

Now This is Leaked Cinema

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Background



In the vast open world of Hollywood, leaks happen left and right. This can include film announcements, trailers, scripts, workprints, or even the entirety of a film. Ever since the dawn of the internet, these scenarios have been far more common than the industry could have ever expected, sometimes leaving a damaging impact on the hard working teams behind big budget blockbusters

Something 2 Scream About

One of the first notable instances of film material being leaked on the internet happened in 1997. After the roaring success of the sleeper hit slasher comedy, *Scream*, director Wes Craven immediately began work on a sequel. Production flew by with the movie set to release almost exactly one year after that of its predecessor. With this rapid paced development underway, little did writer Kevin Williamson know that this film's production was about to make history in a way no one could have anticipated.



Hello Sidney

Just after Williamson had turned in his script, the document ended up being dumped onto the internet. This is the very first instance of a film's script leaking online. As a result, some major rewrites were commenced during filming, with many dummy ones being tossed around, and reportedly, "To prevent further leaks, the identity of the killers became a closely guarded secret, only revealed to actors on a need-to-know basis." (Admiraal 2017). While *Scream 2* ended up being just as successful as its predecessor, this would be only the beginning for internet leaks and the film industry.

Coming Soon to Theaters

Before movies are released, trailers are shown to the public to advertise them and give audiences a general idea of what to expect. Some movie trailers are for projects fans have been anxiously awaiting for years, which one person took advantage of. In May 2023, the trailer for the hotly anticipated Five Nights at Freddy's movie was leaked online, much to the frustration of series creator, Scott Cawthon. Said leaker eventually took it down and later admitted to breaking NDA, but claimed he was doing it "For the people" (Coulson 2023).

A Devious Plot

There have also been several instances of movie plots being leaked online, sometimes over a year before the film released. For example, at least two 2020 films, including Wonder Woman 1984 and Sonic the Hedgehog, had their plots leaked onto Reddit almost an entire year before they hit the big screen. These leaks are usually from people claiming to have seen an early cut of the movie, with said synopsis ending up being horrifyingly accurate.

Mamma Mia!

As technology has evolved, hackers have gotten to the level of leaking entire movies online immediately after their theatrical release. In April 2023, Illumination released *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*, which set box office records left and right. Around this same time, Twitter introduced “a feature available exclusively to Twitter Blue subscribers that allows them to upload high quality videos of up to one hour in length.” (Fuster 2023) leading to somebody posting the entirety of the Mario movie across two posts. They were both taken down within hours, but the posts had already been seen by over 1 million people.



Ruh Roh!

On top of movies being leaked online before release, one movie was released in full form before it was even announced. In early 2023, Scooby-Doo and Krypto Too was leaked online after being pulled from Warner Bros' release schedule. Afterwards, a trailer was officially released followed by the film getting a proper launch that September.



A broken blue piggy bank lies on a surface covered with US dollar bills. The piggy bank is cracked and split open, with its pieces scattered. The background is a dense layer of various US currency notes, including one-dollar and five-dollar bills, creating a textured, financial backdrop.

A Leak in the Bank

Leaks can even have a negative impact on a movie's performance at the box office. The movie *Hurt Locker* was leaked online a full five months before it was set to release. By the time it reached its planned release date and theatrical run, it grossed roughly \$49 million against its \$15 million budget, less than the developers hoped. A workprint of *Hulk* experienced a particularly impactful leak, which marked, "the start of a run of bad luck for the film – with disappointing box office, a cancelled franchise and a recast lead" (Ashurst 2018).

Workprints

Sometimes instead of a movie being leaked, its behind the scenes workprint does. Just an hour before Revenge of the Sith hit theatres, an employees leaked a workprint online. It was reported that, “the leak could have lost the studio about \$627 million.” (Hathaway 2023). In spite of that, the movie was still a success. Some workprints leak several years after the film’s release, such was the case for 2000’s The Magic Railroad, a movie that was heavily altered at the last minute. It had its workprint leaked in 2020 before its planned inclusion on the 20th anniversary Blu Ray release.



Crime Doesn't Pay

There have still been examples of leaked and pirated movies resulting in criminal prosecution. In 2009, a man named Gilberto Sanchez illegally purchased a copy of X-Men Origins: Wolverine and duplicated a workprint of the film onto his computers, sharing those copies online with his friends. He did claim that it looked like "Ferrari without a paint job" (BBC 2011) before he was eventually caught and sentenced to a year in prison. A columnist for Fox News named Roger Friedman was also fired for downloading this copy.

Prevention

While leaks happen out of nowhere and cannot be predicted, there could have been ways to prevent these. Some leaks are caused by hackers, and keeping them out of the database requires a strong firewall and limiting who can access this information. Some instances are from people behind the scenes letting it slip through the cracks, deliberately or not. This should reinforce checking server traffic to make sure no unwanted access is occurring or if anybody is abusing their position.

Resources

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