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MARKETPLACE

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HEADLINE: Gauging the bankability of Hollywood stars

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CHERYL GLASER, anchor:

This is MARKETPLACE. I'm Cheryl Glaser, in for David Brancaccio.

It's Monday again, the weekend's over, and you know what that means. Hollywood is tallying up the receipts. This weekend's winner in a squeaker was Tom Cruise's blockbuster *Minority Report*, just beating out Disney's animated film, *Lilo & Stitch*. Not much of a surprise, though, given all the advance play *Minority Report*. But we thought this day of Hollywood reckoning was perfect for the launch of a new feature, the MARKETPLACE entertainment desk. Over the next few months, we're going to devote some time to looking at the business half of the term 'show biz,' a huge industry both here and around the world. To help us kick it off, we asked our regular business of entertainment contributor Marty Kaplan to help us understand the mystery of star power.

MARTY KAPLAN: Once upon a time, when I was a studio executive, I worked on a project with Tom Cruise. I met him at a restaurant to talk about the movie. I had a bagel; he had a glass of water. I tried to keep my mind on the script, but all I kept thinking was, 'This guy's smile is worth \$10 million.' What's going on here?

Ms. JULIE GLUCKMAN: When I first moved out to California, my sister, who at the time was 16, came out to visit me. And we went to a movie premier.

KAPLAN: That's Julie Gluckman. I met her when she was the honcho at Image Entertainment, but here, she's speaking as a non-pro, as they say in the trades.

Ms. GLUCKMAN: Tom Cruise, who she had a huge crush on at the time, came into the movie theater and I think, you know, like, the rustle went through the crowd, 'Tom Cruise is here. Tom Cruise is here.' And so I said to my sister, 'Oh, Tom Cruise is here.' And she turned around and she looked at him and she burst into tears. She just began weeping. And I was just amazed by this display, like, that had just this incredible power on her. And she just -- she just cried. Did she talk to him? No. Did he sit next to her? No. Did it change her life in any way? No, you know, no. But there was all this well of personal, like, energy, power that could have been harnessed in some way.

KAPLAN: Harnessing that magic -- that's exactly what the entertainment industry wants to do. And according to John Burman, international editor at the *Hollywood Reporter*, Tom Cruise's handlers, along with two others, have done an especially good job.

Mr. JOHN BURMAN (*Hollywood Reporter*): Well, Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts and Tom Cruise all finished tied in our most recent survey. They each scored a perfect 100.

KAPLAN: The survey he's talking about is the *Hollywood Reporter's* annual Star Power survey. It asks a hundred movie executives to look at a list of a thousand stars from around the world and to award them bankability points, based on some hard-nosed criteria.

Mr. BURMAN: We look at the ability of an individual to get financing, based on the strength of their name, them being attached to a project. Can they open a movie to significant weekend box office, which we know is more than ever so critical these days. Are they going to get studio distribution if they're in a film?

KAPLAN: And what does it mean that a Tom Cruise scores a perfect 100?

Mr. BURMAN: You're basically saying that this is about as close as a guarantee as you can get in this crazy industry. You know, you've got a good-looking guy who's very appealing in the roles that he chooses, although he mixes it up, he keeps it interesting. They know that he's very smart in choosing his projects. So you can feel good going into it that you're going along with someone who's made the right choice. You've got a nice bet down there it's a good insurance policy for your project.

KAPLAN: And it was -- to the tune of \$37 million. But bankability is a cruel god to worship.

Some stars might be bankable in another medium like theater, but movie studios can be notoriously timid about betting on them. Take Carol Channing. She starred on Broadway in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, but when Hollywood made the movie, the role she originated was given to Marilyn Monroe.

Ms. CAROL CHANNING: It is painful, yes. You've hit a real raw nerve, and you've put salt on it.

KAPLAN: Carol's kind of family to me, so I figured it was OK to ask her about it.

Why did Hollywood make the choice it did?

Ms. CHANNING: Oh, I wasn't as good looking as Marilyn Monroe. See, but it wasn't a comedy with her. Well, now, you see, I would think that. But Marilyn was

beautiful, and I do think it was one of her best movies. But anyway, so they bought her a ticket for a whole month.

KAPLAN: They bought her a ticket to see your performance...

Ms. CHANNING: Yes.

KAPLAN: ...for a whole month...

Ms. CHANNING: Yes.

KAPLAN: ...after you knew she'd been cast?

Ms. CHANNING: Yes.

KAPLAN: And you went on performing anyway?

Ms. CHANNING: Well, what am I going to do? It's my responsibility. I mean, they're in the Ziegfield Theatre. I've got the audience who bought their tickets to see us and the original cast. What are you going to do? Say, 'No, I don't want to do the show because Marilyn's out there.' You can't do that.

KAPLAN: So I asked John Burman, what does the brand Marilyn Monroe mean?

Mr. BURMAN: Well, I think, with Marilyn Monroe, you've got sex appeal, you know, you've got good qualities there. And I think it's an image that's lasted through the years. It'll be interesting to see if that continues, going along. But she certainly represents that iconic classic Hollywood that a lot of us yearn for that doesn't necessarily exist today.

KAPLAN: Mm. The star power of a Marilyn Monroe or a Tom Cruise is an emotional promise, isn't it? It's literally exciting. When I watch a good movie, I don't think about branding. I don't think about bankability. In fact, I don't think at all. I pretend. I pretend that illusion is reality. I pretend that beauty lasts forever. I forget that the bucket of popcorn on my lap packs 1,000 calories. I even forget my own mortality. And the studios know that's worth paying for. This is Marty Kaplan for MARKETPLACE.

GLASER: Marty Kaplan is director of the Norman Lear Center and associate dean of USC's Annenberg School for Communication.

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