

Elegant marketing tie-ins back 'Memoirs' release



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"Harry Potter" wristwatches. "Batman" action figures.
"Memoirs of a Geisha" face wash.

What? A movie tie-in geared toward adults?

You bet. Gone is the Hollywood adage that you need an
adventure flick and a Happy Meal to milk a movie's retail
potential.

To market "Memoirs of a Geisha," which opens Friday, Sony

Pictures Entertainment is targeting adults with clothing and beauty products at a variety of retailers, including Sephora and Banana Republic.

"This is a brilliant move and a first," said Peter Sealey, adjunct professor of marketing at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business. "The unique thing here is a much more elegant tie-in to what's basically a sophisticated, female audience."

"Memoirs," based on the 1997 best seller about an impoverished Japanese girl who becomes a legendary geisha, is full of milkable themes, from lavish tea ceremonies to Asian beauty.

And retailers were eager to partner with Sony for a cut of its hefty marketing budget, which Sealey estimates at \$50 million. The average budget, he says, is around \$30 million.

Marketing budgets for films have gone up 700 percent in the past 20 years, said Sealey, author of "Not on My Watch: Hollywood Vs. the Future." "Memoir's" is particularly high, he added, because it is being released during the holiday season against fellow heavyweights such as "King Kong."

Banana Republic, for example, has launched a limited-edition holiday collection featuring kimono-inspired silk tops, dresses, shoes and Asian-influenced accessories.

The partnership allows Banana Republic to give its customers exclusive access to the film, including advance screenings, a chance to go to the premiere and a shopping spree at its Tokyo stores, said Chris Nicklo, vice president of Brand Management for Banana Republic.

"Our customers love art, fashion and culture," he said. "This film allowed us to bring them together."

Sony approached most of the "Memoirs" retailers. Those retailers, in turn, welcomed the visibility and product potential of a star-studded, \$85 million film, directed by Rob Marshall and backed by Steven Spielberg, that is generating plenty of preholiday Oscar buzz.

While Sony could not be reached to comment on its marketing strategies, Nicklo said the production company "wanted to partner with people who could share the aesthetic of the product and who share a customer base."

The approach appears to be working, at least for Sephora.

Fresh, a beauty line sold there, created "Memoirs" products including a rice face wash, a bath wash with sake, and a beauty palette designed to be applied with the fingers, a real geisha tradition.

"We have people come in and ask for it," said Domonique Ward, a makeup artist at Sephora in Walnut Creek.

Added Norma Ornelas, also a makeup artist: "I had one woman who didn't even know it was a book. She came for the movie."

Another likely tie-in? Tea, of course. Republic of Tea, based in Novato, offered up its Spring Cherry Green Tea, a Japanese tea they launched with Barnes & Noble when the book came out. The new tin features the film's incandescent star, Ziyi Zhang.

"She talks about tea in the first line of the book," said Marideth Post, head of media relations. "For us, the connection was spot on."

Movies get a lot of visibility in a short time, so it's not

surprising that a tea tin could become a collector's item, said Sealey.

The phenomenon makes the former president of marketing and distribution for Columbia Pictures marvel at the missed opportunities.

"I had 'Ghostbusters' and 'Gandhi' on my watch," he said. "It didn't even occur to me back then."