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To: R Epstein  
Subject: RE: Hollywood's box office slump continues: Are movies losing their mojo?

## Hollywood's box office slump continues: Are movies losing their mojo?

by Josh Rottenberg

With this weekend's solid-but-unspectacular opening for *The Green Hornet* and the disappointing debut of *The Dilemma*, Hollywood is marking an unhappy milestone: Box office revenues have now been down from the previous year's tally for 10 consecutive weeks. After a bruising holiday season littered with high-profile misfires like *The Tourist*, *How Do You Know*, and *Gulliver's Travels*, the major studios were hoping that 2011 would bring a reversal of last year's 5 percent decline in overall movie attendance. 2011 is certainly not off to an encouraging start. Though final numbers aren't in yet, this weekend's total box office haul looks like it will come in a whopping 25 percent below last year's. Yes, last year at this time audiences were still flocking to the 3-D hit *Avatar*. Still, that stings—and not in a good *Green Hornet* way.

What's going on here? It's hard to argue that studio executives have been making foolhardy gambles. Granted, casting Seth Rogen as a superhero whose heyday was in the golden age of radio might have been a questionable call. But who wouldn't have greenlit a thriller costarring Johnny Depp and Angelina Jolie? Or a romantic comedy with Reese Witherspoon, Owen Wilson, and Paul Rudd, directed by James L. Brooks? Or a Ron Howard comedy pairing Vince Vaughn and Kevin James? Those are the sort of down-the-middle pitches studio execs crave precisely because they're supposed to be safe, but in retrospect they proved to be unwise bets.

Yet, while a number of would-be blockbusters have underperformed and overall revenues have been down, this hasn't been a completely dismal stretch for movie fans. Smaller, ostensibly less commercial films like *True Grit*, *Black Swan*, *The King's Speech*, *127 Hours*, and *The Fighter* have drawn not only critical love and awards-season buzz but far larger crowds than anyone could reasonably have expected. Does this mean that budget-conscious audiences are starting to reject stale, been-there-done-that formulas and demanding a greater level of originality and artistic ambition if they're going to fork over their hard-earned dollars for a movie ticket? Will major studios—which, lest we forget, brought out daring zeitgeist-definers like *Inception* and *The*

