The Films, the dosh and the ratings

Or why Avatar will see 4 sequels, while John Carter calls its off (and Deep Throat might want to have another go…)

Intro

Films cost money. However, they hope to make some money back and often do. When they do, it can be a lot and when they don’t it can be a laugh. Sometimes they don’t expect to make any money and do. The joy of looking at Film costs and revenues comes from 2 main properties: Being stunned at how a sizeable investment can in fact accrue mountains of returned gold as well as dropping the same jaw at how lakes of invested money sometimes evaporate through empty screens. Films are bets on human taste that must entertain a lot of people. They often consume rhinoculous amounts of effort, people, skill, scream and shout to get into the public sphere which decides about their rise or fall. This modest piece offers a glimpse into this world of ups and downs, portraying a handful of stories, surprises and failures. (you can read about the data here)

**The biggest budgets**

Click zero

First let’s look at the big fish. These are the 20 films with the biggest production budgets recorded so far.

Click one

Avatar is already a mature guest in this list being released in 2009. But it’s earned it’s top spot with a whopping $425 million budget. Exactly 6 years later on the day (the 18th of December that is) Star Wars’ The Force Awakens tried hard but stays significantly behind with a mere $306 million. An interesting feature that even made the headline of this piece is John Carter – or (not much better) John Carter of Mars. In general you might notice that all films are what one would call Action Blockbusters – apart from Tangled, the only Animation that cost $260 million. Decent…

Now let’s see what they managed to get in.

Click Two

First from domestic screenings (the US) and then worldwide.

Keeping the production budget on screen, we can already see how some films didn’t have any worries after just counting the domestic revenue. Avatar and Star Wars could’ve just packed up to lay back and stay at home, while others were surely hoping for a world wide success.

Sort by Domestic Gross

Our friend Tangled for example didn’t quite break even in the US, but I guess John Carter had worse problems finding sleep only looking at the US revenues.

Re-sorting by production budget…

Sort By production budget

…we should now lift our eyes up towards Avatar – and enjoy the ride bringing in the worldwide gross, which includes domestic and internal revenues.

Click Three

Overall Avatar made a mind boggling $2.78 billion. Stacking the money would lift you up 303 km or 189 miles (<http://www.ehd.org/science_technology_largenumbers.php>). Less than a Marathon away from the International Space Station 340 km away. (<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/82/Orbitalaltitudes.jpg>). Anyhow. Star Wars is pretty jaw-dropping as well, but you would need to run a little longer to the ISS (130 km).

In other news we’re happy Tangled as our lonesome premium animation made it comfortably to the safe zone, while it seems John Carter actually just got it’s money worth. However – the production budget doesn’t show the marketing cost, which is pretty much exactly what it lost: around $150-200 million. Hurty. Wouldn’t quite make it to Mars.

So far this only shows the mass attractiveness. But how much in tune are film ratings with the revenue? Let’s have a look at 2 of them…

Click on IMDb rating

The size and saturation of these bubbles show the IMDb rating. IMDb ratings are close to the masses (of film-aficionados, I guess) as that every registered IMDb user can vote. You can hover over the circles to get more info. Not that much surprises here. Pirates of the Caribbean wasn’t really as much loved as the income suggested and – well – John Carter and the Lone Ranger weren’t exactly embraced.

Click on RT rating

Rotten Tomatoes is further away from the populous and closer to the distinguished film taste one would hope as only people who earn their money with going to the cinema are allowed to elaborate and cast their votes from 1 (sad) to 10 (happy). It’s interesting to see how the same pattern we saw from IMDb is reflected, yet more pronounced. Much more variation in the data but the general structure follows the money.

**The most profitable**

Now, let’s keep on the road of success, accelerating our trip a little. More surprises to come, though ! Let’s look at the top 20 most profitable films.

Sort by production budget

Go to most profitable

Click one

If I wanted to make film with a big budget, I’d surely try Action as a Genre. If I wanted to make a profitable film, I’d probably go for an Animation. Frozen, Minions, Despicable Me, The Lion King – all there. Where are the domestic bubbles off to?

Click two

The money making zone. The worldwide revenue?

Click three

Sort by worldwide revenue

…onwards. Avatar dwarves the rest but Frozen would make it quite far on their tower of dollars. Check the ratings if you wish – All not too bad, with the Twilight Saga counting the money while not really caring much about their ratings probably.

**The biggest money losers**

Now let’s look at the bottom of the pile. Not necessarily in terms of quality (we’ll see…) but in terms of money made. Here are the top 20 money losers.

Sort by Production budget

Change to biggest money losers

Here are their production budgets…

Click Two

…and their domestic gross moving to the shameful left. Can the worldwide gross help?

Click Three

Sort by worldwide gross

Not in many cases. Again, apologies for the rough ride here, some worldwide revenues in fact supersede the production budgets but the marketing costs are not party to this data, so you have to believe me and (the numbers) that we’re indeed seeing losses for all these films.

So what genre should I opt for in case I wanted to make sure to lose as much money as possible? This is a little harder. I’m inclined to go Sci-Fi/Fantasy? At least I should not let much reality into my film. John Carter (I won’t mention him again), Grenn Lantern, Jack the Giant Slayer, Jupiter Ascening, Gods of Egypt (I’m a bit of a sucker for Greek mythology action though) etc. Should be the safe choice…

Turn on RT ratings

Hugo is a sad guest on this list as I did sort of like it (although I saw it in 3D, which in my humble opinion ridicules the 3 as it rather takes away a dimension) but some directors should probably stand above the money.

The low budget winners

Let’s end on a high note, though. An unexpectedly high note. Some films don’t cost anything, compared to the money guzzlers we’ve been looking at but turn out to make hey.

Change to Low budget winners

Sort by production budget

Here are 20 films and their production budget.

Click one

(…)

Nothing happened?

(…)

Nothing happened.

But it’s true the bubbles have moved. Hardly noticeable, but they have. Hover over them to see their budgets. El Mariachi cost $7000 US. We could’ve bought 0.16 seconds of Avatar for that money.

Click two

And here come their domestic revenues…

Click three

…and their worldwide total all-in revenue

Sort by worldwide gross

…sorted by worldwide revenue.

I can’t claim to know all the films listed here and will not try to suggest what genre you should pick to produce a low budget winner (even though this is the most realistic of all categories), but maybe a sequel of Deep Throat might be worth a thought…