

Lights, camera ... watches?

Like it or not, we are all influenced by what we see in movies and on TV. It might be the latest catch phrase, a trendy hairstyle ... or even a watch. That's right – as Swiss watch brands become savvier about marketing and promotion, expect to see more timepieces in movies or your favourite TV shows. And Switzerland's watch companies are hoping you'll sit up and take notice.



MiB: Men in Black 2, Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith

By Keith W. Strandberg | Watches are a way for people to showcase their style and taste, so it makes sense for the entertainment industry to use watches on the wrists of stars to help define their characters. When watches and films are combined well, it can be a home run for both the entertainment industry and the watch manufacturer. The movie or TV show benefits from an association with a quality watch and the watchmakers are exposed to potential new markets.

When products are perfectly placed, watches can become key components to the personalities of specific characters. After all, characters are defined by the choices they make: circle of friends, dialogue, actions, cars and yes, their timepieces.

Product placement: how it happens

Most of the time, a producer approaches manufacturers to request the use of a product in their film or TV show. No payment is made; the manufacturer merely supplies the product for use in the film, and then gets the product back when the film is over.

In situations where there is a cross promotion of a product with a movie, an arrangement is worked out in advance, allowing the movie company to benefit from the exposure generated by the manufacturer's advertising, and vice-versa. For example, with the Swatch Group brand, Hamilton Watch's very successful *Men in*

Black promotion of the classic Ventura: or the Omega brand's long-time association with the James Bond franchise. Movies are promoted in watch retailers and point-of-purchase materials are created to emphasise the link. In Hamilton's case, placement of their watches was so effective, people walked into retailers asking for the 'Men in Black' watch – not even knowing the brand name.

Placements can begin in any number of ways. Some brands have relationships with actors who wear their products, and when that actor is in a movie, he or she wears the brand's watches or jewellery. Other times, brand representatives lobby studios and production companies for placement of their products. Occasionally, a manufacturer does not set out seeking placement; instead their product's appearance occurs because a promoter likes the company's watch, or they are chosen by producers, directors or the stars themselves.

Capturing history

Some product placements make sense historically, as well as for character development. In the recent release *Amelia*, starring two-time Academy Award Winner Hilary Swank in the title role, Swank sported a Hamilton watch throughout the film. Producers approached the company because the real Amelia Earhart

wore a Hamilton. Having worked with more than 350 past movie productions, Hamilton responded by providing a model with a vintage look and feel, ideally suited to the period.

"We are pleased that the producers wanted to be historically accurate," says Matthias Breschen, president of Hamilton Worldwide. "According to their research, Amelia Earhart wore a Hamilton, so Hilary Swank is wearing the 38mm stainless steel Khaki Field Automatic."

Hamilton also participates in promoting the movie, offering two versions of the Amelia watch for sale. Point-of-purchase displays at Hamilton retailers feature the *Amelia* poster and other visuals.

A risk worth taking?

When product placement works, it can be more effective than conventional advertising. The impact is greater, because the audience is caught up in the plot of a great movie. There are many success stories when talking about product placement in movies, but the reality is that for every successful, noticed placement, there are hundreds or even thousands which go relatively unnoticed; although it may be possible to argue that "unnoticed" product placements are still noticed on some level by audiences – a form of subliminal advertising.

Companies must be careful when choosing product placements, because screenplays are not written to be perfect vehicles for watches. Some just naturally work, while other product placements can seem shoehorned and out of place.

One example of a hugely successful placement was Canton Vaud's Jaeger-LeCoultre in *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*. Bruce Wayne wears the Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso watch – famous because it flips over – which was put on his wrist to represent his dual personality. The use of this watch makes sense for the story – and begs for a close up so the audience can make the link from the watch to his character. It's always possible that a watch supplied for a movie or TV show, and worn during the shoot, will never appear on screen, despite everyone's best efforts. After all, movies aren't edited with watch placement in mind and what was a great shot for the watch might not make it into the final cut. It's all part of the way things go in showbiz.

Watch creation for movies

Hamilton designed the 2001 watch specifically for Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film, *2001: A Space Odyssey* and never even considered selling it commercially because of its complexity. But surprisingly, a few years ago Hamilton announced that it was finally offering the 2001 watch as a limited edition.



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The Tuxedo 2002, Jackie Chan

Then-action star and current California governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, wore Audemars Piguet watches in a number of his movies, including *End of Days* and *Terminator II*. For 1999's *End of Days*, elite Swiss watchmaker Audemars Piguet created a timepiece called the Royal Oak Offshore. Schwarzenegger had considerable input into the watch's design and Audemars Piguet produced a limited series of 500 Royal Oak Offshores to be sold by their dealers throughout the world.

Pluses and minuses

In most cases, product placement is a win-win for everyone involved; however, in the world of product placement, there are no guarantees. Movie companies can't predict what a movie will gross, or if it will be a critical success. In many cases, they may not know how a watch will be used – or even if it will show up on screen.

Watch companies must decide about product placement well in advance of production; in some cases, a year or more before the finished product appears in cinemas or on TV.

To quote Hollywood screenwriter William Goldman, "Nobody knows nothing." It's a lottery: companies must make decisions based on cast, story, how a product will be used and many other considerations. For manufacturers, the odds are nevertheless stacked in their favour. If a movie bombs, the chances are good that a featured watch will escape unscathed. So, is there a downside to product placement?

Well, there certainly could be. If the prominently featured watch is worn by a psychopathic killer, sales are unlikely to go up (although, given today's fascination with villains, you never

know). Does that mean serial killers or movie criminals don't wear watches? Of course not – but few watch companies want to be on the wrist of the bad guy.

Impact on sales

Although manufacturers are reluctant to say that the appearance of their product boosts sales dramatically; watch retailers mention increased interest, if not sales. "Watches in movies are great advertising and great exposure for a brand when the item is seen on the big screen," Robin Levinson, co-owner of Levinson Jewelers in Plantation, Florida, USA tells *Swiss News*. "For most of the public, having a movie star wear a particular watch is a fabulous endorsement. So, naturally, a placement helps the retailer who carries that brand."

Retailer Jeremy Oster, owner of Oster Jewelers in Denver, CO, USA, cites one particular placement that stands out and resulted in huge sales increases. "The Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Offshore watch in 'Terminator 3' got a full screen shot along with analysis from the Terminator," he remembers. "The responding demand for the watch was unlike anything before. The watch has been an extremely sought after collector's piece since launch and still sells for considerably over original retail."

Hamilton Watch has had several movie tie-ins, the most successful and visible being their involvement with *Men In Black* – where they took a classic Hamilton design, the Ventura, and put it on the wrists of the most forward-thinking, technologically advanced characters in the film, Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith. The result? The watch became a sales leader.



Basic Instinct 3: Risk Addiction, Sharon Stone

Schaffhausen-based International Watch Company (IWC), recently began pushing the product placement side of their public relations and marketing efforts, mostly through the brand's US office. Since their first major placement in *Miami Vice*, IWC watches have featured in *Sex and the City*, *Marley and Me*, *Lucky Number Slevin*; the TV show *Grey's Anatomy*, the film *21* (2008), and more.

"IWC believes that movies serve as invaluable marketing tools," says Benoit de Clerck, president of IWC NA, whose most recent film placement was in Roland Emmerich's *2012*. "They have the ability to influence the consumer and instigate new trends. Movies represent a new channel of communication similar to print and TV and therefore help us garner greater exposure for the brand."

An icon with global appeal

Product placement is helping IWC to raise its profile worldwide, as Hollywood's reach is truly international.

"I would say that our partnerships with various films have enabled us to really increase our visibility and the level of brand recognition across the globe," de Clerck explains. "When we partnered with *Miami Vice* in 2004, we worked hard to create a strong marketing plan to support the movie and our involvement. We implemented this plan across our points of sales and enlisted the support of various media partners, and as a result, we definitely saw strong results." IWC combined retail visibility with high-profile advertisements in major magazines to ensure people spotted its watches in *Miami Vice*.

"We also really focus on placing our most iconic watches,

like the Portuguese, the Big Pilot, the Aquatimer and the Portofino as a means of really implanting the IWC brand into the moviegoer's mind," de Clerck continues. "This has proved very effective as we continue to get calls enquiring about the IWC watch that appeared in a specific film." IWC advertises and heavily markets the models they place in movies and TV shows, in the hope of helping consumers connect advertisements and word of mouth with the on-screen entertainment.

Taking on the world

Placement doesn't only occur in Hollywood: The best companies are actively involved wherever there is a movie industry (e.g. Hong Kong, Bollywood, Europe).

"Obviously our work with the Hollywood films via the US platform is probably the most recognisable, but IWC has 16 platforms worldwide and each of them works individually with various film projects that will support the brand," de Clerck says. "For example, our platform in Hong Kong worked closely with acclaimed director Wan Kar Wei to secure a strong placement in *My Blueberry Nights*."

So, next time you're in the cinema – or just watching TV – why not have a look at the characters' wrists? If you can barely see the wristwatch, the chances are high it's not a product placement. If you can see the brand clearly, and the watch itself has its own tight shot, then it's more than likely to have been a planned product placement strategy. Either way, you can look forward to seeing more watches we love on the big screen ... after all, if the show is any good, you're unlikely to be looking at your own timepiece.