

Lights, Camera, Trademark: The Unsung Heroes of the Oscars

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Oscar night is the most glamorous night in Hollywood. The red carpet. The gold statuettes. The gowns. The tuxedos. The stars. The trademarks. That's right, the trademarks. They are essential to the movie industry, and when we celebrate the best in the movies, we should also celebrate the unforgettable trademarks that go along with the motion picture industry.

The equipment used to make and show movies are all emblazoned with trademarks. We've all seen PANAFLEX or PANAVISION cameras in behind-the-scenes documentaries. Most of us have seen movies in IMAX, and we have heard movies in DOLBY SURROUND SOUND, DOLBY ATMOS, or DTS. Or maybe we've even seen a movie in CINEMASCOPE (Disney's *20,000 Leagues Under the Seas*, for example). We've probably watched movies with special effects from ILM, DIGITAL DOMAIN, and WETA. Almost all of us have seen a movie in an AMC or REGAL CINEMAS theater, or maybe we have seen where the stars have signed their names and left their handprints outside of GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATER in Los Angeles. That theater is so well-known that the look of the building is registered as a trademark.

The studio and production company names that appear at the beginning of films are great examples of trademarks, indicating the source of the movie that viewers are watching. PARAMOUNT, PIXAR, WARNER BROTHERS, RKO, UNIVERSAL, SONY, COLUMBIA PICTURES, A24, ORION PICTURES, FOCUS FEATURES, BAD ROBOT, and AMBLIN are all trademarks. So are the roaring lion that introduces MGM films, the Twentieth Century Fox Fanfare, and Netflix's "Tudum" sound. The water tower on the Warner Brothers lot is also a trademark.

That brings us to the movies themselves. The U.S. Trademark Office will not register the title of a single work (this is true for books, too); rather, it will only register the title of a series (meaning two or more movies). While none of this year's Best Picture nominees are part of a series, plenty of movie series titles are registered trademarks: BACK TO THE FUTURE, JURASSIC PARK, STAR WARS, MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE, DUNE, THE GODFATHER, BARBERSHOP, MADEA, and GODZILLA to name a few.

Even some characters and props are the subjects of trademark registrations. Mickey Mouse, for one, is a registered trademark (trademark protection for characters is not always available). There are trademark registrations for multiple lightsaber hilts, as well as the X-Wing Fighter. In Europe, the owner of James Bond has a number of trademark registrations, including one for the well-known gun barrel sequence, and one for one of the famous spy's iconic poses.

At least some movie brands have received legal advice and sought trademark protection. Thus, there are registrations for STAY PUFT (for marshmallows), STARK INDUSTRIES (for clothing), THE DAILY PLANET (also for clothing), WILLY WONKA (for candy), BUBBA GUMP (for restaurants), THE MIGHTY DUCKS (for hockey). Of course, we should not forget that Mattel has a trademark registration for the shade of pink associated with BARBIE.

And yes, the golden statuette itself is a trademark, so all those who took one home took home a trademark. It's the most glamorous night in Hollywood, and the trademarks have the best seats.