



Anatomy of a Movie Poster

BY CHRIS KOSELLIK

Every time a major Hollywood studio puts out a movie, it spends an average of \$37 million on advertising—a good chunk of which goes into designing movie posters. We spent a little over \$37 to figure out why.

TAG—YOU'RE IT!

Taglines are those pithy, intriguing phrases on posters. It's the "Why So Serious?" line on the poster for *The Dark Knight* and the "Better Late Than Never" copy on *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*. But getting the perfect wording will cost you. Design firms employ an army of copywriters to think up the perfect phrase, and hundreds of taglines are presented and rejected before one is chosen. Most agree the gold standard is from 1979's *Alien*: "In space no one can hear you scream."

THE SMALL PRINT

The paragraph at the bottom is known as the billing block, it's got most of the names you'd see in a film's opening credits, except in smaller print. The studio is listed first, followed by the stars, the co-stars, and the key production positions, such as the music composer, the casting director, the costume designer, the production designer, the editor, and the director of photography. Writers, producers, and executive producers come next, and the director's name always comes last. Why go to all that effort? The studios have to list all of these people because, thanks to the unions and guilds, it's part of their contracts.



THE BOTTOM LINE

Tired of drooping flowers? Take a page from Bob Dole and try Viagra! The little blue pill can keep cut flowers looking fresh for up to one week longer than their normal life span.

MARQUEE STATUS

Many movie-star contracts stipulate that the celeb should get top billing, no matter how small the role. For example, on 1978's *Superman* poster, Marlon Brando's name appears first—above the movie title—even though he was only on screen for 10 min-

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utes. Gene Hackman, who played Lex Luthor, appeared next. Meanwhile, Christopher Reeve, the guy who played Superman, was only mentioned in tiny type in the block credits below the film's title.

If a movie has two big-name stars of equal stature, the process gets more complicated. It also means that movie execs have to do a lot more finagling to get the poster approved. For 2008's *Righteous Kill*, Robert De Niro got his name listed first, while Al Pacino's name was placed higher. The most infamous battle for top billing has to be 1965's *Boeing*, Tony Curtis and Jerry Lewis both demanded to be on top; so on the poster, their names were crisscrossed. It may have been difficult to read, but it was easy on the ego.



THE BIG WIGS

Because the studios pay for the poster, they always stamp their logos at the very end of the billing block. But the logos are often subtle and easily overlooked. Studios don't want fame; they want power. And more than anything, they want you to buy a ticket to the movie.

POP QUIZ!

Terrible Films, Great Directors

These directors might be Hollywood's cream of the crop now, but their first features were rotten tomatoes. See how many A-list directors you can match to their B-movie debuts.

THE A-LIST DIRECTORS



1. JAMES CAMERON
(*Titanic*, *Avatar*)



2. JONATHAN DEMME
(*The Silence of the Lambs*)



3. BRIAN DE PALMA
(*Scarface*)



4. RON HOWARD
(*A Beautiful Mind*)



5. PETER JACKSON
(*The Lord of the Rings* trilogy)



6. OLIVER STONE
(*Platoon*)



7. RIDLEY SCOTT
(*Gladiator*, *Black Ramses*)



8. ROBERT ZEMECKIS
(*Forrest Gump*)

THE B-MOVIES

A) *The Duellists* (1977)—During the Napoleonic age, two French army officers dedicate their lives to avenging honor through a never-ending series of duels.

B) *Grand Theft Auto* (1977)—It's mania on the California highways when a headstrong young man hijacks a Rolls-Royce so he and his girlfriend can elope in Las Vegas.

C) *Piranha II: The Spawning* (1981)—The piranhas' bite was too big for just one film, so the aquatic terrors come back to sink their teeth into a new group of hapless vacationers. If things weren't bad enough, this time the nasty snappers can fly!

D) *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* (1978)—Four giggly-but-determined New Jersey teenage girls hatch a plot to meet the Beatles by sneaking into *The Ed Sullivan Show* and crashing the band's television appearance.

E) *Selma* (1974)—A novelist learns the true meaning of horror as demonic creatures from his imagination come to life and terrorize his house guests.

F) *Bad Taste* (1987)—Alien entrepreneurs journey to Earth to hunt for a cheap meat supply for their intergalactic fast-food chain. Guess what's at the top of their shopping list? People!

G) *Caged Heat* (1974)—A young woman struggles for both her life and her virtue in an isolated women's prison run by a twisted matron.

H) *Murder à la Mod* (1968)—After a young Manhattan woman professes her love to a sexploitation filmmaker, she finds herself on the receiving end of an ice pick.

ANSWERS: A) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13

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