

News from Theatre Operations

TOBY MENSFORTH, THEATRE OPERATIONS
LAURA BRILLINGER, ONTARIO SCIENCE CENTRE

The IMAX Big Bang Theory is simple and is proven time and time again... you have only one chance to launch... don't waste it! A great launch campaign will almost certainly pay great dividends at your box office. Laura Brillinger of the Ontario Science Centre, which surpassed 500,000 attendance in its first year of operation, describes for us to what lengths she and her colleagues went to launch their latest film, Cosmic Voyage, at the Shoppers Drug Mart OMNIMAX® Theatre. Having attended the VIP opening, read the subsequent press clippings and heard about attendance results, I can attest that if anyone is proving the IMAX Big Bang Theory, it's the Ontario Science Centre.

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"When you get off to a strong start, everything falls in line afterward – the media stay interested, promotional partners are pumped, word-of-mouth is excellent and people keep coming."

On November 1st, 1997, *Cosmic Voyage* opened with a Big Bang at the Shoppers Drug Mart OMNIMAX Theatre at the Ontario Science Centre in Toronto, Canada. On launch weekend alone, close to 6,000 people visited the Science Centre and more than 4,000 of those people attended shows at the OMNIMAX Theatre. Seven of nine *Cosmic Voyage* screenings were sold out and line-ups often stretched out the door.

And what's the secret to this success? Not much, according to theatre manager Wes Wenhardt. "All it took was months of planning, a team of talented people, five preview screenings, one gala, an appearance by a key government minister, a special guest appearance by producer/director/writer Bayley Silleck, 12 media interviews, glowing reviews in all three dailies, a stellar advertising campaign, 55,000 distributed pieces of collateral material, two multi-million dollar companies as promotional partners, seven complementary educational programs, one *Cosmic Voyage* exhibit and a jam-packed, activity-filled launch weekend featuring a host of talented promotional partners."

Both the gala and launch weekend featured a special ball-passing performance by the internationally renowned Canadian Children's Dance Theatre, a *Cosmic Voyage*-themed laser show by a Toronto-based laser company, a telescope show-and-tell by the Canadian Royal Astronomical Society and a special comet-making demonstration by Science Centre hosts. A display featuring an IMAX camera and an appearance by Imax's Michael Gibbon at a special member's preview topped off the weekend. "When you get off to a strong start, everything falls in line afterward – the

Cosmic Voyage gives you a lot of bang for the buck.

Christopher Harris, *The Globe and Mail*

**Cosmic Voyage...
does it with beauty, simplicity and a sense of drama.**

Jennie Punter, *Toronto Star*

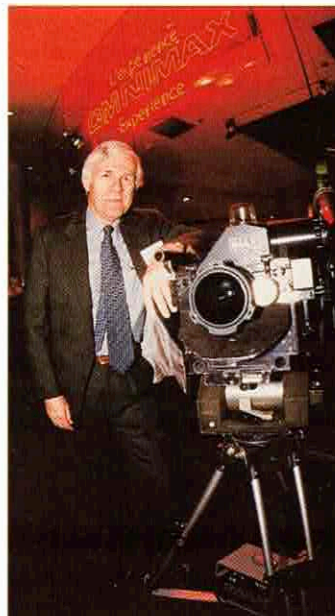
media stay interested, promotional partners are pumped, word-of-mouth is excellent and people keep coming," says Wenhardt.

And coming they are. Since launch weekend three weeks ago, thousands of people have come to see the film. And it doesn't stop there. Over 10,000 more school children are booked to see *Cosmic Voyage* in the next three weeks.

According to the Shoppers Drug Mart OMNIMAX Theatre team, the formula for success involves combining creative events, long lead times, early trailers and signage, solid and committed technical support, corporate and promotional partnerships and outstanding pre-publicity and media relations. According to Wenhardt, launches at the OMNIMAX Theatre are developed specifically to convey a sense of the theatre as offering "more than just a movie but an experience as well."

Stay tuned March 6th for the next Shoppers Drug Mart OMNIMAX Theatre launch as they partner with the Cinesphere IMAX Theatre for Toronto's first-ever joint large-format film launch for *Thrill Ride: The Science of Fun*.

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Bayley Silleck at the Ontario Science Centre's *Cosmic Voyage* opening



Ball-passing performance by the Canadian Children's Dance Theatre

photos courtesy of Ontario Science Centre