

# What to expect when you're exploiting

By JANE RIDLEY

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In a scene from Jennifer Lopez's newest movie, "What To Expect When You're Expecting," her character gazes ruefully at a pregnant couple returning home from the store. They're carrying buckets of paint to decorate their nursery. The shot lingers — so you get a good, long look at the Glidden label on the paint cans.

Fast-forward to another scene, and the character played by Elizabeth Banks arrives at an upscale trade convention for baby products where one of the booths is run by . . . Glidden Paints. Blink and you won't miss this particular plug.

Inspired by the best-selling pregnancy manual of the same name, Friday's "What To Expect" turned into a "product placement bonanza," according to one Hollywood insider who worked on the set last summer. California Pizza Kitchen, Carter's, Jansport, Playtex, Delta Air Lines and Britax all join Glidden in the great baby brand-off.

But none of them matched Reebok. Take a shot of tequila every time you spot the sportswear maker's logo and you'll be watching with double vision. It's there on nearly every curve-hugging outfit worn by Cameron Diaz, as well as on her exercise ball. The push to squeeze brands into every frame was so obsessive that even the actors began to mock the process.

"A lot of the actors were laughing about it during filming because it was getting ridiculous," the insider says. "They don't really want to be seen as prop whores. At one point, Dennis Quaid turned a Reebok exercise ball towards the camera and said: 'Hey, let me hold it this way. Make sure you get the label in!'"

The film follows five couples preparing for parenthood. The ensemble cast also includes Anna Kendrick, Chace Crawford and Chris Rock.

The stars, though, are nearly overtaken by the logos, says the insider. "There's an unwritten rule that, once you show a product, you don't show it again, especially if [it] seems incongruous or is used in another scene with unrelated characters," he says. "At least this film was never headed to [the] Oscars!"

It's no big mystery why "What To Expect" attracted so many companies willing to pay for placement.

"Parenting is big business," says Ron Simon, curator of the Paley Center for Media. "Every company wants a slice of the pie because romantic comedies are aimed at a very specific demographic — women aged between 18 and 49 who are raising families."

Some of the sponsorship is more upfront than others. Stroller and carseat firm Britax is running a cross-promotional marketing campaign with the film's producer, Lionsgate. So is clothing company Carter's, which also owns OshKosh B'Gosh, which crowed about its participation in the film to Ad Age.

Executive producer Heidi Murkoff, author of “What To Expect When You’re Expecting” and creator of [whattoexpect.com](http://whattoexpect.com), concedes that the number of companies wanting to place products was “a little out of control some times.”

But she defends the film, insisting it reflects real-life purchasing habits. “Moms are buying more than they need,” she says. “I always give approval over certain advertisers on my Web site and I had the same thing with the movie.” She drew the line at “anything which was formula-related.”

Banks smiles when The Post asks if she was aware of the product placement. “Oh, yes, I noticed that,” she says. “It’s hard not to notice.”

So is she paid extra for munching California Pizza Kitchen and drinking Layer Cake wine?

“You should call SAG about that,” she laughs. “I’d love for you to inquire about that, but no. It’s the reality of modern movie making so I’m not actually really complaining. It’s a brave new world.”

The insider says advertisers kicked in about \$1 million total for the chance to be featured. Shirley Brady, editor of the New York-based Web site [brandchannel.com](http://brandchannel.com), says the arrangement is win-win.

“It’s a payday for the producers who want to keep their costs down,” she says. “And the brands get promoted in front of an engaged, captive audience.”

But for audiences that pay escalating ticket prices partly to avoid the commercial breaks on television, the strategy can backfire.

“If you see a product again and again, it starts to get obnoxious,” adds Brady. “A movie’s success relies a lot on word-of-mouth and, if something is unnatural and obvious, it’s not such a good thing.”

“What to Expect” director Kirk Jones, whose background is in TV advertising, says real products make scenes more believable. “It wasn’t like someone was saying to me, ‘You’ve got to feature this.’ But I can’t deny there is a lot of product placement. The challenge is when you’re not allowed to use real products and you have to ask the art director to make up a buggy which looks like a Bugaboo but can’t be a Bugaboo for whatever reason.”

There are also the fringe benefits.

“A friend of mine in the UK was pregnant when I was filming,” Jones says. “And I must admit that I pinched a couple of car seats for her from the props department.”

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