

A new kind of viral marketing

TORONTO, CANADA: Films have used billboards to advertise since the early days of cinema, and it's fair to say that little has changed in the century or so that film studios have used posters to entice the public to the box office. Until now...



When promoting the film *Contagion* ahead of the Toronto Film Festival, however, Warner Bros needed an eye-catching way to stand out from the crowd.

Contagion, directed by Steven Soderbergh, tells the story of a lethal pandemic that spreads around the world, and how society unravels as a consequence. A suitable gruesome billboard as created using cultures of various microbes on large agar jelly frames. Initially invisible, the microbes were able to feed off the agar jelly and thrive in the heat. Within a few days, the various spores and cultures were visible to the human eye, spelling out the title of the film.

Film praised

Contagion has received praise from the scientific community for its accurate portrayal of the mechanics of a virus pandemic. This authenticity was extended to this element of the film's marketing, where microbiologists were also involved in the creation of the billboards to ensure the most dramatic results.

Results

Contagion grossed more than US\$23 million dollars in Canada and the US in its opening weekend.

Time lapse video footage showing the growth of the bacteria has received almost 400 000 views on YouTube.