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## Scene 1, Double Take 2

DirecTV Re-creates Movie Moments for Attention-Getting Ads

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Wait a second. Isn't that [Sigourney Weaver](#) in her signature role as Lt. Ripley in the movie "Aliens," kicking alien butt while talking about . . . *satellite TV service*. . . in a new TV commercial?

Yep: "All I want to do is kick back and enjoy the [DirecTV](#) we just hooked up," says Weaver/Ripley to the camera during a particularly intense woman-vs.-monster action scene. "This," she adds before knocking out the creature, "is going to feel almost as good as when I got rid of cable."

Since it's pretty certain this bit of dialogue didn't come from [James Cameron](#)'s 1986 movie, the obvious question is this: How'd they do that?

How did DirecTV take a 21-year-old action movie and make its star, who looks almost as fresh-faced as when she made the film, mouth those words? How, too, did DirecTV do the same time-travel trick with other famous films, such as "Back to the Future," "Major League" and "[Ferris Bueller's Day Off](#)"?

Advertisers have been using digital manipulation to put products into old movie stars' hands for years. Despite an outcry from old-movie buffs and his own daughter, the late [Fred Astaire](#) danced with a Dirt Devil vacuum cleaner in the mid-'90s. In 1996, [John Wayne](#) returned from the dead to appear in a [Coors Light](#) spot. In 2005, [Volkswagen](#)'s British ad agency used some digital prestidigitation to turn Gene Kelly's street dance in "Singin' in the Rain" into a funky pop-and-lock routine.

DirecTV's ads, which began last year, create an even more impressive illusion: that an iconic movie or TV character is momentarily stepping out of a scene and speaking directly to viewers. The company calls the ad series its "Fourth Wall" campaign because it plays off the old theatrical idea that a performer who addresses the audience is breaking through the theater's imaginary fourth wall.

In addition to sending Weaver back in "Aliens"-ville, the ads have featured "Back to the Future's" Doc Brown (played by Christopher Lloyd) touting DirecTV seemingly in the middle of the movie's climactic main-street scene. In another, "Major League's" erratic pitcher ([Charlie Sheen](#)) breaks off in mid-pitch to sell the company's high-definition service. And one of "Twister's" intrepid tornado chasers (Bill Paxton) wonders why he's dodging storm-tossed cows when he could be home watching his satellite hook-up.

All the commercials were created using the same basic technique, said Jon Gieselman, DirecTV's senior vice president of advertising: Production crews shoot new footage of an actor from the movie and then edit this material into actual scenes from the film.

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But it's not quite that simple. The trick is in how cleverly the old and new footage are intercut and the attention paid to details in the original film. Costumes, makeup, props, haircuts, lighting, camera angles, music and sets all have to match those used in the movie to sustain the impression that movie and ad are one and the same, he says.

Sometimes the new material can be shot on the film's original set ("Back to the Future's" main street was still around on a back lot), and sometimes the ads require improvisation. Watch the new "Aliens" commercial closely -- very closely -- and you might be able to tell that the mechanical contraption surrounding Ripley in the new segments isn't the same as the one in the movie. The movie prop, known as a "power loader," is in a museum in [Seattle](#), and the commercial's producers couldn't get access to it. So they built a smaller copy and shot Weaver in it only in close-up.

"Everyone thinks this is a big CGI [computer-generated imaging] operation, but it's really not," says Eric Hirshberg, president and chief creative officer of Deutsch Inc. in [Los Angeles](#), the agency that created the series. "The biggest production assignment has to do with disciplined re-creation of the movies." He adds, "When we started doing these, we told ourselves that 1 percent off [the original] is 100 percent off."

Some computer manipulation is used to make the actors look as young as they were when they starred in the movie. A few perpetually youthful looking types -- Weaver and Sheen, for example -- didn't need much of this electronic [Botox](#). But it took a bit more effort to make actor Ben Stein, who played the droning teacher in "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," look as he did in the 1986 comedy.

"I loved doing it, [but] it was a lot of work," Stein said. "We had to match it with the original. It was me with my hair dyed to make me look younger."

Nitpickers have pointed out a couple of flaws (Paxton's hair seems to age right before viewers' eyes in DirecTV's knockoff of "Twister," for instance). But for the most part, Hirshberg and Gieselman think the ads get it right. They are particularly proud of a spot that featured "Star Trek's" [Captain Kirk](#) ([William Shatner](#)) extolling the clarity of DirecTV's picture on the Starship Enterprise's big-screen TV. The ad, based on the sixth "Star Trek" movie, made in 1991, drew praise from "Star Trek's" detail-obsessed fans, they said.

The campaign has gotten such strong feedback that DirecTV, based in [El Segundo, Calif.](#), is frequently contacted by agents, actors and TV network executives who want to see their old movies and TV shows become part of the series.

But not just any old show will do, they say. For starters, it has to be widely familiar and fairly recently made, since DirecTV needs the actual stars to play the characters again. What's more, the source material has to fit with DirecTV's male-oriented marketing message. Since men are the primary buyers of satellite TV service, the ads tend to trade off macho action films and goofy comedies. Which means it's unlikely that Debra Winger will come back to life in a "Terms of Endearment" ad or [Renee Zellweger](#) will reappear as Bridget Jones.

DirecTV has also targeted men by using athletes and coaches in the campaign (one featured [Colts](#) quarterback [Peyton Manning](#) interrupting his signal calling to yell at the camera). And others have just been plain babelicious: [Pamela Anderson](#) re-created her "Baywatch" lifeguard in one and [Jessica Simpson](#) reprised her "Dukes of Hazzard" role in another.


Neither the company nor the ad agency will talk about what they next have in mind. But the concept

seems to have endless possibilities. Maybe [Indiana Jones](#) or [Rocky Balboa](#) or [James Bond](#) could use some commercial work? Maybe Borat needs a new job?

"We want to [end the campaign] before the first customers say, 'We're sick of these,' " Hirshberg says. But so far, he adds, "people seem thirsty for the next one."

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