcing marketers to find alternative solutions for the internet. An emphasis on the film's visual style and the iconic appearance of the characters, therefore, receded as priorities, and marketers adapted the marketing message to the characteristics of interactive marketing. Text-based appeals with strong ties to narrative and gaming applications were privileged. This had implications for conventional advertising rhetoric as campaigns became increasingly reliant on the strength and marketability of film in an industrial context. This accounts for the heavy reliance on behind-the-scenes footage, script excerpts and storyboard samples, and on-set simulcasts with cast and crew members. The development of rich media technologies in the late-1990s—which favoured moving imagery, cinematic editing and interactivity—attracted the attention of all the Hollywood majors. There followed, consequently, a shift away from the text-based practices of the Dial-Up era. Fundamentally, broadband technologies brought new opportunities to synchronise website and DVD design in a fashion that strongly supported the home-video industry. In the Dial-Up era, websites advertised a home-video or soundtrack release via an HTML link which forwarded consumers to third-party websites where products could be purchased sight unseen. In the Broadband era, however, the trend was towards the veritable "shop-window" as motion picture websites became seductive multimedia showcases for DVD. It was noted in Chapter Three, for example, that the *Iron Man* (Jon Favreau, Paramount Pictures, 2008) website and the digital menus contained on

the *Iron Man* DVD home-video release both used layered animated video and interactive features to create full-motion, 360-degree digital worlds.

In the mid-2000s, however, decentralisation emerged as an efficient coping mechanism for meeting the competitive demands of a dynamic marketplace. Broadband applications and improved services encouraged more efficient advertising models for publishers and expanded new revenue opportunities. The segmentation of audiences into visible 11-18, 19-26, 27-35, 36-49, and 50+ age groups, and further subsegmentation of these groups via the many new commercial services and social community pages online undermined the motion picture website's relevance as a driver of community participation and activity. Movie websites thus became less effective as destinations for innovative content, even less so as community aggregation points. In the Dial-Up era, it was assumed that websites served the needs of members in the brand community. The developers created two versions of a website for consumers with slow and fast-processing speeds, but site content was strictly contained within the website and not on the front landing, or splash, page. However, during the Broadband era, some tentpole releases, including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Tim Burton, Warner Bros., 2005, US/UK), moved the website's most desirable content onto the landing page in an attempt to interest non-brand community audiences who did not particularly care to spend the time exploring the main website. Importantly, these extras (which included Downloads, Photos, Games and Video) were positioned alongside stronger appeals promoting other audiovisual entertainment (such as the Soundtrack, The Book, Imax screening information and Mobile). By 2007, summer blockbusters such as *Transformers* (Michael Bay, Paramount Pictures, 2007) and *Iron Man* were effectively integrating showtime, cast and credits, and booking information on their landing pages with attractive

appeals inviting site visitors to play an official game or to learn more about the official merchandise produced by game company Hasbro without ever having to enter the website.

This entrenchment of decentralisation occurred for three reasons. Firstly display advertising, which marketers used in order to build audience awareness on a broad scale, became a key architectural feature of the web. Secondly the mainstreaming of social-networking platforms and publishing tools raised the profile of online consumer groups, making them visible and hence targetable for marketers. And thirdly the recommendations of market analysts who scrutinised marketplace dynamics and who circulated opinions about the importance of decentralisation were highly influential. *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, Artisan Entertainment, 1999) methodology—which privileged across a range of offline media the website as a key resource for information about the film—was supplanted in the Broadband Era by multidirectional online marketing. The online marketing message is therefore no longer singular (that is to say: "visit our website") for the film is almost everywhere we look. In the Broadband Era, the big studios negotiated and sustained favourable promotional partnerships with the most highly trafficked web portals (Yahoo!, AOL, Google), popular entertainment news publications (*Entertainment Weekly's EW.com, People*, *Rolling Stone, Premiere*), instant messaging services (AOL's AIM and ICQ, MSN, Yahoo), online magazines (*GQ, Cosmopolitan, Esquire, Time, New Yorker, TV Guide*), national newspapers (*The New York Times, USA Today, The Washington Post*), trailer delivery platforms (Apple's Movie Trailers, RealNetworks' Film.com, YouTube) and social networking publication services (MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, Xanga, Friendster) to assert the dominance of a corporate brand, ensuring that it existed in the digital sphere. Banner advertising, widgets and microblogging further expanded this multidirectional approach.

This plurality extends to website content. In my correspondence with Gordon Paddison it was made clear that a single viral element was irrelevant, both as a technique and as a standard for the studio (in the context of our conversation the single element was the Crash This Trailer application, but his case applies equally to other non-commercial devices). Single attractions were, and thus remain, transitory features, for they are not universally replicable. This, at least, explains why the interactive trailer, discussed in Chapter Three, did not come to fruition as either a form of mass market communication, or on a sufficiently large enough scale to constitute a trend. Trend-setting is not the goal of studio marketers. Thus, the interactive trailer and mobile phone promotions examined in Chapter Three—or more recent examples such as Burger King's Simpsoniser application, which customised a user's personal head-shot in the visual style of *The Simpsons Movie*—did not constitute social media optimisation in and of themselves, but were, rather, elements of a regime of social media optimisation that continues to underpin the majors' varying approaches to online marketing for modern blockbusters.

In helping to further the subsegmentation process of market positioning, the web is beginning to provide opportunities for closer analysis, not just of studio practice and hence commodity culture, but of grassroots consumer responsiveness and the value of grassroots participation. Specific quantitative and qualitative questions about the co-operative alliance between media companies and emergent grassroots knowledge cultures are therefore being taken very seriously by the marketing departments of the major studios.

This research, therefore, builds on the knowledge of internet marketing in the existing film studies literature. It explores the historical development of website promotion over the course of two periods in the web's history, the Dial-Up era (1994 to 2001) and Broadband

era (approximately 2001 to the present), and identifies the key industrial and social changes that have occurred across these periods. The findings from this study suggest that movie website promotion has served the Hollywood film industry's long-term interest in home entertainment as a crucial ancillary market since its very first dealings with the web in 1994. It therefore suggests that websites are more beneficial to their users and to their creators as multimedia showcases for DVD and a range of other merchandise available to online shoppers than for, in contrast, their paratextual value for viewers during a film's theatrical run.

Some key technological developments have impacted online marketing practices in recent years and these un-researched areas provide scope for further research. The mainstream adoption of wireless internet and mobile technology services in the Broadband era has radically freed the internet from the constraints of a conventional desktop computer connected by cables. From 2005 hardware developers such as Apple and Sony produced portable computing devices, smartphones and videogame consoles which connected to the internet via wireless networks supplied by telecommunications carriers such as Verizon Wireless and AT&T. These technologies have expanded radically in the course of the research, becoming as ubiquitous in western culture as the traditional cell phone and thus initiating a new phase in the internet's development. This new "connected" mobility necessitates a more interactive approach to relationship marketing, and this ability to advertise to consumers on the move is certainly an area in which further study will expand on the research findings.

Secondly, this research could not cover every major development in website production over the course of the Broadband era. In recent years, however, the website for *Zodiac* (David

Fincher, Paramount Pictures, 2007), a film about a series of local murders committed in San Francisco over forty years ago, showed how some of the methods utilised in prestige pictures such as *Capote* can be improved upon using high-quality computer-generated imagery. The result could potentially transform what is possible with movie websites. Its *Interactive Timeline* and *Washington and Cherry Crime Scene* features presented never before seen materials supplied by the San Francisco Police Department, some of which can only be viewed on the website. This is especially noteworthy because these features were designed at the director's behest (Christiano, 2010). The *Crime Scene*, which enabled users to interact with a photo-realistic digital recreation of the Presidio Heights murder and highlight key pieces of evidence, was the result of a collaboration between the interactive design agency Project C, David Fincher himself and the visual effects company Digital Domain. Fincher directed the digital mapping of the whole scene (determining camera movement and close-up shot selections), Digital Domain executed the computer-generated images and Project C translated the final work to the web. These extras clearly differentiated the *Zodiac* website from any other promotional element used in the campaign; and nothing like it has appeared, in the form of bonus features, on its DVD releases.

This and other intriguing developments clearly provide scope for further research on motion picture websites; indeed if filmmakers like David Fincher continue to press for similar innovations in online marketing, the movie website itself may come to represent a new form of collector's item.

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