

Plastics & Entertainment – a Hollywood Romance that Goes Far Beyond Celluloid

Mr. McGuire: I just want to say one word to you. Just one word.

Benjamin: Yes, sir.

Mr. McGuire: Are you listening?

Benjamin: Yes, I am.

Mr. McGuire: Plastics.

– from the movie *The Graduate*, directed by Mike Nichols; written by Calder Willingham, Buck Henry (screenplay) and Charles Webb (book)

Industry Spotlight: Will Bioplastics be a Box Office Hit at the Movies?

By Laura Mauney

Plastic and the entertainment business have a lot more to do with each other than the artificial nature of film and television. Beyond the stereotypes of starlets whose careers are made – and sometimes broken – by plastic surgery, and from the *The Beverly Hillbillies* to *Dallas*, petro-plastic wealth has been glamorized by Hollywood, a city whose foundation was built literally on top of the Los Angeles petroleum industry.



U.S. movie theatres sold over 1.3 billion (<http://www.the-numbers.com/market/2013/summary>) polymer coated paper tickets in 2013, a figure that translates further to hundreds of millions of polymer coated beverage cups with

plastic lids and straws handed out annually at concession stands across America.

The approximately 700 million DVDs

(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/dadehayes/2013/07/08/six-reasons-why-dvds-still-make-money-and-wont-die-anytime-soon>) and jewel cases sold in 2013 to people for home entertainment were all made of plastic.

The electronic devices that play DVDs or stream entertainment contain multiple plastic components, and are often packaged in shrink wrap, plastic film, and/or polystyrene foam.

Plastic Is as Plastic Does

Variety411 (<http://variety411.com/us/los-angeles/stages>), an index of businesses serving the Hollywood production community, lists over 180 active studios and soundstages across the city of Los Angeles, each of which hosts one or more productions on a daily basis.

According to FilmLA.com (http://filmla.com/uploads/PR%2010-21-14%20Q3%20-%20Final_1413922807.pdf) and other sources, an estimated 38,000 production events occurred additionally on location around Los Angeles in 2013. That translates to an average of 146 feature film, television and TV commercial productions per weekday outside of studio stages.

Each and every production employees a multitude of creative and technical personnel. The U.S. Bureau of Labor



(<http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes270000.htm>) states that over 1.75 million people are employed in the arts and entertainment industry at large. About 200,000 are directly involved in media or event production, including over 63,000 actors, 92,500 producers and directors, and 16,800 camera operators.

The work of moviemaking is arduous, complex, and often requires long hours. Cast members, production staff, and technical crews need to be fed and hydrated through the day to stay functional.

As a result, film and television productions not only generate a massive amount of plastic food and beverage container trash, but plastic props, lighting gels and other items are often used only once, to be dumped in dumpsters at the end of shooting schedules.

...And then there are the plastic trash bags, the millions upon millions used daily to collect garbage at theaters and on sets.

Eco-Heroes to the Rescue!

Although the amount of trash created by film crews pales in comparison to that generated by the entertainment audience, young millennial filmmakers and producers began to target the industry for a “green-up” back in the late 2000s, adding expertise in “zero waste” management to their production skillset.

Thanks to their leadership, **recycling** plastic and aluminum, **repurposing** props, gels, wardrobe, and set furnishings to local schools and charities, and **replacing** disposable plastic bottles with reusable bottles, became the new standards for waste management on stages and at shooting locations.



Sustainability Strategist, Producer, and self-described ‘Ecotreprenuer,’ Erika Backberg, played an early role in developing and implementing sustainability measures on film productions. Currently, she is the co-owner of Social Sotan, a design-driven event planning and consulting company that she says “nerds-out on sustainability.” Her credits include TV commercials for Target, Clorox, Levis, Honda, Publix, and Wieden+Kennedy, as well as a host of live entertainment events and festivals.

In light of the unique challenges involved in replacing petro-plastics with compostable bioplastics when stocking craft service supplies – plates, cups, utensils – on film sets, I asked Erika to comment on the potential of bioplastics to influence Hollywood’s newfangled zero-waste practices.

Says Erika ...



“One of our first steps when coordinating zero waste events and film productions is to actively reduce the use of plastics altogether by identifying potential plastic sources, and substituting as many alternatives as possible.”

“During events and on film shoots, correctly using and disposing of bio-plastics is complicated and confusing to both the eco savvy and layman. The term bio-plastic, referring to both biodegradable and bio-based plastics, are

different from one another in terms of their rates of decomposition and methods of disposal.

“To complicate matters even further, only a fraction of bio-based and biodegradable plastics are compostable (commercially or individually), and none of the bio-plastics can be recycled within the regular plastics recycling system.

“Most compostable plastic products and their contents require processing at a commercial composting facility, and can only biodegrade in these controlled, aerobic environments. These bio-based compostable products do not easily degrade in landfills. Because of this, their use is limited to communities that provide commercial composting services to businesses and residents.

“It does not make sense to switch to compostable plastics unless the equipment and infrastructure to properly manage them after use, is available. It is becoming easier to manage compostable plastics, in a way that is more environmentally sustainable than regular plastics, but still a challenge based on the unique specifications of the event or production.

“The ideal compostable bio-based plastic products are:

- Affordable
- Easily Accessible
- Serve their function well/sturdy
- Perform well in heat
- Rapidly degrade both aerobically and anaerobically
- Will compost rapidly without a trace in soil or water

“Depending on its application[s] ... and cost, compostable bio-based plastics able to perform as well as petro-plastics, while also able to rapidly degrade both aerobically and anaerobically without a trace in soil or water, are a huge step in the right direction.

“In the immediate, I see products made with this type of bio-based compostable plastic having the largest impact within sectors of the population who will reduce their environmental impact without requiring any lifestyle changes because these items can go in the landfill and leave no trace. Product innovations like this are greatly needed!”

Will Leadership from Young Millennial Communicators Trickle Down?

Since the “set greening” movement began, most of the big studios in Los Angeles have adopted sustainability policies, including [Disney](http://thewaltdisneycompany.com/citizenship/policies/environmental-policy) (<http://thewaltdisneycompany.com/citizenship/policies/environmental-policy>), Fox TV (<http://gei.21cf.com/what/business/twentieth-century-fox-tv>), Paramount

(<http://www.paramounthollywoodproject.com/overview>), Sony Pictures (<http://www.sonypictures.com/green>), Universal (<http://www.greenisuniversal.com>), and Warner Brothers (<https://www.wbcitizenship.com/sustainability>).

Communities and organizations tied heavily to film production have likewise joined the fray, including the State of California (<http://www.film.ca.gov/GreenFilmmaking.htm>), New York City (http://www.nyc.gov/html/film/html/production_resources/green_screen.shtml), and industry organizations like the Association of Independent Commercial Producers (AICP) (<http://www.aicp.com/business-resources/aicp-green>).

Though the relationship between sustainability initiatives on Hollywood film crews and the mitigation of plastic trash generated by movie theaters and packagers of media products is fuzzy, the issues Hollywood's young, set-greening innovators confronted on sets offer a snapshot of what many people face everyday at home and in the workplace.

The entertainment industry, in practice and as a message-maker, has the potential to influence society at large to massively adopt zero-waste practices, including the use of 100% compostable plastics in ticketing, concessions, and media product packaging.

Does Your Company Manufacture Plastic Products for the Entertainment Industry?

*Please visit **MHGBio.com** (<http://www.mhgbio.com/>), to find out more about how biodegradable plastics from MHC can be adapted to a wide range of product manufacturing and packaging requirements.*



Learn more (<http://www.mhgbio.com/mhg-sustainability/mhg-certifications/>) about how MHG's biodegradable PHA plastic is **Certified** (<http://www.mhgbio.com/mhg-sustainability/mhg-certifications/>) for all six levels of biodegradability and compostability.

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