

It is Labor Day 2025, and I decided to do the most patriotic thing to do this evening: watch Jaws on an IMAX screen at the Century City AMC. The movie is a staple in American culture, and I had a great time watching Richard Dreyfuss nerd out over different sharks. It was during the opening credits that I realized that Jaws was adapted from a book of the same name, and I was curious to learn more about how it became a success.

Having acquired the rights to the manuscript of the novel, Richard Zanuck and David Brown had a plan:

1. Sell the book to a publisher
2. Promote the book with the publisher
3. Make it the first ever summer blockbuster they know it'll be
4. Make a boat load of money, so much so that they'll need a bigger boat
 - a. I had to sneak a cringey pun in there, now keep reading

While simple, the main detail that I think is lacking in Hollywood today is the producers promoting the book and making it a cultural phenomenon. There were no targeted ads or invasive tactics in 1975, so Zanuck and Brown had to rely on word of mouth. To mass promote the book, they decided to send copies to as many demographics as possible. This included important C-Suite executives, restaurant owners, broadcasters, and more. This idea of diversifying the demographics seems like a no brainer equation:

More eyeballs that are on the book = more money to be made the following year with the movie.

However, I feel like the marketing for films today doesn't do that anymore. Somewhere down the line, probably during the Superhero boom of the past decade, advertising stopped targeting as many people as possible and only those who had the highest chance of buying a ticket. In other words, this was the equivalent of parlaying a bunch of safe odds together, like betting LeBron and Luka Dončić to both score 10 points in a game. Oh and for context, the last time LeBron scored under 10 points in a game was January 5, 2007.

You're almost guaranteed to win, but you're not going to make a lot of money. My opinion is that this safe betting has led studios to taking less creative risks over the past decade and putting massive amounts of money into safe IP. Cord Jefferson's Best Original Screenplay Oscar acceptance speech in 2022 always hits: *"Instead of making one \$200 million movie, try making 20 \$10 million movies or 50 \$4 million movies."* While I always will preach quality over quantity, there are tons of young, hungry creatives just begging for someone to take a chance on them and their ideas. Whether that's an original idea or an aspiring writer who has a take on an adapted story that can't afford the option rights themselves, studios should be taking risks on storytelling AND promoting it to as many people as

possible. Sure, not every story can be a four quadrant film (appeals to men/females both > 25 and < 25), but why not spread who you can target?

From my understanding, studios have obviously been pushing for digital advertising of movie lovers when it comes to most of their non blockbuster releases. This puzzles me. Sure Jaws was the first blockbuster ever, but why don't studios try to promote their smaller budgeted films to a diverse audience. One that goes to the theater once or twice a year. Matter of fact, why not try to get the person who hasn't been to a theater in 5+ years to go. I'm aware this goes against every sales tactic in the book, but in an age where people are yearning for personal connection, the movie theater is one of the last arenas left. Also, in order to get word of mouth appeal, you need to target the groups that usually don't go to the theater because not only is that the majority of America, but it's not the same group of 10 cinephiles who only talk to each other – including myself.

Yes, inflation has caused a typical family adventure to a theater to be way too expensive, but if the studios and the theater chains can agree to lowering the price a tiny bit, I believe the frequency that people that go to the theaters thereafter will leave a monumental difference in ticket sales. Studios should subsidize part of the cost of a movie ticket. Try to create some buzz by doing something different. Take a shot.