

NEWS RELEASE

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Nader, Commercial Alert Want Theaters to Disclose When Movies (Not Ads) Start Urge Moviegoers to Say “No Commercials” When Pre-Movie Ads are Shown in Theater

Since movie theaters are running more pre-movie ads, Ralph Nader and Commercial Alert are proposing that movie houses should be required by law to inform their customers as to when the show actually starts.

“Customers should have a choice as to how they use their time,” Nader said. “The choice should be theirs to make, not the movie theater’s to make for them.”

“Time is precious to Americans these days,” Nader said. “We don’t have time to give away to the advertising industry for free. And the movie industry has no business taking that time through deception. When they say the screen time is, say, 7:30, that should be the time the movie starts, not the time the theater starts showing commercials to a captive audience.”

In-theater commercials are booming. Screenvision Cinema Network, which distributes commercials to more than 11,500 movie screens, expects to add another 6,000 screens during the next two years, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Dennis Fogarty, Screenvision’s president and CEO, described his prospects for expanding into new theaters: “The others who haven’t got commercials running are looking at it.”

The Cinema Billboard Network, which is a division of Screenvision Cinema Network, boasts: “We have a **captive audience** watching your advertisement. **No interruptions!** The patrons sitting in the theaters are not going anywhere.” (Emphasis in original.)

“We are calling for commercial-free movies – no ads, no product placements,” Nader said. “Movie theaters should be a sanctuary, a refuge from the ad barrage. We are challenging movie and theater companies to rid themselves of commercials and product placements.”

Commercial Alert is asking moviegoers to say “no commercials” out loud whenever a pre-movie ad is shown on screen. “We don’t pay at the ticket window to get inundated with ads,” said Gary Ruskin, director of Commercial Alert.

“If you can’t stand being forced to watch yet another pre-movie ad, then let out a hoot of ‘no commercials’ when they come up on the screen,” Ruskin said. “It’s a cry of disapproval for being lied to and advertised at.”

Not all movie companies allow ads before their movies. The general counsel to Buena Vista, which distributes Disney movies, explained in 1990 why Disney generally prohibits advertising in theaters before its movies: “We do not believe people should be held hostage to unavoidable commercials in theaters any more than on their telephones.” According to the *Los Angeles Times*, New Line Cinema and Warner Bros. don’t allow in-theater advertising before their films.

Two major theater chains have recently decided to show in-theater ads, according to the *Times*. In 1997, Regal Cinemas, with 3,600 screens, started showing ads to film goers. This year, AMC, with 2,500 screens, started to show ads.

Since 1997, over 11,000 screens have added audio commercials distributed by the Theater Radio Network. Jeff Arthur, Theater Radio Network's co-founder and CEO, says about theaters: "Whether you or I like it or not, every conceivable space is going to be filled with some type of advertising."

Nader and Commercial Alert are urging that state or local consumer protection regulations be amended to require theater owners to disclose the actual time when their movies begin -- not when the pre-movie commercials begin. This disclosure would be placed, among other locations, at the ticket window, and in ads showing movie times. Whether, in addition, movie owners would disclose when the ads begin would be up to movie owners.

Another form of movie advertising -- product placements -- dominates several holiday season movies. The Warner Bros. film "You've Got Mail" is tied to America Online, Disney's "Enemy of the State" has repeated product placements for Phillips Electronics, and Tommy Hilfiger is conducting a roughly \$15 million ad campaign on behalf of Miramax's "The Faculty," which is almost a motion-picture length ad for Tommy Hilfiger's clothing.

"It's bad enough there are so many product placements paid for by brand name companies in the films themselves without frontloading the audience's movie experience with more ads," Nader said. "Whatever happened to art?"

Commercial Alert helps parents, children, and communities defend themselves against harmful, immoral or intrusive advertising and marketing, and the excesses of commercialism.

Commercial Alert's web address is <<http://www.essential.org/alert>>.