MGM, Fox, Warner Bros. Say NO to Tobacco Placement

For the past year, EIC’s Creative Professional Network has been hard at work through its committee to address tobacco’s role on television and in feature films. Chaired by Kathy Finding, VP Production Resources for MGM, the Product Placement Tobacco Advisory Committee’s mission is to advise entertainment industry members and production companies on issues related to the placement of tobacco products in entertainment productions, and provide assistance in engaging our peers in the industry related to the controversy over perceived continued paid placement of these products. Committee members from the entertainment industry include Josh Ravetch (New Line), Tracey Hainsworth (Miramax), Susan Saffers (Fox), Musette Buckley (Warner Bros.), Melissa Robinson (Paramount) and Tony Grana (Universal).

At the time of the committee’s formation last year, only two studios had a written policy regarding tobacco product placement, though more had unofficial verbal policies. Contrary to popular belief, however, it was also revealed through committee meetings that the practice of tobacco product placement has not taken place in the entertainment industry for years.

EIC Focuses on Tobacco

EIC will soon be releasing its new, original findings from an audience survey on the impact of tobacco products in entertainment productions. The study, crafted by EIC and conducted by Internet-based E-Poll presented viewers with different versions of the same film clip, the only difference among them being that the characters in some clips smoked, and in others did not. The experiment also tested the audience’s correlation between age and smoking.

The study’s findings will surprise most, as the experiments often lead to conclusions that contradict traditional beliefs about onscreen smoking. EIC will release the new findings in a national media rollout this fall. A full report on the study, titled Focus on Tobacco, is currently available through EIC, and can also be found online at www.eiconline.org.

Ananda Lewis & Christy Turlington Honored on Capitol Hill with Barbara Eden, Special Guest

MTV personality Ananda Lewis hosted the 6th Annual PRISM Awards Premiere on Capitol Hill. Her Ananda Lewis Show received the 6th Annual PRISM Award in the TV Talk Show Series Episode category for its episode “Clearing the Air: Christy Turlington Talks About Smoking.” The PRISM-recognized episode examines the health effects of smoking on women, with support from model and anti-smoking advocate Turlington.

Lewis, who was not available for the May taping of the 6th Annual PRISM Awards, was surprised when Special Guest Barbara Eden presented her with a PRISM trophy at the Capitol Hill event. Lewis accepted graciously, expressing her belief in the importance of accurate depictions in entertainment, and entertainment creators’ responsibility to young audiences: “Long before TV ever became an option, I was doing youth activism for eight years. In that time, I had the privilege of seeing first hand how the entertainment industry affects youth. The PRISM Awards proves that the industry does care, and handles its ability to educate audiences by integrating realistic portrayals in entertainment productions.”
The words above are uttered by Catherine Tramell in Basic Instinct, probably the best known of Joe Eszterhas' creations. Tramell, played by Sharon Stone, is remembered for her ability to adroitly use sexuality as a weapon. In the film, part of Tramell's sexual allure (especially to Michael Douglas' Detective Nick Carran) is her seductive use of cigarette smoke.

Joe Eszterhas was once the highest-paid and one of the most publicly recognizable screenwriters in the history of motion pictures. Among his accomplishments are Basic Instinct, Flashdance, Jagged Edge and Showgirls. His films are known for provocative and often controversial storylines. Likewise, the fictional characters he creates are some of the most complex ones to ever shine on the silver screen, and espouse highly quotable dialogue.

"Killing isn't like smoking—you can't quit," another pointed piece of dialogue from Basic Instinct, reflects Eszterhas' ironic wordplay, but hardly his first-hand knowledge of the power of addiction. At the time he wrote Basic Instinct, and since the age of 12, Eszterhas was a smoker.

Maybe killing isn't like smoking, but is smoking like killing? According to Eszterhas, when it comes to smoking on screen, it is. Eszterhas shocked the world recently when he issued a press release from his home in Cleveland stating that:

"I don't think smoking is every person's right anymore. I think smoking should be as illegal as heroin...I'm desperate to see my four boys grow up. I want to do everything I can to undo the damage I have done with my own big-screen words and images."

Eszterhas continued on that "My hands are bloody; so are Hollywood's. My cancer has caused me to attempt to cleanse mine. I don't wish my fate upon anyone in Hollywood, but I beg that Hollywood stop imposing it upon millions of others."

EIC wishes Eszterhas a full recovery so that he can indeed see his boys grow up. While it is commendable that he has reflected on his past creative choices and elected to use his craft and connections to make a difference, epiphany should never have so steep a price.

Core principles of EIC suggest that the entertainment industry is one small piece of the puzzle. Smoking and addiction are complex, multifaceted issues that can be addressed by the creative community through numerous perspectives. Seeking creative alternatives is part of the process of making a film or TV show.

Certainly, the realities currently being faced by Joe Eszterhas have provided an opportunity for him to reassess his creative intent regarding smoking on screen. We trust in the creative community's integrity to make their own creative choices about tobacco use and addiction on-screen in the best interests of audiences, while remaining true to their visions.

EIC's Let's Clear the Air program was created to partner with entertainment companies to spotlight their potential influence on audience perceptions through the depiction of tobacco and related lifestyles in entertainment products.

The program addresses the accurate portrayal of tobacco use in entertainment media; the reinforcement of media depiction activities through community support efforts; serves as a media resource to other tobacco community support efforts; and provides scientific expertise on tobacco and nicotine addiction.

"Behaviors associated with tobacco use are very personal," said Brian Dyak, EIC President and CEO. "The decision to smoke rests with the individual. The bottom line is that the entertainment industry can empower youth not to risk tobacco use, and can empower those who desire smoke-free environments."

"What are you going to do? Charge me with smoking?"

For additional information regarding EIC's tobacco initiative, please contact Larry Deutchman at:

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Hollywood: Hooking Audiences Without Cigarettes

Larry Deutchman, EIC’s Sr. VP of Marketing and Industry Relations, said: "EIC wishes Eszterhas a full recovery so that he can indeed see his boys grow up. While it is commendable that he has reflected on his past creative choices and elected to use his craft and connections to make a difference, epiphany should never have so steep a price."

Convincing evidence was given, citing examples of “responsible” entertainment productions that de glamorize smoking, and in fact encourage and support the success of such efforts through positive reinforcement rather than negative. More examples of progressive entertainment industry-based initiatives to counter smoking were provided, such as the new tobacco placement policies of MGM, Warner Bros., and 20th Century Fox, as well as the annual PRISM Awards™, which recognizes outstanding accurate depictions of drug, alcohol and tobacco use and addiction in entertainment productions.

Encouraging the Art of Making a Difference