

Advertising Age

AdAge SPECIAL **REPORT** ENTERTAINMENT
MARKETERS OF THE YEAR



PAUL BROOKS & GARY GOETZMAN

WEDDING WORTH WEIGHT IN GOLD

IN THE ANNALS OF MOVIE marketing history, "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" is one big fat blockbuster. The little film, shot in 27 days with a \$5 million production budget, has earned an astounding \$240 million-plus in theaters. It was the fifth-ranked film in U.S. box office in 2002. That also makes it No. 28 on the list of highest-grossing films domestically, ever. Even more remarkable is that "Greek Wedding" achieved this in a season filled with mega-budget studio competition, such as "Spider-Man" and "Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones." The last time buzz marketing worked so well for a film was 1999, when Artisan Entertainment developed a cult following for "The Blair Witch Project," a success that came in \$100 million less than "Greek Wedding."

The instincts of producers Gary Goetzman of Playtone Pictures and Paul Brooks of Gold Circle Films, true believers in the comedy based on Nia Vardalos' one-woman show, grounded the vision for the film. Two years ago, when "Greek Wedding" was first tested before audiences, Messrs. Goetzman and Brooks shrewdly foresaw its potential, despite the film's lack of recognizable stars. Gold Circle, which co-financed "Greek Wedding" with HBO, opted to pop for prints and advertising expenses, reversing earlier plans to pass that to

another distributor. "We got to the point where Gary and I wanted to control the destiny of this movie," says the English-born Mr. Brooks, 44, whose title is executive producer on the film and president of Gold Circle.

FROM STARS TO MARKETER PARTNERS

Control it they did, hiring former Columbia Pictures marketing chief Paula Silver's Beyond the Box Productions to handle marketing. She undertook a grassroots campaign that included doling out T-shirts and Frisbees to Greek organizations. Even then, "Greek Wedding" broke the independent cinema marketing mold. It attracted publicity from the get-go, through the star wattage of fellow producers Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson. It landed corporate partners, such as Bed Bath & Beyond, for point-of-purchase displays and a sweepstakes—unusual in the indie film arena. "Greek Wedding" backers spent a modest \$2.2 million to open the film on April 19 on 100 screens, relying chiefly on cable TV ad support—a trifle when compared with rivals.

Others involved in fueling the movie's buzz included GS Entertainment Marketing Group, Los Angeles, which handled public relations and promotional alliances; Hammer Film Works,

which created the TV spots and trailer; DNA Studio, which built the film's Web site; and media-buying outfits Media First International and S. Callan Co.

But "Greek Wedding" became a movie industry Cinderella story, as gratifying as main character Toula's transformation from plain Jane to beautiful bride. The film's backers were relentless: When "Greek Wedding's" box office would soften with the arrival of yet another big studio film, Messrs. Goetzman and Brooks would pump up interest by dispatching stars Ms. Vardalos and John Corbett around the country for press interviews. "We felt if we could endure until Aug. 1, we had the potential to be a huge vacation movie," Mr. Brooks says.

The strategy worked. "Greek Wedding" not only lasted through summer, this bona fide word-of-mouth hit is still playing in some venues—11 months after initial release (despite



a Feb. 11 debut on video/DVD). At its height, "Greek Wedding" played on 2,300 screens. The film's backers ultimately spent \$30 million to market the movie over its run—small change considering how profitable "Greek Wedding" has become.

—JENNIFER PENDLETON