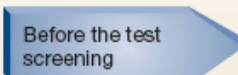
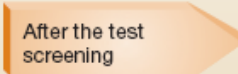


## **Market Research in Movie Making**

Virtually every major U.S. movie produced today uses test screenings to obtain the key reactions of consumers likely to be in the target audience.

For test screenings, 300 to 400 prospective moviegoers are recruited to attend a “sneak preview” of a film before its release. After viewing the movie, the audience fills out an exhaustive survey to critique the title, plot, characters, music, and ending as well as the marketing program (posters, trailers, etc.) to identify improvements to make in the final edit of the movie.

Table below summarizes some of the key questions that are used in these test screenings, both to select the people for the screenings and to obtain key reactions of those sitting in the screenings. Note how specific the studio’s action is for each question asked, like change the title or ending. This is an example of effective, action-oriented marketing research.

POINT WHEN ASKED	KEY QUESTIONS	USE OF QUESTION(S)
 Before the test screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How old are you?</li> <li>• How frequently do you pay to see movies?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find people who fit profile of target audience for movie.</li> <li>• Find people who frequently attend movies.</li> </ul>
 After the test screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think of the title? What title would you suggest?</li> <li>• Were there any characters too distasteful? Who? How?</li> <li>• Did you like the ending? If not, how would you change it?</li> <li>• Would you recommend the movie to a friend?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change movie title.</li> <li>• Change aspects of some characters.</li> <li>• Change or clarify ending.</li> <li>• Overall indicator of liking and/or satisfaction with movie.</li> </ul>

Here are some changes to movies that have resulted from this kind of marketing research:

*Making the plot move faster.* Disney cut a duet by Pocahontas and John Smith in *Pocahontas* because it got in the way of the action and confused test audiences.

*Changing an ending.* *Fatal Attraction* had probably the most commercially successful “ending-switch” of all time. In its sneak previews, audiences liked everything but the ending, which had Alex (Glenn Close) committing suicide and managing to frame Dan (Michael Douglas) as her murderer by leaving his fingerprints on the knife she used. The studio shot \$1.3 million of new scenes for the ending that audiences eventually saw.

Companies can learn from these examples, to use marketing research as a link between marketing strategy and decisive actions. Movie studios use market research to reduce their risk of losses by hiring firms like the National Research Group to conduct test screenings and tracking studies.

However, but even good marketing research can’t guarantee success. Test screenings caused the studio to shoot a new ending for JLo and Ben Affleck in *Gigli*. Audiences hated that Ben Affleck’s character died in the original ending, which they felt was too dark and inconsistent with

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the rest of the movie. The reshoot wasn't enough. Besides being a disaster at the box office, *Gigli* was nominated for "worst picture" and eight other "Razzies," the highest profile bad-movie anti-Oscars given by voters of the Golden Raspberry Awards.

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