How a Monster-Sized Marketing Campaign was Built for Chinaâ??s â??Great Wallâ?? (EXCLUSIVE)

Description

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â??The Great Wallâ?• presents a whole series of firsts. It is the first movie made in English by Zhang Yimou, Chinaâ??s master of the big spectacle. Costing some $150 million it is possibly the biggest-budget Chinese film of all time. It is certainly the biggest Hollywood-Chinese co-production to date and is Matt Damonâ??s first Asian movie.

US Actor Matt Damon takes on his first role in an Asian film with the *Great Wall,* the biggest Hollywood-Chinese co-production to date. (Photo courtesy of Universal)

Additionally, it is the first picture to emerge from Legendary East, the Chinese wing of Thomas Tullâ??s â?? now Wanda-owned â?? Legendary Entertainment production powerhouse.

All that is another way of saying there is a lot at stake. And it is why the movieâ??s upcoming release in China is being delivered to market with an unprecedented marketing and promotional campaign.

â??It is a new kind of film,â?• says producer Peter Loehr, and CEO of Legendary East. The action-fantasy-adventure movie has major elements of Western blockbuster cinema, yet is 20% in Chinese and is directed by Zhang, whose film credits include epic â??Heroâ?• and â??House of Flying Daggers.â?• His track record mounting massive live events includes the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Olympic Games, and the recent G20 Summit Conference in Hangzhou.

â??This film is absolutely what Iâ??ve spent 25 years of my career building up to,â?• says Beijing-based Loehr, who was previously a Chinese indie producer and later the China head of talent agency CAA.

Jeff Shell, chairman of Universal Filmed Entertainment Group, believes that the film can change the course of Chinese movies in international markets as well. â??At Universal we are huge believers in a bright future for Chinese Cinema, fueled by the impressive recent growth of the Chinese theatrical marketplace. Our participation in â??The Great Wallâ?? is very exciting to us. The combination of a tentpole scale Chinese-themed picture, the vision of the renowned filmmaker Zhang Yimou, the star power of Matt Damon and the enormous cast of talented Chinese actors make it the ideal vehicle to introduce Chinese creative product to the global audience,â?• Shell told *Variety* by email.

The film originated with a high concept idea â?? that the Great Wall of China only needed to be that size if it was built to keep out something far nastier than mere humans â?? from Legendary founder, Tull.

â??It is not that I actually saw it from a plane. Rather when I was a little boy I heard that the only man-made object you could see from space was The Great Wall of China. Whether it is true or not, I could not conceive of the feat of engineering and ingenuity needed to build it. And Iâ??ve been fascinated with it my whole life,â?• Tull says.

The film was shot in mid-2015 and Zhang has spent more than a year in post-production. The China release date of Dec. 16 puts it squarely at the height of peak season cinemagoing in the Middle Kingdom. It releases in North America on Feb. 17 next year with outings in international territories between those dates.

The lengthy post-production period gave plenty of time to cut visual material for promotion. Online marketing is much more important to film releases in China than in Western markets where posters and TV ads may dominate. Producers delivered more than 60 pieces of bespoke video for online consumption, in addition to a conventional trailer, a teaser trailer and three music videos. The trailers have played ahead of nearly every significant local and Hollywood film in Chinese theaters since Oct. 1.

Marketing efforts for Chinaâ??s Zhang Yimouâ??s *Great Wall,* are rolling out for a December 16, 20 wide release in China and a February 17, 2017 North American release. (Photo credit: China.org.cn)

Marketing in China shifted up a further gear with a major event called the â??Five Armies Press Conferenceâ?• on Nov. 15. â??The filmâ??s marketing is stretched over a series of events, introducing the filmâ??s worlds in pieces, so that people get to know the concept progressively,â?• says Loehr. The Five Armies event introduced the battle groups, their leaders and the actors who play them as well as the unique weapons required to fight the filmâ??s monsters.

That has been followed by the release of the first and second singles from the soundtrack. This week (Dec. 6) sees a large glitzy press conference in Beijing with the full cast in attendance, followed by a one day junket for domestic Chinese press, and then another for South East Asian press who are being flown in.

Along the way there will be further reveals about the creatures, their interaction with the human characters and the release of the final song. On Friday, the promotional action shifts to Shanghai for an event with more focus on the movieâ??s animation and proceeds going to the Great Wall Preservation Fund.

Screenings for Chinese press, friends-and-family and opinion leaders begin from Dec. 12. Public screenings begin from 7pm on Dec. 15, the evening before the official release date. Presentations will use an almost unprecedented combination of formats including 2D, 3D, IMAX 2D and 3D, China Giant Screen, and 4DX, the Korean technology that sees supplementary content and screen extensions projected on a cinemaâ??s side walls for a 270-degree effect.

The film was conceived and green-lighted even before Wanda acquired Legendary in the deal that was announced in January this year. Its four financiers and presenters are Legendary, Universal Pictures, China Film Group and Le Vision Pictures.

The range of resources that Wanda can bring to bear â?? Chinaâ??s largest cinema chain, distribution, and two marketing companies â?? elevate the filmâ??s launch into a national event. China Film and

Wandaâ??s Wuzhou Distribution firm are the distributors of record, while Legendary and Le Vision (part of the Le Eco group) oversee marketing and promotion.

â??Where we might have had 8 people in a marketing meeting for â??Pacific Rimâ?? or â??Godzillaâ?? that expanded to 20 people on â??Warcraft,â?? including people from Wanda, Wanda Cinema Line and (social media giant) Tencent,â?• says Loehr. â??Warcraft had a stellar opening and achieved a lifetime gross of $220 million, making it the third biggest film this year in China, a figure that dwarfed the $47.2 million it achieved in North America.

â??For â??The Great Wallâ?? weâ??ve held marketing and strategy meetings every Saturday with up to 60 people in the room from Legendary, Le Vision, CFG, Wanda Cinema, Tencent, China Movie Marketing Group, Mtime, Wanda Malls and Wandaâ??s real estate development team,â?• says Loehr. Some 260 of Wandaâ??s malls are putting on â??Wallâ?• events. Mtime, the movie ticketing and marketing firm Wanda acquired this year, is putting on â??Dare to Dreamâ?• and Zhang Yimou exhibitions in a further 56 malls and CMMG will promote an augmented reality video game.

â??If you are doing things that are formulaic, or that audiences feel theyâ??ve seen before, it is going to be a hard sell,â?• says Tull. â??The canvas and some of what Zhang accomplished is jaw-dropping.â?•

(Source: http://variety.com)

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Date Created
December 5, 2016
Author
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