

**8<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

## **...and the Award for best picture goes to: the one with the best PR smear campaign?**

[The Week's](#) coverage of the upcoming Oscar Award's had me gripped.

According to the article, this year has seen one of the ugliest PR smear campaigns ever.

The buzz was growing that the underdog Iraq-war drama *The Hurt Locker* would upset *Avatar* for Best Picture — then disaster. The indie frontrunner became embroiled in two scandals: first one of its producers [allegedly played dirty](#) with an "illegal" e-mail campaign; second, The Los Angeles Times [challenged the war film's accuracy](#).

But what I really liked was The Week's incisive recap of how desperate moviemakers have tried to use the press to sway Academy voters.

Here's a summary of [The Week's six best Oscar smear campaigns](#): note how many of them are considered great movies despite the low collection of Oscar's in the cabinet.

### **1: Execute a media freeze-out**

**The movie:** *Citizen Kane*.

**The smear:** William Randolph Hearst, on whom the film's main character was closely based, banned any mention of the film in his papers, used his influence to limit its theatrical run, and publicly slandered director Orson Welles.

**Did it work?** Yes. *Citizen Kane* only took home one Oscar for Best Screenplay, losing Best Picture to the relatively obscure *How Green Was My Valley*.

### **2. Paint the film as a Pinko**

**The movie:** *High Noon*

**The smear:** Exploiting McCarthy-era fears, rival studios spread rumours that the acclaimed Western was pushing a liberal line and making "un-American" statements about Hollywood's anti-communist blacklist and U.S. foreign policy regarding the Korean War.

**Did it work?** Yes. Despite critical praise and the allures of Grace Kelly, Oscar voters were [too intimidated](#) to support *High Noon*. It lost the top award to Cecil B. De Mille's, *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

### **3. Expose historical inaccuracies**

**The movie:** *Saving Private Ryan*.

**The smear:** After reports questioned the film's research, [entertainment journalists alleged](#) that publicists at Miramax (which was pushing *Ryan*'s top rival, *Shakespeare in Love*) had asked them to criticize the film.

**Did it work?** For the most part, yes. While *Shakespeare in Love* took home six Oscars, the Academy gave the Best Director award to Spielberg – a rare split of the Best Director and Best Picture awards.

#### 4. Play the anti-semitic card

**The movie:** *A Beautiful Mind*.

**The smear:** Two weeks before voting closed, [the Drudge Report](#) claimed the biopic's makers had conveniently concealed that their subject, John Nash, was anti-Semitic and said some Academy members were questioning [why they would vote for a "Jew hater."](#)

**Did it work?** No. The otherwise heartwarming film prevailed, collecting four statuettes, including those for Best Picture and Best Director.

#### 5. Counterspin

**The movie:** *The Pianist*.

**The smear:** After Samantha Geimer, the erstwhile minor with whom Polanski had ["unlawful sex" in 1977](#), publicly forgave him and [wrote an LA Times editorial](#) calling on Oscar voters to "judge the movie, not the man." Rival studios allegedly tried to halt the pro-Polanski momentum – leaking old court transcripts that graphically detailed Polanski's assault on Geimer.

**Did it work?** Not entirely. Though *Chicago* was named Best Picture, Polanski won for Best Director, and *The Pianist* nabbed statuettes for Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Actor.

#### 6. Level charges of child exploitation

**The movie:** *Slumdog Millionaire*.

**The smear:** The media [criticized](#) director Danny Boyle for underpaying the film's impoverished child stars, raising suspicions that rival studio publicists had found a powerful angle to take down the film; *Slumdog* studio Fox Searchlight quickly [issued press releases](#) pushing the fact that Boyle had set up trust funds for the kids.

**Did it work?** No. The film swept —winning eight Oscars, including Best Picture.

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### **Not all is gloom and doom: Attendees at Vegas show up nearly 14%, with 56 first-time exhibitors**

Nothing like exhibition stats to give you a feel for the market. We were at the Digital Signage Expo in Vegas last week to look after some of our clients, and certainly noticed that although it was smaller, it was abuzz with attendees.

According to the organiser's of the show, which boasts to be the world's largest International Tradeshow and Conference dedicated to digital signage, interactive technology and out-of-home networks, it drew over 3,400 attendees, nearly a 14% increase over 2009. And, although fewer of the big timers were in attendance, there were 56 [first-time](#) exhibitors, indicating a growing market, and lots of interest.

It will be interesting to see the attendee and exhibitor figures over in Hannover this year at the traditionally 'mega' CeBit show.