The Intersection of Brand Partnerships in Australian Feature Filmmaking

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Abstract

In this paper I explore the advantages, potential compromises and ethical considerations that arise when Australian filmmakers collaborate with brands and commercial partners. Hollywood studios have infused films with actual brand label products for more than a century. Branded content has now permeated into a variety of entertainment platforms, and brands such as Red Bull, Toshiba, Intel, Samsung General Electric increasingly serve as quasi-studios and modify traditional models of financing and distribution. Concurrently, the acceptance of branded content is growing as film festivals increasingly include viral and branding formats into their catalogues for exhibition. In 2016, the respected Tribeca International Film Festival introduced the Tribeca X Award to celebrate collaborations between filmmakers and brands. In Australia, branded entertainment is not new to the media landscape but rarely factors in feature film financing. With the Federal Government’s gradual cuts to Screen Australia’s direct funding schemes, Australian filmmakers need to be innovative and resourceful, and when the right project presents itself, perhaps consider partnering with brands. With such an increasing intersection between brands and Australian filmmakers, this paper examines the complex issues and challenges surrounding the advantages and disadvantages that can be gained from commercial brand partnerships.

Keywords: filmmaking, branded content, product placement, commercial partners, financing, distribution, advertisement
Biography

Dean Chircop has been directing drama projects, music videos and television commercials for the past twenty years. His short drama projects *Bloody Footy* and *The Parlour* have screened at the prestigious Berlinale, Tribeca Film Festival, Los Angeles International Short Film Festival and Chicago International Children’s Festival and won numerous international awards. Dean is currently Program Director of the Bachelor of Screen Media Production at the Griffith Film School. He is developing a hybrid financing and marketing model for his screenplay *King of Speed*, which would enable him to produce the studio work that is the heart of his doctorate.
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Introduction

In this paper I examine the intersection of branded content and Australian feature film financing, and review the theory of branding and history of embedding products in various forms of art and storytelling. I go on to explore a range of branded content campaigns, the financial advantages and disadvantages that can be gained from associating films with brands, as well as the increasing acceptance of viral and branded formats at film festivals. A key aim is to survey Australian feature film examples, and assess the aesthetic limits of product placement and challenges to creative integrity when filmmakers collaborate with brands. But first, what do I mean by branding?

Defining ‘brand’ and product placement

The idea of a ‘brand’ is certainly not new. As a concept, it has existed for hundreds of years and can be as simple as an identifying mark burned on with a hot iron. Yet nowadays branding is complex and the very word ‘brand’ is elusive to define, with many associations and meanings. In the introduction to Debbie Millman’s Brand Thinking and Other Noble Pursuits (2011), Rob Walker explains:

Brands do not exist, you can’t extract them from the earth, craft them in a workshop, manufacture them or fabricate them. You can’t put one in your pocket, grow it on a farm, put a fence around it, fling it through a window or even leave it in a restaurant by accident. You can’t even download a brand, a brand is nothing but an idea. Creating the idea is a complicated process involving design, anthropology, advertising, public relations, semiotics and of course, the often-over-looked factor of tangible reality. (Walker 2)
Debates surrounding the morals of enmeshing the psyche in a commodity are divided. Millman proposes that a brand is a creative achievement that is as capable as any art form of stimulating our emotions and intellects (11). In contrast, Naomi Klein argues in her book No Logo (2000) that brands are “the surrender of culture and education to marketing” (14). For the purposes of this research, branding will be considered the process of attaching a concept to a symbol, product, service, event, location or establishment that differentiates it from another. For example, when it comes to the Disney brand, Disney is making a promise that if we go to a Disney theme park or see a Disney movie, we are going to get fun family entertainment. When we see the Nike “swoosh”, or we walk by a Nike store, we are communicated a promise that we will get a product that will enhance and enliven the athletic part of our life (Pink 228).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, brands proliferated and became significantly woven into the fabric of everyday life. In 1876 Bass Ale became the first trademarked brand in the world, protecting its red triangle logo from other companies using similar icons (Millman 2). In 1882, the Bass brand also appeared in Édouard Manet’s masterpiece, A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, and again in 1912 in Pablo Picasso’s Bouteille de Bass et Guitare, providing the brand with the cultural distinction of being the first incarnation of product placement (Millman 3). In 1922, the US telecommunications company AT&T, a corporate pioneer in radio broadcasting, aired the first radio advertisement for apartments in Jackson Heights on WEAF, a “toll broadcasting” station where one could pay to put out messages to one’s audience (Barnouw 110). By 1929, 55% of programs on radio were not only paid for by advertisers but were in fact created by advertising agencies (MacDonald 32). The Shadow hawked Goodyear tyres between solving mysteries, and Johnson’s Self-Polishing Glo-Coat wax was worked into the script of McGee’s Magic Act (1948) (Turner 11).
Hollywood also understood the advantages that could be gained from associating films with brands. In the 1910s, the Model T Ford was frequently found in the credits of Mack Sennett comedies (Lehu 20). In 1916, LKO/Universal produced *She Wanted a Ford*, where the brand was explicitly featured in the title (Lehu 21). The practice intensified in the 1930s when studios began sending marketers shot-by-shot breakdowns of scripts with promotional opportunities (Galician and Bordeau 16). Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was the first studio to open a product placement office in 1939, and the practice expanded slowly until the late 1960s when films began emphasising reality-based themes and, accordingly, infusing them with actual brand label products and advertising images (Galician and Bordeau 17). With an increasing number of marketers desiring product exposure, branded entertainment progressed beyond a Hollywood-based cottage industry to become a billion-dollar enterprise.

Lehu identifies four basic types of appearance that are usually detectable: classic placement; institutional placement; evocative placement; and stealth placement. *Classic placements* are where the brand or product appears in the camera’s view. Anything is possible for this form of placement that makes few demands – it can range from a pair of Converse sneakers worn by Ty Simpkins in *Jurassic World* (2015) through to Steve McQueen’s Ford Mustang GT in a supporting role in *Bullitt* (1968) (Lehu 8). *Institutional placements* prioritise the overall brand over a specific product, because brand placements bring benefits to all the products and in some instances, are more durable than a product. In *Minority Report* (2002), brand advertising can be seen for Reebok and Pepsi Cola, but not their products (Lehu 8). *Evocative placements* are more discreet; the brand does not appear nor is it clearly seen onscreen. In these cases, the product itself is sufficiently unique enough in its design to be recognisable, such as the Rubik’s Cube featured in Rian Johnson’s debut feature film *Brick* (2005) (Lehu
Stealth placements are not sufficiently specific to be identified and are well integrated into the scene. They usually receive a mention in the credits but their inconspicuous nature means they risk going unidentified (Lehu 9). These placements can be cosmetics that make-up artists use on the actors, or costumes provided by designers, such as the Thierry Mugler dress Demi Moore wore in *Indecent Proposal* (1993).

Films do not always necessarily need to feature a product or brand to be considered having a form of product placement. New Zealand is not directly mentioned in Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* trilogies but it is common knowledge that it was the location for Middle Earth, and international tourism advertisements such as the ‘100% Middle Earth’ campaign took advantage of tie-in advertising, targeting sightseers and fans of the movies. The aim of tie-ins is to create an orchestrated promotional synergy that can help expand awareness of the film, leveraging advertising run by a brand that refers to the film. In its most obvious form, tie-ins include toys and figurines of characters, limited edition accessories such as watches, or special meals with free toys based on the film or its characters (Lehu 83). Complementing the ‘100% Middle-Earth’ campaign, Air New Zealand produced a Hobbit-themed airline safety video to tie-in with the release of *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (2012). The four-and-a-half-minute work features characters and costumes from the films. Director Peter Jackson makes a cameo and the video also includes appearances by Mike and Royd Tolkien, great-grandsons of *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* author J. R. R. Tolkien. Air New Zealand used the video as part of a major global promotion linking the airline to the movie. Air New Zealand marketing manager Mike Tod said: “We will invest several million dollars in Australia, Asia, the United States and Europe on uniquely Air New Zealand marketing efforts related to *The Hobbit* movies to attract more tourists to New Zealand” (“Hobbits Take to the Air in New Zealand Safety Video”). As brands have evolved over the
last century, the practice of product placement has become increasingly sophisticated with multiple forms. There are now hundreds of brands that stand for something that works as entertainment, and increasingly brands do not want to be limited to simply being placed in someone else’s content; rather, they are producing their own.

**The rise of content enablers**

Studies such as Brennan, Rosenburger and Hementera’s “Product Placement in Movies: An Australian Consumer Perspective on their Ethicality and Acceptability” (2004) show that people expect a certain amount of branding in films and storylines because we use brands every day. The dilemma with product placement is reaching an agreement about what is excessive and what is acceptable. Product placement relies on a differential threshold known as the ‘just noticeable difference’ (JND). JND is the theory behind the discreet placement of products or brands in strategic locations onscreen which enables them to be seen and connect with their potential audience without being overt or changing the nature of the engagement with the film from enjoyment and amusement to manufactured and transactional (Hughes).

When studios, brands and filmmakers overuse product placement to the point that it becomes gratuitous, it threatens the enjoyment experience because the unofficial advertising insertion appears to an audience in a context different from classic advertising, resulting in resentment. James Bond films have been derided for lingering shots of brands and, in *Casino Royale* (2006), 007 Bond even talks about his Omega watch. Fans of the franchise fear that Bond scripts are being distorted by the needs of advertisers to plug products. For *Casino Royale*, one-third of the budget ($45 million) was raised from companies wanting their brands featured in the film (Harlow).
With traditional means of reaching an audience via 30-second advertisements being interrupted by the proliferation of video streaming, online broadcasting and catch-up TV, the number of brands now featuring their products or logo in content is rising, and potentially jeopardises the creative integrity of a film by being too blatant. Brands are responding with a new approach that centres on the brand itself creating compelling content that appeals to the audience with whom they seeking to connect. This involves enmeshing the brand into the entertainment, which can take various overt and covert forms. Greg Logan, co-founder of Hatch Entertainment, an Australian agency that creates formats for broadcasters, distributors, brands and production companies, predicts “very soon everyone in business will be making original video content. In a few years, online video will be exploding at levels we cannot imagine, and those who have done the hard work, who have worked out what works and what doesn’t, will be producing entertainment people will turn to” (Logan). If brands and filmmakers can create and position their content ‘correctly’, the partnership opportunities are copious (Penny).

The original BMW series entitled *The Hire* (2001) is considered a branded content icon, winning Best Action Short at the Los Angeles International Short Film Festival for *The Hostage* (2002), two Grand Clio Awards and a Titanium Lion, the highest honour at the Cannes International Advertising Festival. The anthology of eight short films released over two seasons in 2001 and 2002 were directed by esteemed international filmmakers including Ang Lee, John Frankenheimer, Wong Kar-Wai, Guy Ritchie and Alejandro González Inárritu, and starred Clive Owen as ‘The Driver’ who saved, kidnapped and escorted people in various BMW automobiles. The films were promoted as good movies rather than good advertisements, with reviews in trade press, posters and trailers, but BMW’s involvement as the financier was always fully disclosed. Praised by both advertising and film industries, the
The campaign garnered media coverage not accessible to typical advertisements and catapulted BMW’s exposure into film festivals and award shows. Despite BMW’s sales rising by 17.2 per cent between 2001 and 2002, the series was abandoned in 2005 when the agency ended their 10-year relationship with their client (Sherwood). All eight films were removed from the BMWFilms.com website but not before they had amassed more than 100 million views, which is considered a major achievement in pre-YouTube days. In 2016 the series made a comeback with *The Escape*, directed by Neill Blomkamp. Unlike its predecessor, *The Escape* did not turn into its own series but appears to be a celebration of the pioneering work of *The Hire* 15 years prior. In 2017, Trudy Hardy, Vice President of Marketing at BMW North America, said: “Everyone now looks back on this [The Hire] as the greatest investment the company ever made. It has exponentially paid off, not only in our brand equity and our brand value, but also sales. I think we created fans for life” (Sherwood).

The brand Red Bull has extended the innovative work of BMW through the creation of Red Bull Media House, a global media production and distribution division launched in 2007 in Salzburg, Austria. Red Bull connotes adventure, which works perfectly in the entertainment space – if it were not for Red Bull, we would not have seen a person jump from a balloon in space. In 2011, Red Bull also signed a partnership deal with American free-to-air broadcaster NBC and became a partner in YouTube’s original content strategy, at the same time founding Terra Mater Factual Studios, a subsidiary of Red Bull Media House specialising in the production of natural history theatrical documentaries. At Red Bull, content is not considered a loss leader; rather, its media arm turns a profit and is now almost as big as the product it sells.
The online series *The Power Inside* (2013) epitomises the creative scope of innovative storytelling entwined with brand partnerships. Revolving around alien facial hair and starring Harvey Keitel, *The Power Inside* is a social film developed by brands Intel and Toshiba in conjunction with San Francisco advertising agency Pereira & O’Dell. The web series centres on Neil, a seemingly normal 20-something who is stuck in a dead-end job and going nowhere in life. Everything changes when a race of planet-destroying moustached aliens need something inside Neil to help them destroy Earth. After Intel and Toshiba financed *The Beauty Inside* (2012) – an episodic tale that became a major success propelling the small agency onto the world stage where it won a Daytime Emmy Award and three Grand Prix at Cannes – it was a natural progression to experiment with more branded content, resulting in *The Power Inside* becoming one of the most watched online series of 2014. The success of *The Power Inside* suggests that like BMW’s *The Hire*, Pereria & O’Dell understand their audience and market, engaging them in a way that is pleasing to the financial backers of the content, Intel and Toshiba. Pereira says, “the previous movies were so successful that a few other brands are doing product placement in this one.” This may very well be a new model for branded content because companies like Spotify, Skype, Fossil Watches and Skull Candy are all product placing in someone else’s content (Fera).

As more brands produce content, film festivals are increasingly receptive to allowing viral and branding formats into their catalogues for exhibition. One such pioneer is the respected Tribeca Film Festival (TFF) that in 2016 announced the Tribeca X Award, sponsored by General Electric (GE), to celebrate the best collaborations between filmmakers and brands (Tribeca Film Festival). Jane Rosenthal, founder and executive chair of TFF, said:

> For the past decade, a shift has taken place across traditional models of entertainment, art and advertising, as brands step in to serve as financiers and
studios, and become catalysts for high quality provocative storytelling. We are looking forward to shining a light on the contributions that brands are making to support filmmakers and celebrating the exciting work that has been produced. (Tribeca Film Festival 2016)

*Hearing Colours* (2015), directed by Greg Brunkalla, won the inaugural Tribeca X award in 2016. The five-minute short film sponsored by Samsung in partnership with online video-sharing website Vimeo, is part of *The Connected Series* which looks at how modern technology affects the way people communicate. *Hearing Colours* looks at a day in the life of Neil Harbisson, a young man with achromatopsia, a rare condition that leaves people colourblind. Neil is like a sci-fi character in that he has convinced doctors to implant an antenna in the back of his head that allows him to hear colours. The short film can be viewed freely on Vimeo and has presently amassed 199,000 views. The only hint that it is sponsored by Samsung is a two-and-a-half-second Samsung Galaxy logo that features at the end of the credit sequence. “This film exemplifies the kind of work that we applaud in which a brand is telling a genuinely compelling story in a way that adds value to people's lives,” said Andrew Essex, CEO of festival owner Tribeca Enterprises. “I'm told it was a very difficult decision for the jury, that there were tons of great work, and that’s an encouraging sign for the industry” (Monllos).

BMWFilms, Red Bull Media House, *The Power Insid*, and *Hearing Colour* are all examples of the synergy that is possible between brands and filmmakers. It also confirms that there is no single model for how brands can function; rather, there are multiple possibilities. Australian audiences’ acceptance of branded content in narrative storytelling is longstanding because our viewing habits are infused with US content that is heavily branded. Arguably,
Australian producers can then gain some reassurance that when correctly applied, the financing model can provide innovative collaboration opportunities locally.

**Branded content and Australian feature films**

Australia has no regulatory body or specific legislation managing product placement and branded content. As such, content that incorporates branding or placements falls under the broader consumer advertising regulations managed by the Advertising Standards Bureau (Byers 2014). Close scrutiny is maintained on alcohol and tobacco as well as broadcasts to children because branding and placements specifically targeting children is not allowed (Byers 2014). Presently, branded content rarely concerns the bankrolling of Australian films because production has relied typically on taxpayer financing and, to a much lesser extent, private investment. As brand integration strategist James Grant-Hay from *In Shot*, an Australian company that specialises in branding, explains: “Branded content in the Australian motion picture industry is still in its infancy because producers look to the public screen funding bodies first” (Barclay and Rigg). However, Australian filmmakers must be increasingly resourceful with Federal Government cuts of $51.5 million over four years from Australia’s film bank Screen Australia since the 2014–15 budget (Karlovsky). This tight monetary policy, balanced against increases to the Producer Offset created in 2007 to enable producers to retain equity and build sustainable production companies, means that Australian producers must investigate innovative and unorthodox methodologies of finance. This could include fostering relationships with brands and other commercial partners, which in this tight economic climate can be mutually beneficial for both parties. Academy Award-winning producer, director and actor Roger Corman said, “motion pictures have always been part-art and part-business. It’s what makes cinema interesting, but also difficult” (cited in Holdsworth). Screen Australia CEO Graeme Mason, when speaking at the Currency House
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Arts and Public Life Breakfast in 2014, repeatedly stated that “there is a big difference between the screen sector and pure arts practice. Our sector is big business”, reinforcing this incongruous straddling of two worlds (cited in Blatchford).

Branded entertainment is not new to the Australian media landscape. At the 2013 Spikes Asia Festival of Creativity attended by more than 1800 delegates from 30 countries, and in collaboration with organisers of Cannes Lions, Dubai Lynx and Eurobest festivals, Australia was by far the most dominant in the Branded Content & Entertainment category, with 12 finalists and one Grand Prix awarded to McCann Melbourne for *Dumb Ways to Die* (“Spikes Asia”). Disappointingly, in the feature film category, there was not an Australian entry.

Belgiovane Williams Mackay (BWM), The Content Agency, In the Thicket, In Shot and The Connected TV Marketing Association are all Australian agencies that are branded content specialists; however, television is where most of the content is being produced, specifically reality-television formats such as *The Voice, MasterChef* and *The Block*. Rob Belgiovane, Executive Creative Director of BWM, says he wants to place his clients in Australian films but admits that advertisers are worried about appearing in ‘flops’ and were difficult to persuade on the merits of the discipline. He adds, “Australian marketing is all about eliminating risk. It’s difficult, in such an eyeballs driven industry to get clients to commit to [film] funding. There’s the risk of being associated with a film that fails” (Belgiovane).

Considering the small number of brands that have engaged with Australian film, scepticism towards the benefits from the association appear completely valid given it is at present not uncommon for Australian films to fail with local audiences. Despite a TV partner in the Nine Network and commercial sponsors such as the Commonwealth Bank, the cricket-themed Australian film *Save Your Legs* (2013) featuring Stephen Curry and Brendan Cowell could
not attract a local audience, despite extensive media coverage. In short, although people knew the film was showing they did not attend screenings. *Save Your Legs* cost approximately $5 million and with an estimated $1 million spent on prints and advertising, the distributor Madman had been anticipating better performance (Quinn). When discussing the poor box office return, Madman co-director Paul Wiegard said:

> It’s very, very confusing. There’s always the argument that the publicity could have been timed tighter to release, but I genuinely thought all the pre-news during January was timed well—there’s very little else competing then for the space—and I suspect the awareness is good-to-high. We’re incredibly disappointed and somewhat flummoxed—I mean, we haven’t always got things right, but it’s not like we haven’t done this before (Quinn).

More recently, *The BBQ* (2018), which features Shane Jacobson, Magda Szubanski, Julia Zemiro and celebrity chef Manu Feildel, employed what producer Tait Brady described as “sophisticated product placement” that contributed nearly $1 million to the $3.7 million budget (Groves b). IGA Supermarkets and Barbeques Galore put up the bulk of those funds, with the rest from Heat Beads (Groves b). Brady says the product placement was integral to the film, with Jacobson playing Darren ‘Dazza’ Cook who works at Barbecues Galore, and Julia Zemiro as his wife Diane, an employee at IGA (Groves b). Despite the producer’s efforts to integrate brands into the narrative, it would appear from the comments by Leigh Paatsch, movie critic for the *Daily Telegraph* and *Herald-Sun*, that the filmmakers did not sufficiently naturalise them and broke the JND threshold of perceptibility: “The only viewers guaranteed to walk away with big smiles on their faces are associates of *The BBQ*’s promotional partners, who paid a stack of dough to ensure their branding is tactlessly tattooed all over the place” (Paatsch). Despite enthusiastic reactions to national Q&A screenings
hosted by Jacobson and director Stephen Amis, *The BBQ* only achieved moderate results grossing $507,000 during its cinema release, confirming the concerns expressed by Australian advertising agencies whether the combined million-dollar spend from IGA, Barbeques Galore and Heat Beads was value for money (Groves c). Although *Save Your Legs* and *The BBQ* confirms that Australian companies and brands appear willing and ready to engaging in commercial partnerships with local filmmakers, such poor box office performance raises the question of how long this will last. Filmmakers understand filmmaking is inherently uncertain, but as per Rob Belgiovane above, marketing is about mitigating risk and *Save Your Legs* confirmed that films can still fail even with support of a broadcast network and strong marketing.

Not all collaborations with Australian filmmakers and brands have concluded unfavourably. *Red Dog* (2011) worked in partnership with the mining industry and is ranked 11th in Screen Australia’s *Top Australian Feature Films of All Time*, and number one in their study 94 *Films: A Commercial Analysis* (George and Rheinberger). *Red Dog* is based on the real-life exploits of a stray dog that roamed Western Australia’s remote Pilbara region in the 1970s, hitchhiking between settlements and bringing people together as it travelled. Mining company Rio Tinto contributed financially as well as supplying free accommodation and food, and provided unprecedented access to Pilbara mining sites featured in the film. Additional support included a helicopter for aerial shots, travel from regional airline Skywest, local council assistance with locations, union support for crew and actors to access restricted sites, the use of a freight train and earth movers from mining equipment company Westrac, and a financial contribution from gas company Woodside Petroleum, which also aided with logistical support and some extras (Bodley). Nelson Woss, *Red Dog*’s producer, explained:
We had a few big challenges with *Red Dog*. One was it takes place in the 1970s in a mining region in WA. There really was a red dog, and he really did ride on three-kilometre trains and was friends with the miners that drove caterpillar trucks. We had a script that required us to show those things so it was really a necessity because as a producer with a limited budget, I realised I probably couldn’t rent a three-kilometre train, so I better get into business with someone who had one. (Barclay and Rigg)

According to Screen Australia’s 2010 annual report, approximately $3 million of the estimated $8.5 million budget came from the Australian Government. Although it has never been fully disclosed how much supplementary cash came from the mining community when the industry support was made public, Rio Tinto CEO Sam Walsh said it was “an exciting opportunity to showcase our industry” (Bodley). Director Kriv Stenders told film industry magazine *Encore* about the importance of the support:

> Without that we couldn’t have made the movie and we were incredibly well supported by them, it was overwhelming, they were welcoming and excited. The mining industry has been maligned recently; it was a chance for them to remind Australians that this is a part of Australia, an amazing vital part. We were really paying tribute and honour to the pioneers who built that place.

(Barclay and Rigg)

Former Screen Australia Chief Operating Officer Fiona Cameron said, “It’s a reflection of the stories being told. *Red Dog* is set in the Pilbara so there’s a natural synergy” (Maddox 2011). While Rio Tinto did not require their corporate logo to feature in the film, Hamersley Iron, a wholly owned subsidiary of Rio Tinto, features heavily with both an onscreen
presence and narrative incorporation where the characters working for the company. In many ways, it is just as overt as the Barbeques Galore, IGA Supermarkets and Heat Beads logos that feature in *The BBQ*. The name ‘Hamersley Iron’ is on the side of the staff bus and on the hardhats of the workers who drink in the bar and stand next to the CAT-branded heavy earthmovers; there is the sporadic appearance of a Woodside employee in uniform; and the dog Koko is also fed Pedigree petfood in the bar during the opening scene. However, unlike *The BBQ*, when respected Australian movie critic David Stratton reviewed *Red Dog* for *The Australian* newspaper, he rejected the idea that the movie was a propaganda piece (Stratton). When asked about the audience’s response to the incorporation of brands during an *ABC Radio National* interview in 2011, Woss said:

> There hasn’t been any reaction to the product placement in *Red Dog*. Not directly anyway. For us, we were very, very careful, we respected the intelligence of the audience; we didn’t want to push it. We wanted to tell an authentic story and an Australian story and we wanted to put aspects of that story, that really existed on the screen so that’s the only area we went into. I think what’s pretty terrific about some of the companies that supported us, was simply, they supported us. They said it is an important story and something people will like, we’re going to get behind you and it wasn’t a case of we want to put our logo in your film. (Barclay and Rigg)

*Red Dog* was not instigated by the mining industry but from early on there is evidence the mining companies knew it was supporting something that would show the industry in an encouraging light. The film acknowledges the support of the mining companies at the end of the closing credits and their logos appear in the small print of the movie poster. Although there has been no deliberate attempt to hide the fact that mining companies financially
supported the film, casual moviegoers could be unaware. *Save Your Legs, The BBQ* and *Red Dog* demonstrate that financing can come from both public and private sectors, and contribute directly to the budget of an Australian feature film. They also confirm that there is scope locally for the application of branded content but there is no single model for how the brands can function. The illustrations outlined above demonstrate that success has been mixed, however perhaps that is what one should expect because filmmaking is inherently uncertain.

**Conclusion**

For some filmmakers, negotiating with government screen agencies for funding is much simpler and straightforward than seeking brand partnerships. However, for those filmmakers willing to experiment with innovative and unorthodox funding, branded entertainment does provide scope and opportunity within the commercial sector to seek out financial partners. The practice has evolved from crude, unsophisticated product insertions to real collaborations between filmmakers and business. It is now accepted at respected film festivals, and the amorphous nature of this financing model means it will continue to develop and adapt to advances and changes in technology and communications. What is certain is that brands now more than ever need to connect with audiences in an *à la carte* communications environment, and the traditional means of reaching audiences is being interrupted. As government subsidisation waxes and wanes, Australian filmmakers need to be innovative, because there is little hope that the budgetary cutbacks will be reversed.

There must be rigorous analysis to determine whether a story is compatible with branded content because not all films are suitable and savvy consumers are inherently sceptical about corporations claiming to support their cultural values (Carah 24). However, for the right
projects, working with commercial enterprise for shared outcomes can provide an alternative viable model for financing, allowing filmmakers creative licence without compromising the narrative with forced connections. Working with private enterprise and brands in Australia is not a standalone panacea; it does need to operate within existing systems is still truly in its infancy. The difficulty lies in finding the right commercial companies willing to take risks and partner with filmmakers. There are various ways to finance a feature film, and many and varied industrial and cultural contexts in which production may occur. This is just one approach; the application of the proposed model depends on the suitability of the content for branding opportunities and the significance of the contribution from brand partners as well as other sources. This process can be complex and convoluted but the possibilities are vast; a filmmaker needs to be persistent in exploring them.


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**FILMOGRAPHY**


