



Scott Mendelson Contributor *I cover the film industry.* Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT 4/08/2015 @ 10:15AM 6,123 views

When 'GoldenEye,' 'Mission: Impossible' Reinvented The Movie Trailer

I'm sure some of you saw this yesterday, but the good folks at [Vulture](#) asked [Louis Plamondon](#) to cut together yet another trailer for Walt Disney's *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, but with a twist. The 90-second trailer is cut and structured like a stereotypical 1990's action movie trailer, complete with Don LaFontaine/Hal Douglas-type narration, the theme music from *Aliens*, and what amounts to a glorified plot summary. The teaser, which is a wonderful bit of loving satire, is labeled as a "If *Avengers: Age of Ultron* Came Out In 1995," and I would argue the choice of year is no coincidence. That the first peaks at *Spectre* and *Mission: Impossible Rogue*

Nation debuted in the run-up to the opening weekend of *Furious 7* is no coincidence, as those three franchise make up not just three of the bigger tentpole-type franchises around but also something of a "last stand" for old-school practical stunts-and-explosions action cinema that used to be considered an uncontested A-level blockbuster in the 1990's. But that's for another day. What I would like to briefly discuss is the first respective teasers for the "first" respective 90's-era chapters in each series. I am speaking of course of the initial teasers for *GoldenEye* which opened in November of 1995 and the first [Tom Cruise](#) *Mission: Impossible* film from May of 1996. Those initial teasers basically reinvented the modern action movie trailer and slowly-but-surely changed how trailers for action movies were constructed.

Yes, I am aware that *GoldenEye* was actually the 18th 007 adventure. But for all intents-and-purposes, Pierce Brosnan's entry into the franchise, which came six years after the box office failure of *License to Kill* left the franchise's long term future in doubt, was something of a soft reboot back before Hollywood felt the need to retell the origin story every friggin time. Anyway, the initial teaser trailer announced that James Bond was back in movie theaters during the summer of 1995 (attached to *Species*) showed off Pierce Brosnan in a tuxedo, and then dove headfirst into a 50-second montage of nonstop action and excitement, offering nary a hint of voiceover, plot, or even much in the way of narrative coherence. It was arguably the first trailer to move so quickly that you could barely digest the images.

That's not a criticism, but it was edited within an inch of its life and made the conventional action movie trailer, full of voiceover exposition, explicit plot points, and long take action sequences, feel downright slug-like by comparison. The James Bond franchise had one shot to reclaim its hold on the popular zeitgeist and make a case for its continued relevance in a world with *Die Hard* and *Batman*, and it wasn't going to take any chances by coming up for air. And it was perhaps the most action-packed and relentlessly breathless action movie trailer you had ever seen. The next prime example of this somewhat new form of trailer construction came with the initial two teasers for Brian DePalma's *Mission: Impossible*.

What did audiences need to know about the Paramount release, which at the time was pegged to be the biggest grossing film of the summer (it sounds crazy now, but *ID4* was not considered a sure thing even as late as June of 1996) other than that it was an adaptation of the popular ensemble spy action show and that it starred Tom Cruise? Nothing, which is what Paramount's marketing department gave them outside of those two facts. The initial *Mission: Impossible* teaser dropped in late 1995 and didn't even bother with a single line of dialogue, voice over or otherwise. They merely gave us 55 seconds of Tom Cruise and friends engaged in non-stop action set to Lalo Schifrin's classic theme song culminating in that climactic "Cruise flies off an exploding helicopter onto a train" bit that was one of the coolest things you had ever seen back then. That final shot of Cruise leaping

from the exploding helicopter was the best money shot in a trailer I had ever seen. But upon seeing the film, my heart sank as I realized that golden money shot was actually the climactic death of the primary villain.

So yes, I've been complaining about studios giving away the action finales of their films in the trailers for at least twenty years.

The next trailer offered little-to-no plot beyond the introductory "this is your mission" set-up and merely cryptic lines ("a simple game...") to power along what was basically 80 seconds of context-free action and just enough quotable dialogue to allow us to catch a moment's breath. Ironically, if I may digress for a bit, it now exists as a classic example of both misdirection and spoiler-by-insinuation. If you actually pay attention to the trailer, you'll see pretty much every major action moment in the film, which in turn makes the film appear to be far more action-drenched than it actually is. It falsely sets up Emmanuelle Béart as a damsel-in-distress spoiling not every action moment in the film but also quite a bit of the narrative. But I digress, the initial teasers for *GoldenEye* and *Mission: Impossible* were designed to be seen a few times in a theater, but they were also tailor made for the Internet, which was in its mainstream infancy.

I am not going to pretend that the *GoldenEye* and *Mission: Impossible* teasers were the first big trailers to not have voice overs (I'm pretty sure that honor goes to *Batman*) or even the first big trailers to have what were somewhat context-free scenes (again, probably the 80's/90's *Batman* films), but if you compare what were the so-called big action movie trailers (think *Superman*, *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *True Lies*) to not only the aforementioned *Mission: Impossible* campaign and that initial *GoldenEye* trailer and major trailers that followed (*Face/Off*, *The Phantom Menace*, *X2*, *The Matrix Reloaded*, *The Dark Knight*, etc.) felt like an entirely different medium. Those older trailers weren't better or worse than the "newer" ones, but they were more explicit marketing tools, often more spoilery than what we now complain about. The kind of quick-cut, montage-based trailers that flourished in the mid-1990's and beyond were basically mini-action movies in-

and-of-themselves, more a master class in cutting and creating theoretical narrative without voice over and through a bare minimum of actual storytelling.

The second *Mission: Impossible* trailer set the form best: a first act of either minor exposition or a stand-alone sequence to set the mood, perhaps narrated by the villain who totally meant to get caught, and then the next two acts of straight action montage with periodic expositional dialogue running over the stunts and explosions. What was fresh in 1995 and 1996 is now of course cliché, but the marketing campaigns for *GoldenEye* and *Mission: Impossible* are still worth noting in how they used the property to their advantage. They didn't have to explain what the movies were about and they had iconic and instantly recognizable music with which to score a contextless montage. Putting aside some awfully spoilery visuals, the marketing campaigns in question just set the scene and got the heck out of the way of their own movie.

This newfangled trailer construction is part of what turned trailers into stand-alone art as opposed to strictly being advertising materials. Hollywood didn't immediately switch to this new "style" of trailer construction (yes, there are plenty of old-school trailers from the late 1990's and even a few in the early 2000's), but what the *GoldenEye* and *Mission: Impossible* teasers provided something of a roadmap for the future of movie trailers. If you were old enough to have seen the *Mission: Impossible* trailer campaign in a theater in the run-up to release, you may-well have thought they were the best movie trailers you had ever seen. And in terms of how they were constructed, you may-well have been right. The above *Avengers: Age of Ultron* mock trailer is a hoot, and the fact that it refers to an *Avengers 2* film opening in 1995 is a historically correct coincidence. They really don't make trailers like that anymore. And you can thank the marketing gurus at MGM and Paramount/Viacom Inc. for that.