

Marketing Society Excellence Awards 2015

Category: Branded Content

Client: Warner Bros.

Contributing Agencies: PHD, Drum

# THE LEGO MOVIE AD BREAK

How changing the rules of Branded Content delivered awesome results for Warner Bros.



## **\*Spoiler Alert\***

### **We're about to ruin the end of this story.**

*The LEGO Movie* was the highest grossing movie in the UK in 2014. We wouldn't normally spoil the reveal in the first paragraph but with that fact having been a recent mainstream news story you *may* start this paper with the sense that this film was a success. And you'd be right.

However, it's important to understand that the movie's success wasn't pre-ordained and that positioning the movie in the right way to the right audience was critical.

And an ambitious piece of branded content sat at its heart.

## **THE INITIAL BUILDING BLOCKS**

Back in May 2013 we started work on the launch strategy for *The LEGO Movie* – a collaboration between Warner Bros. and the LEGO Group in which an ordinary LEGO character called Emmet is mistaken as being the Master Builder who can save the universe.

The movie was an original story and wouldn't be based on an established LEGO franchise such as Star Wars so wouldn't come with audience knowledge 'built-in' and Emmet and Wyldstyle - *The LEGO Movie's* main characters (right) – were also brand new.



## "SO, WE'RE LAUNCHING A KID'S ACTION MOVIE?"

At this stage, all we had was a short synopsis, a list of voiceover cast and characters, a broad box office target benchmarked against recent family animations, a sense of the visual feel of the movie and a logo.

With relatively little to go on, the first thing we did was commission some light touch quantitative research with regular cinema-goers to get their instinctive reactions to the logo. So without any other context we showed people the logo and asked people to describe the type of movie they would expect to see.

The responses (shown in the 'wordle', right) helped to frame the challenge. On the surface, people clearly expected this to be a movie for kids (and predominantly boys) and to have a sci-fi / space action feel to it.

But while useful to know this wasn't particularly what we wanted to hear.

We knew that, in order to hit box office expectations it was important for it to be seen as a film that would not only be enjoyable for all the family but would appeal to regular young adult cinema-goers too (an incremental adult audience to those who would be taking kids).



# REKINDLING CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Whilst *The LEGO Movie* was a new concept, for most adults LEGO itself is a hugely iconic brand – one that’s wrapped up in positive childhood nostalgia. The sentiment of “I loved LEGO when I was a kid” was played back to us consistently.

We knew that if we could channel the positive childhood memories of the wonderful things that could be made from a pile of LEGO bricks and combine them with movie cues then we’d have a powerful mechanic to engage older audiences with the movie.

So, we set out to combine the best of LEGO (playfulness, creativity and possibility) with the best of Hollywood (high quality entertainment) around a strategic approach we called ‘LEGOtainment’.

We had a unique opportunity to transport people to a unique LEGO world – and challenged ourselves to create a piece of ‘LEGOtainment’ that would capture the imagination of the nation and bring a smile to the faces of people who saw it.

To tap into ‘grown-ups’ magical LEGO memories and unlock their inner child we’d need to take something from their recognisably grown-up world and transform it through the power of LEGO.

To do that, we’d need to create our own content.



# TURNING THE RULES OF BRANDED CONTENT ON THEIR HEAD.

The opening week's box office for any movie can make or break its lifetime commercial performance. That meant we couldn't do something that had a slow build. To generate the buzz we required, we needed whatever we created to noisily come to life on the largest canvas possible. This couldn't be one of those campaigns that the marketing industry loved but no-one saw.

This led us quickly to peak-time ITV. A channel which would allow us to maximise our message to the core target audience (families with younger children) and our older cinema going audience at mass.

However, ad-funded content in the UK broadcast television market is still amongst the most highly regulated in the world and would come with a significant number of hurdles to overcome.

Which got us thinking. Rather than creating expensive and highly-restricted programming content or compromising on the need for immediate, large scale impact by going online, could we use the transformative magic of LEGO to make **other brands' ADVERTISING** the branded content for the movie?

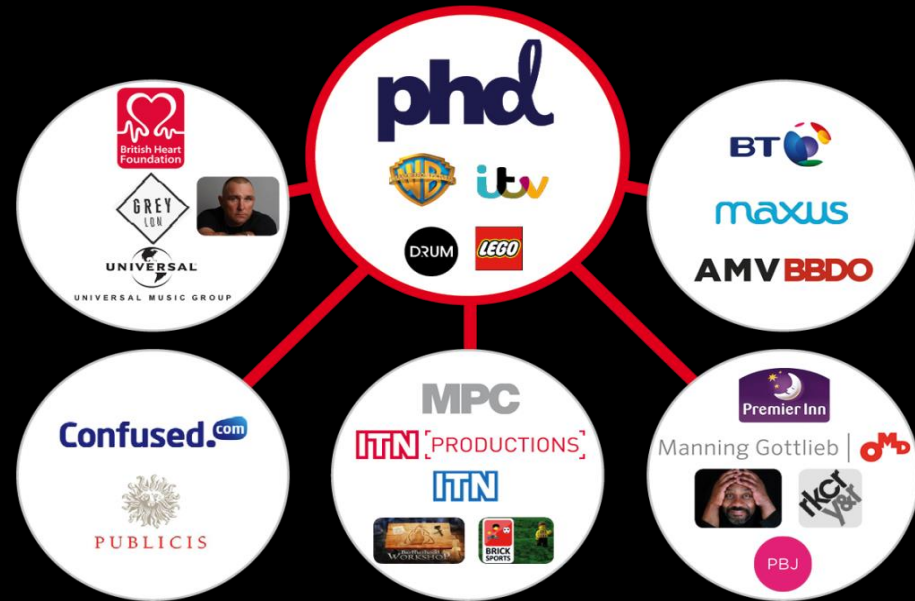
So, for a movie in which the whole world is made of LEGO, we set out to replicate that experience in media by re-creating four well-known existing TV ads brick-by-brick in LEGO to create **THE WORLD'S FIRST ALL-LEGO TV AD BREAK.**



# HOW WE MADE IT HAPPEN

No matter how appealing an idea is, no client on the planet – including Warner Bros. - could justify paying to remake and buy someone else's advertising. This meant this idea could only come to life if we made participation a compelling enough proposition for each of the brands involved to pay for their own media and production costs.

We did this by making participation as easy and inexpensive as possible – starting with PHD (with significant help from content agency Drum and ITV) sourcing specialist LEGO production partners and remaking all four ads themselves. Having one agency across all elements of the break's creation and media made the process simpler AND more financially viable\* ]



\*

> <not for publication>

# THE LEGO MOVIE AD BREAK

In *Dancing on Ice* at 7.27pm on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2014 - five days before the movie launched - ITV broadcast a world first, an ad break made entirely out of LEGO (if you'd like to watch it as it was broadcast, type "LEGO Movie ad break" into YouTube or click [HERE](#)).

Four familiar and modern UK television ads \* – for the **British Heart Foundation**, **Confused.com**, **BT** and **Premier Inn** – were recreated frame by frame and brick by brick in LEGO (for context, the LEGO remakes are shown next to the original ads, right).

\* To ensure that the break felt as much like real-life had been turned into LEGO as possible, it was important that the four ads were all live/recent campaigns, not remakes of classic ads of yesteryear.



## PUTTING THE MOVIE INTO THE LEGO MOVIE AD BREAK

To ensure that people made the link *to The LEGO Movie*, not just LEGO, the ads were separated by five different 2 second "stings" featuring characters from the movie and the break ended with a 40 second trailer for *The LEGO Movie* itself. (examples are shown, right)

ITV also introduced the break with a voiceover informing viewers that "to celebrate a much anticipated new movie coming to cinemas, we've assembled a very special ad break". (see, below)





We suspected that unexpectedly turning peak-time ITV into LEGO would stimulate a lot of "did you just see that?" activity on social media, so as the TV ad break was transmitting, we simultaneously released the break - in full - on YouTube to ensure those who saw it could share it (and, as importantly, so those expressing regret at having missed it could be directed to join the conversation quickly.)

The four participating brands even had a form of "block party" on social media after the ad break ran where they celebrated their involvement in the break together (shown, right)

The reaction across social media was immediate and overwhelming, surpassing anything we'd hoped for, e.g. the number of #thelegomovie tweets per day increased fivefold after the break aired (a selection of social media reaction is shown below and right)

The screenshot shows a Twitter thread with four tweets. The top tweet is from 'The LEGO Movie UK' (@TheLEGOMovieUK) posted at 11:36 am on Feb 9, 2014. It says: "After all that #DOI excitement we don't want this night to end! Who's up for a #BlockParty? #TheLEGOMovie". It has 2 retweets and 3 favourites. Below it are three replies: 1. 'Premier Inn' (@premierinn) says: ".@TheLEGOMovieUK We're in! Our place or yours? #GoodNightGuarantee #BlockParty". 2. 'BRIAN' (@BRIANtheRobot) says: "@premierinn @TheLEGOMovieUK Yay! I calculate that this is my first party invitation #blockparty". 3. 'Clare' (@missisbroon) says: "Omg. #legoadbreak the best set of adverts ever lol". 4. 'Paul Beebe' says: "Best thing ever alert! To promote the new Lego movie they recreated a bunch of real adverts into Lego adverts and played them during Dancing On Ice". The bottom part of the screenshot shows two more tweets from Google+ (which were later integrated into Twitter): 1. 'James Masterton' says: "So this was a thing here in the UK this weekend. To promote The Lego Movie, an entire commercial break was rendered in Lego with CGI remakes of the actual adverts which would have normally aired in the slot. The planning and co-operation which must have gone into this is breathtaking to imagine, securing the agreement of all the advertisers to have their spots remade in what is essentially a four minute plug for someone else's brand. But clearly everyone was up for it." 2. 'COSMIC Recifax' says: "#legomovie Please take over all adbreaks from now on".

**James Masterton** via Google+ · 2 days ago  
So this was a thing here in the UK this weekend. To promote The Lego Movie, an entire commercial break was rendered in Lego with CGI remakes of the actual adverts which would have normally aired in the slot.  
  
The planning and co-operation which must have gone into this is breathtaking to imagine, securing the agreement of all the advertisers to have their spots remade in what is essentially a four minute plug for someone else's brand. But clearly everyone was up for it.  
Reply · 1 · 👍 · 🗨️

**COSMIC Recifax** via Google+ · 1 day ago  
#legomovie Please take over all adbreaks from now on  
Reply · 3 · 👍 · 🗨️

**Barrie Tingle** via Google+ · 5 hours ago  
Now that is an advert break I could watch more than once :)  
Reply · 1 · 👍 · 🗨️

# TURNING AN AD BREAK INTO AN ENTERTAINMENT EVENT

Nearly 6m people saw *The LEGO Movie* break live on TV, with an additional 1.1m seeking it out on YouTube within a week (all of these views were achieved organically with NO paid-for digital optimisation).

By making it a piece of branded entertainment in its own right, over 1 million people actively sought out a 3min 20 sec AD BREAK and watched it in its entirety. Quite an achievement in a challenging new marketing world where audiences are doing everything they can to AVOID ads.

The break also captured the imaginations of the press, where it was written about in over 60 different consumer and trade publications.

**the guardian**  
 News US World Sports Comment Culture Business Money Environment Science Travel Tech Media Life & Style Data  
 News Media Advertising  
 The Lego Movie rebuilds ITV ad break  
 Warner Bros jumps on trend of reimagining famous scenes with bricks by recreating ads for Premier Inn, BT and Confused.com  
 Mark Sweney  
 theguardian.com, Friday 7 February 2014 05:54 EST  
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 The LEGO movie: ITV advert break to be recreated in LEGO  
 An entire ITV advert break will be recreated in LEGO this Sunday to celebrate the launch of Warner Bros' film the LEGO Movie  
 The BT advert will be transformed into LEGO as part of the world's first entire LEGO advert break  
 The BT advert will be transformed into LEGO as part of the world's first entire LEGO advert break  
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 5:14PM GMT 07 Feb 2014  
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 2 Comments  
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 The BT advert will be transformed into LEGO as part of the world's first entire LEGO advert break  
 The BT advert will be transformed into LEGO as part of the world's first entire LEGO advert break  
 By Telegraph Reporters  
 5:14PM GMT 07 Feb 2014  
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 Share on Twitter  
 Caroline Westbrook  
 Entertainment reporter  
 Big Brothers Big Sisters  
 Watch life-changing

**campaign**  
 Lego breaks the mould in ad takeover  
 The brand has achieved a movie-style impact through a mixture of creativity and collaboration. David Wilding says  
 Work debrief  
 It was one of those moments where you have to step and remind yourself that you get paid to do this job. Adam was day in Covent Garden. The brands and the

**BLEEDING COOL**  
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 Watch: ITV Just Aired This Whole Ad Break In Which The Ads Were Recreated In Lego  
 Posted on February 9, 2014 by Brandon Connolly  
 One of the prime time ad breaks on ITV tonight was filled with re-made commercials, all recreated in Lego animation. This has required Lego Lenny Henry, Lego Daniel Rigby and Lego Yinnie Jones.  
 FREE

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 Entire Ad Break Is Made of Lego in Delightful Stunt for Toy Company's Movie  
 Four British ads remade almost shot for shot by Tim Nudd  
 February 10, 2014, 1:32 PM EST

The world's first ad break made entirely from Lego is set to be screened by ITV. Ads for Premier Inn and BT have been given the building-block treatment to help Time Warner promote its Lego film, which opens next week. And Lego people are taking

# DID IT ENGAGE THE INCREMENTAL ADULT AUDIENCE WE NEEDED?

Yes. In independent research by YouGov, it was described as the best performing ad break they've tested to date.

Respondents rated it **14% more enjoyable than the average ad break** (the average ad in the LEGO break scoring 63 enjoyment points versus YouGov's benchmark average of 56)

We also now know that **re-making an ad in LEGO makes it an average of 19% more enjoyable than its live action original** (scoring 10 points higher than the originals' average of 53, see right)

The screenshot shows a YouGov article page. The header includes the YouGov logo, navigation links (HOME, PUBLIC OPINION, OPIGRAM, MY YOUNGOV, ABOUT), and a search bar. The article title is "Lego adverts hit home with consumers" by John Spencer, dated March 19, 2014. It features social media sharing icons and a photo of Lego characters. The text discusses how Lego-themed ads outperformed original versions in engagement tests.

## Average enjoyment ratings

Viewers rated the adverts on a scale of 0-100 as they watched. The rating indicates their average level of enjoyment for each of the adverts.

As an indicator of individual performance our benchmark overall average rating for all ads we have measured is 56. All the Lego adverts are rated above the benchmark average.

Advert	Average enjoyment	
	Original	Lego
British Heart Foundation	67	68
Confused.com	48	61
BT	46	61
Premier Inn	49	61
Total	53	63

## DID THAT ADULT AUDIENCE GO AND SEE THE MOVIE?

Yes.

*The LEGO Movie* outperformed the average UK ticket sales for 15-34 year olds by 8%. Not bad for 'a kids film'.

Source: Film Monitor

**YOUNG ADULT  
TICKET SALES  
+8% vs.  
CATEGORY**

## DID THE BREAK DRIVE TICKET SALES?

Yes.

Post-launch tracking showed that *The LEGO Movie* ad break influenced an incremental 5% of the opening week's box office revenue, returning Warner Bros. **£5.96 of ticket sales for every £1 they spent on the break.**

Source: Nielsen

**£5.96:£1 ROMI**

The movie ended 2014 at No.1 in the UK box office charts, meaning it wasn't just the best performing kids film of the year, it was the best performing movie of ANY kind.

It was an amazing result for a completely new franchise launch in a category which is traditionally dominated by adaptations and sequels.

To paraphrase the movie's Oscar-nominated song...

...Everything was Awesome.

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## The Lego Movie named highest-grossing film of 2014 at the UK box office

The Warner Bros movie beat The Inbetweeners 2 to take the title

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## The Lego Movie

### The Lego Movie block-busts UK box office in 2014

Phil Lord and Christopher Miller's smart Lego cash-in beats The Inbetweeners 2's Australian jaunt for No 1 place

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Ben Child

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## Lego Movie was top UK and Ireland film of 2014

A follow-up to The Lego Movie is due out in 2018

Animated comedy The Lego Movie was the top film in the UK and Ireland in 2014, although box office takings were down almost 3% on the previous year.

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The Lego Movie made £34.3m, while the final Hobbit instalment took

“We knew from the start that we had a great idea that would really elevate the campaign but the complexity of making it happen was astounding.

The ambition, co-ordination and sheer will to make it happen was astounding.

However, it delivered everything we hoped it would. People talked about it, people tweeted about it, people viewed it online and ultimately it convinced people to go to the cinema to watch the film - helping make The LEGO Movie the highest grossing movie of the year.”

Alex Lewis, VP & Director of Marketing, Film, at Warner Bros. UK