

EXHIB CONFAB, KUDOS ROLL

Film confab organizers aim for bigger, glitzier event

Seminars zero in on new trends

Those attending this year's ShoWest convention will find themselves uniquely positioned to receive information on the latest trends, challenges and opportunities in the exhibition industry.

The convention, running through Thursday at Bally's in Las Vegas, will feature six seminars on a variety of topical issues, ranging from new trends in building design to innovative strategies for increasing concessions and handling weekend crowds.

Exhibitors also will get a sneak peak at emerging technology in digital cinema and will hear the results of ACNielsen/EDI's most recent survey on moviegoers' habits.

Whether one is an exhibitor,



SADDAM YANKEES: Warner Bros. presents highlights from its upcoming pic "Three Kings," starring George Clooney, left, Mark Wahlberg and Ice Cube, at this year's ShoWest confab. Helmed by David O. Russell ("Flirting With Disaster"), the pic follows five Americans who set out to track down relics stolen by Saddam Hussein from Kuwait during the Gulf War.

'I think every distributor is now operating inside this highly competitive arena where there are, basically, less screens.'

Duncan Clark, president,
Columbia TriStar Film Distribution Intl.

distributor, concessionaire or equipment manufacturer, this year's event promises to provide relevant information for companies of all sizes and capabilities.

Today is International Day, offering two seminars related to international exhibition and distribution. The morning seminar features a panel from leading exhibition companies worldwide, while the afternoon seminar provides the studios' perspective on ways to work product into an already stuffed marketplace.

Panelist Duncan Clark, president of Columbia TriStar Film Distributors Intl., notes, "We will be discussing the marketing of product, what territories are opening up, fiscal disadvantages we're suffering and what

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VEGAS UPS THE ANTE

By PAT KRAMER

This year's ShoWest Convention at Bally's Hotel in Las Vegas promises to be the largest to date, with greater star power, more participants and extra efforts taken to streamline traffic.

ShoWest general chairman Milton Moritz, who also serves as president-CEO of the California/Nevada chapter of the National Assn. of Theatre Owners, anticipates about 12,000 participants today through Thursday, with 3,500 preregistered for the exhibition industry's largest trade show.

"The international market is probably growing faster than the domestic. We're up to about 42 countries represented so far; that's about 900 of those registered," Moritz says. "We even have people coming from Vietnam and that's never happened before!"

Five of the studio's distribution arms have signed on to sponsor events: New Line Cinema/Fine Line Pictures, 20th

Century Fox, Warner Bros., Miramax Pictures and Buena Vista Pictures Distribution. New Line, Warner Bros. and Miramax will host luncheon events, Fox is sponsoring a dessert party and Buena Vista will provide the grand finale Thursday evening at the MGM Grand.

Really big show

"With seating for 15,000 people, I think we are assured of a big show," Moritz says. "It's going to be a very exciting ShoWest, with stars turning out in major force. I've been told by three of the sponsors that they are expecting their largest star contingent ever; so from that standpoint, it's going to be very exciting."

Despite ShoWest's increased size, Moritz assures that this will be a user-friendly event.

"We are making things a little more accessible due to the way we're programming (the seminars) and scheduling events so that they don't overlap. For the events we think are going to be very popular, we'll have more than one presentation."

Such popular events include

ACNielsen/EDI's survey of 16,000 moviegoers — the seminar "Insights Into Moviegoing Habits" on Wednesday — and a digital cinema presentation later that evening.

"This will be a very, very interesting demonstration," Moritz predicts, "because this will show off the capabilities of what the future will bring in digital transmission as a possible replacement for 35mm rolling stock. We will have a side-by-side presentation of both on an 80-foot screen. On one side of the screen you will see digital cinema and on the other 35mm film

being projected in sync, using the same footage so you can compare one against the other."

This year's trade show is 20% larger than '98's, with 550 vendors occupying 100,000 square feet of space under one roof.

Vendors represent a cross-section of services and products for exhibitors, from acoustic tiles and carpets to projection equipment and concessions.

Moritz likens it to a one-stop shopping center. "Where else can you go and have a preview of everything that's new that's available? It's the largest con-

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INSIDE

Jerome Forman
Silver Jubilee Award

John Madden
Director of the year

Tom Hanks
Box office star of the decade

Peter and Bobby Farrelly
Screenwriters of the year

Beyond popcorn sales and celebrity sightings

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opportunities we're experiencing. I think every distributor is now operating inside this highly competitive arena where there are, basically, less screens. That means less opportunity for holdovers and moveovers. Add to that there are more films, not only American traffic but a great burst of local product in many countries. There are some real issues that every responsible distribution company has to take into account."

Deciphering decision-making process

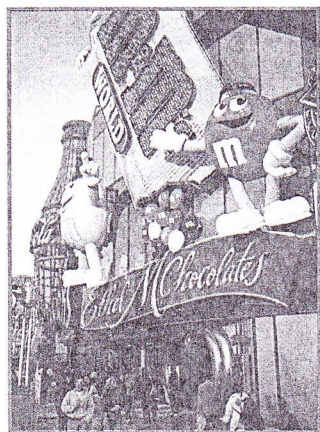
On Tuesday, moviegoers' buying habits will be revealed at ACNielsen/EDI's afternoon presentation "Movie Views."

"We spent a lot of time (examining) the actual process that moviegoers go through when they decide what to see," says Tom Borys, ACNielsen/EDI president, about their survey of more than 15,000 moviegoers last year.

On Wednesday, the focus shifts to concession sales as the National Assn. of Concessionaires and Nestle present "Using Customer Surveys to Improve Concessions Sales."

Working together

Later that morning, a panel of leading architects and shopping mall developers will examine the growing trend of entertainment and retail joint ventures in "The Entertainment Experience of the 21st Century."



SWEET RELIEF: After learning about the latest concession snacks at ShoWest seminars, Las Vegas visitors can check out the new M&M's World at the Strip's Showcase Mall.

Moderator Tim Warner, Cinemark Intl. president, explains, "The primary focus of the panel is going to be the coming together of entertainment and retail as the future of the out-of-home entertainment experience. The public is demanding more of a full experience outside the home.

"In addition to going to the movie theater, they also want great restaurants, nightclubs and shopping for an experience that might last five (to) six hours instead of going to the movies and going home.

"Whereas before, (developers) would build a traditional mall with a small theater and large

department stores, now the traditional mall is featuring more of a large theater and boutique shopping. The whole concept of retail is really changing dramatically as to what's driving the traffic."

Closing out the day, ShoWest will showcase a special presentation introducing digital projection technology and comparing it to traditional methods.

Megaplex operations

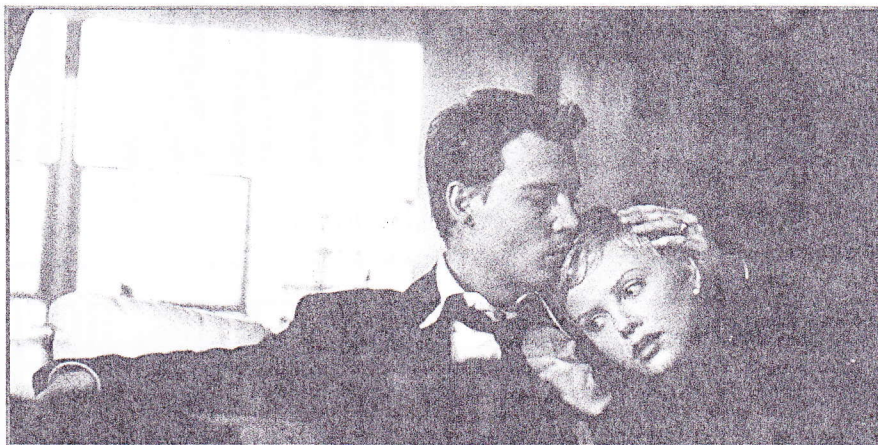
The last presentation, on Thursday, will reveal the power and the glory behind "Managing Top-Grossing Megaplexes." General managers from Sony's Lincoln Square, Universal's Cineplex Odeon CityWalk, Pacific's Winnetka, AMC's the Block in Orange, Cinemark's Tinseltown in Texas and Michigan's Loeks-Star Theatres' Star Southfield Entertainment Center will provide a view of their operations, which average anywhere from 15,000 to 27,000 patrons a week.

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"We're very excited about this year's ShoWest seminars and presentations," Moritz says. "There's something for everybody here and we believe everyone will walk away with a better understanding of their business."

—Pat Kramer



LUST IN SPACE: New Line is presenting several upcoming titles, including Rand Ravich's "The Astronaut's Wife," a sci-fi thriller starring Johnny Depp and Charlize Theron. The pic is set for a fall release.

Int'l market hits the Strip

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vention of its sort (in the world), and we attract not only people from the U.S. and Canada but from over 40 other countries.

"Distributors are exposed to exhibitors and exhibitors to distributors. You come here and you're exposed to all the new hardware that is available, you see the newest product line and preview films that are still in production."

In an effort to reduce traffic, the trade show will be open longer hours, check-in services will increase dramatically and participants will receive pocket-sized maps of the show and a schedule of ShoWest events.

Another innovation is the ShoWest Web site, being introduced this year. It will allow people to find vendors who participate in the event and contact them later by phone or e-mail.

Also, magnetized badges will allow sponsors to track participants at their events.

Al Shapiro, president of domestic theatrical distribution at New Line, says, "ShoWest is always an extremely valuable connection for us to meet exhibitors and showcase the product that we're going to be distributing in the next year."

New Line sponsors Tuesday's luncheon, bolstered by the appearance of Adam Sandler, Mike Myers and Drew Barrymore, among others. Included in their product reel will be clips from "Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me," "The Corruptor," "Detroit Rock City," "Dairy Queens," "The Astronaut's Wife," "Body Shots," "Town and Country" and "The Bachelor."

Barrymore will present Sandler with ShoWest's comedy star of the year honors for "The Wedding Singer" at the Coca-Cola-sponsored awards dinner.

Also, Sean Connery, who appears in 20th Century Fox's "Entrapment," will receive a career achievement award, while his co-star Catherine

Zeta-Jones will get supporting actress of the year honors.

Warner Bros.' "You've Got Mail" star Meg Ryan gets the Actress of the Year Award, Will Smith receives the Actor of the Year Award, William H. Macy will receive supporting actor of the year and Giovanni Ribisi of "Saving Private Ryan" is ShoWest's Male Star of Tomorrow.

Previous ShoWest honoree Jerry Bruckheimer gets the producer of the year honors, John Madden ("Shakespeare in Love") will get director honors, and Peter and Bobby Farrelly get the screenwriters award for "There's Something About Mary."



SAME TIME, LAST YEAR: Helen Hunt and Burt Reynolds received actress and supporting actor honors at ShoWest last year.

"Analyze This," starring Billy Crystal and Robert De Niro.

Says Dan Feldman, Warner Bros.' domestic distribution executive VP-general sales manager, "We are very excited about our 1999 schedule. Based on what you will see there, I think we'll have a sensational year."

Warner Bros. also will preview "Matrix" (Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne), "Deep Blue Sea" (Samuel L. Jackson, Stellan Skarsgard), "The Wild, Wild West" (Smith, Kevin Kline) and "Eyes Wide Shut" (Tom Cruise, Nicole Kidman).

In addition to the studios' product previews, six full-length



Twentieth Century Fox is tight-lipped about its Wednesday dessert presentation.

"We always try to stay low-key and surprise people, so that's the approach we're going to take here," says Tom Sherak, 20th Century Fox domestic film group chairman. "We wanted to support ShoWest and that's the reason we are doing this."

For Warner Bros., which started 1999 with the \$100 million-plus release "You've Got Mail," ShoWest kicks off a promising year. During the luncheon WB is sponsoring Wednesday, clips will be shown from 15 upcoming features, including the highly anticipated

films by independent film companies will be shown at ShoWest's ShowCase of independent films tonight. Participants can choose two of the following: Miramax's "Happy, Texas," October Films' "Cookie's Fortune," Trimark Pictures' "Twice Upon a Yesterday," Artisan Entertainment's "Open Your Eyes," Lions Gate's "The Red Violin" and Sony Pictures Classics' "This Is My Father."

ShoWest also includes panels and seminars, starting today with a panel of leading exhibition execs and then a seminar led by keynote speaker Bill Mechanic, prexy of 20th Century Fox.