

Anja Kootz

Selling the Bond Image – Merchandizing and Product Placement in the James Bond Movies

Is there any hope to look like Sean Connery or Pierce Brosnan after having shaved with a razor beautified by the 007 logo? Do people buy a BMW expecting their cars to be equipped with changeable licence plates, remote control and rocket launchers? Would there be a chance for the the average person to do spectacular stunts in a skiing area that was once used to film a *James Bond* movie?

One would guess not. So to be James Bond is impossible, to play James Bond lacking the right equipment rather difficult. What then is so fascinating and encouraging about buying *Bond* related products? Even if there is no direct relation to the action hero, there seems to be quite some demand on products that offer the highest amount of possible heroic identification. The idea of identification with a literary or film hero is not a new phenomenon. Goethe's 1774 novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*) for example did not only trigger a wave of suicides among young men unhappily in love. It also started a fashion of dressing. One of the last sentences in the book are: "Er lag gegen das Fenster entkräftet auf dem Rücken, war in völliger Kleidung, gestiefelt, im blauen Frack mit gelber Weste."¹ These clothes became a "dress code" for those unhappily in love and not willing to commit to the radical manner of identification. Both groups, the suicides and the dress code followers demonstrate an attachment and involvement with a fictional character. The 1967 movie *Bonnie and Clyde* was followed by a Bonnie and Clyde look craziness. So the idea of identification and attempts to come close to the nature of a fictional character are neither new nor restricted to James Bond. Bond though, is a special case, because, it is not only that it accidentally creates a fashion. Rather, it even aims at doing so. When the first Bond movie *Dr. No* appeared in 1962, "the only notable merchandise tie-ins to the film were a paperback edition of the novel featuring promotions for the film, a comic book adaptation, the soundtrack album and a 45rpm single of the Bond theme."² The acceptance and the will to identify also outside of the movie theaters must have been quite amazing and also demanding.

¹ Johann W. von Goethe. *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*.

² Lee Pfeiffer, Dave Worrall. *The Essential Bond*. New York: Harper Entertainment, 1999. p. 21

So movie related products to *Goldfinger*, whose release started the intended merchandizing campaign for James Bond in 1964, already featured "an elaborate children's version of Bond's lethal attaché case"³, trading cards and jigsaw puzzles. It also included a pair of shoes, whose box alone is today worth \$300.

The merchandizing to *The World is Not Enough* (1999), encourages to a thinking that implies if you bought it all, you almost could be James Bond himself. Wannabe-Bonds can find there way through the night with a pocket sized flashlight, put their cigars in a leather embossed cigar holder, list their appointments in a Secret Agent File and virtually be James Bond in a Playstation game. No question about trading and postcards, coffee mugs and of course videotapes, DVDs and soundtracks. In preparation to *Die Another Day*, the Swiss watch company Swatch, edited a whole series of watches, one specific watch for every film made so far.

And because everything featuring the 007 logo sells quite nicely, besides the official book to the film you can also buy a few unofficial ones and some music "inspired" by *The World Is Not Enough*. There are not only official merchandizing campaigns, but also a lot of producers who take the chance in jumping the band wagon.

As important for the *Bond* phenomenon as the merchandizing is the product placement that starts with the very first *Bond* movie, *Dr. No*. Florian Asche argues that product placement is a refined form of advertisement and defines it as follows: "Product Placement ist eine vom Betrachter akustisch oder visuell wahrnehmbare Präsentation von ökonomischen Leistungen oder deren Anbietern in Darbietungen jeder Art, die geeignet und bestimmt ist, den Absatz der Leistung zu fördern." The so called Reaktanzeffekt of the audience is switched off. Diese Besonderheit [des Product Placements] liegt in der Ausschaltung des Reaktanzverhaltens des Verbrauchers. Reaktanz ist das Abwehrverhalten des Konsumenten gegen eine Beeinflussung von außen. Er hält sich für unabhängig. Er hält sich für den Herrn seiner Entscheidungen. Wähnt der Konsument diese Autonomie gefährdet, so reagiert er mit Ablehnung und gegebenenfalls mit Aggression. Das Reaktanzverhalten des Verbrauchers, das die konventionelle Werbung aufgrund ihrer offensichtlichen Werbeabsicht herausfordert, kann durch Product Placement deutlich verringert, wenn nicht gar ganz ausgeschaltet werden."⁴ Over a hundred different products were advertised in the history of Bond movies.

The first brand ever mentioned in a *Bond* movie is of a weapon. When Bond is sent on his mission to hunt *Dr. No*, he is asked by M (head of MI6) to leave his Beretta and instead to get comfortable with a Walther PPK. He is introduced to it by the words: "Walther PPK. 7.65 ml.,

³ *The Essential Bond*. p. 31

with a delivery like a brick through a plate glass window. Takes a Brausch silencer with very little reduction in muzzle velocity. The American CIA swear by them." Bonds knowledge of weapons is emphasized again on in *Dr. No*, when Bond recognizes himself to be out of danger through the knowledge of a gun of his enemy "that has had it's six shots." In *Goldfinger* Bond is lecturing on Dom Perignon. He says to Tillie Masterson: "My dear girl, there are some things that just aren't done, such as drinking Dom Perignon '53 above the temperature of 38 degress Fahrenheit. That's just as bad as listening to the Beatles without earmuffs."

In the first three films featuring Pierce Brosnan, Bond is driving a BMW, which he in *Tomorrow Never Dies* picks up at an Avis car rental service and which he brings back to Avis in a rather unconventional manner – he „flies“ the car in through the window of an Avis rental station. In the same movie James Bond is using an Ericson mobile phone, and Heinecken beer can be seen for a short moment during a hunt. In *Goldeneye*, Bond is wearing an Omega watch, is equipped with a Parker pen, which is in fact a bomb detonator. And very often this equipment is also named, when Q hands over the gadgets for Bond's next mission. In *Die Another Day*, Bond is using the traditional Aston Martin again. What is new is the fact, that the car has a feature that is not technically possible – the car can become invisible.

What is quite striking is that James Bond is using the products in a different manner as the average customer could or would do. Bond is not paying with his visa card, rather he opens a locked door, the Ericson cellphone does serve as a remote control for his car, as a fingerprint reader and also electrocutor for the villain Dr. Kaufman (in *Tomorrow Never Dies*). Bonds cars are equipped with exeptional features like revolving licence plates, rockets, ejector seats, submarine qualities and radar systems. So the mere effect of positive attachment to Bond is made more important to the movie goer than the concentration on reality reflecting details.

A change has occurred to be developped in concern to the product placement over the years. The emphasis on upper class drinks and cars in the early Bond movie one could see as an attempt to distinguish James Bond from the characters of the 1950s kitchen sink dramas. The developpment in the nineties though showed that the product placement now serves a different purpose. It feels like the products are not responsible for the formation of the Bond character, but to influence the audience on buying them as Bond related products. In 1965 the Bond character was characterized by the products he used. Today the established character of James Bond, who represents upper class style, good looks, taste und intelligence, helps shape and thus sell the products he surrounds himself with. So Bond by now has become a desirable communicator for products of all kinds. More than 20 different products are advertised for in

⁴ Florian Asche. *Das Product Placement im Kinospiefilm*. Frankfurt: Lang, 1996. pp.23, 26, 43

Die Another Day, each with a participation in the movie of about \$45 million. The product placement alone guaranteed \$900 million for the production company. \$900 for a film with a budget of (only) \$130 million.

For the production company it is certainly a financial issue. For the advertised products it is a way to make their products more popular. As it reads in one of Visas press releases: "In fact, James Bond and the Visa brand share several of the same characteristics:

- #1 in their fields
- Recognized everywhere
- Access to everything
- Contemporary
- Ubiquitous"

The argument here of course works the following way: You want to be like James Bond, we ARE like him in several ways. So turn to us and you will come closer to James Bond. And this sort of advertising campaign works very successfully: "The greatest home run in product placement since E.T. scarfed up a pack of Reese's Pieces came with BMW's launch of its Z3 roadster last fall. When the car became James Bond's preferred ride in the 007 flick *Goldeneye*, the hype and glitter surrounding this placement became an event unto itself, generating hundreds of millions of dollars worth of exposure worldwide. The deal won BMW and its marketing partners a Super Reggie as the top promotion of the year. Beyond the accolades and the press clips, though, the placement helped drive BMW's business as discounts for the Z3 vanished and waiting lists stretched out for months."⁵

It is not only the pointed product placement that launches shopping booms. Florian Asche for example points out that the usage of Wackelpudding in Liebling Kreuzberg increased the sell of about 45 percent. And no brandname was mentioned. And it would certainly not be so farfetched to argue, even though I do not have any numbers on that, that Bond's Vodka Martini drinking habit, has contributed to make this drink popular and did not only increase the sell in . And as it is set in the movie, it gets a very positive connotation. (show scene, explain). There is definitely a back and forth influence. Bond is cool and drinks Martini or uses a BMW and at the same time, the logic of Bond is that he achieves stylishness BECAUSE he drinks Martini and drive a BMW.

⁵ <http://bodarky.www1.50megs.com/termpaper.html>

So you do not buy what you saw in this special kind of advertisement, what you really buy is an idea and the hope that your wishful thinking might turn into reality. The advertising campaign often though is not restricted to the film. Mostly, combined with the appearance in the film, further relations to Bond are made. Pierce Brosnan for example does appear on advertising event for Omega watches or BMW. What they are playing with here is quite fascinating. On advertising events of course, there is no more James Bond. Outside the film world, of course, there is Pierce Brosnan, not James Bond anymore: The identification though works perfectly interchangeable. And then the teasing line Pierce Brosnan IS James Bond (instead of Pierce Brosnan AS James Bond) becomes true for this effect. There is an amazing exchangeability here.

New with *Die Another Day* (2002) is this phenomenon: While before Pierce Brosnan was to be seen in an advertisement campaign for Omega watches and viewers of Bond movies immediately identified Pierce Brosnan with James Bond, now Pierce Brosnan is still to be seen posing for Omega watches, but he is posing as James Bond. It is no longer Pierce Brosnan's choice to wear an Omega watch, the reference to James Bond is made even more obvious by naming the advertising statement: „James Bond's Choice“.

But how does an audience emerge in the first place? What kind of psychological structures lie behind the Bond phenomenon? As I already emphasized, total identification is impossible. Still, the idea of identification is a key point in this discussion. Maybe it is exactly because James Bond is no one you can become. This gap between wanting to be James Bond and not being able to be him, offers an ever open space for potential or utopian identification. And maybe buying Bond related products is not only a way to come closer to the hero, but also a way of paying tribute to the character and the idea of him. A good example for this homage to James Bond is for example the Piz Gloria skiing area in Switzerland. Originally called Schilthorn, it is still carrying the name given to it by the 1969 movie *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. I dare say this is not only for commercial reasons.

(date of online publication: February 11, 2003)