The Importance of a Great Ending

The following article is written by Darlene Hayman, co-author of Audience•ology along with Kevin Goetz. This **movie book** is considered one of the **best filmmaking books** sharing never-before-told insights about the impact that audience test screenings have on moviemaking.

For nearly two decades, I've been involved with the **movie research**, working as an analyst on some of Hollywood's biggest movies. I am privileged to be among the first to experience these motion pictures, along with an audience of typical moviegoers who are invited to watch an early cut of the film and then asked to fill out surveys that capture their opinions about what they just saw.

My observations of these test audiences, and analysis of their answers on the surveys has led me to the undisputable conclusion that the ending is critically influential in driving overall perceptions of a movie and positive word-of-mouth. This may seem like a no-brainer, but you would be shocked by the number of films, when first tested, missed the mark on delivering a satisfying conclusion.

Satisfaction is weighed in two parts – intellectual and emotional. Intellectual satisfaction pertains to the way in which details of the story come together, questions are answered, and the dénouement makes sense. Examples of intellectual satisfaction might center on the mystery being solved, the villain being stopped, the journey coming to an end, or the barriers between two lovers tumbling down. Emotional satisfaction is less tangible, a tear in the eye, a pull on the heartstrings, the release of one's breath when the disaster has been avoided, or the inner cheer when the underdog comes out on top. A good moral to the story or lesson learned can also be emotionally gratifying for the audience, as well as something funny or surprising.

Comedy directors know that a big laugh at the end can make all the difference in how satisfied an audience feels as they leave the theater. It often comes after the heartwarming beat, sometimes even during the credits.

We've all experienced the "bump" at the end of a Horror movie. The story wraps up, there is a collective sigh of relief that a character or two is still alive and then, wham! The demon/serial killer/good guy-now-possessed emerges before the screen goes black. Genre fans eat it up.

Audiences will categorically reject endings that leave them confused. Who wants to be along on a two-hour journey only to have unanswered questions when all is said and done? But give them a twist that they don't see coming, or the big laugh, or that one great final scare, and the chances of winning them over increase exponentially.

If you are looking for one of the best books about film, **look no further.** For behind-the-scenes stories about *Thelma & Louise*, *Footloose* and other **Hollywood films** where changes to the endings had huge impact upon their success, read ***Audience-ology***: *How Moviegoers Shape the Films We Love*, the **movie book** I co-authored with legendary **movie research** guru, **Kevin Goetz**.