

Sitrick to assist New Line's Oscar push for 'The Return'

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Published on November 10 2003

LOS ANGELES: For New Line Cinema, this year's Oscar race is as much about its own image as the quality of the film it is championing, The Return of the King. That may be why it has put together a top notch team of PR experts, including Sitrick & Co., to shepherd the film through the awards season.

Studios chase Oscars for two reasons: prestige and money. For films that are tougher box-office sells, like past award winners *Monster's Ball* or *Boys Don't Cry*, an Oscar can be a tremendous ticket seller. But for New Line, a *Lord of the Rings* Oscar is more about reshaping the studio's image than lining its coffers, since the trilogy has already proven its box-office muscle.

"It's not an economic question for them," said **Sitrick's Allan Mayer**. New Line itself wouldn't comment for this story.

When it comes to Hollywood perception, New Line has worked to change its image from a studio that puts out crowd-pleasing films such as the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series, to a company that also creates more artistic fare. In recent years, films such as *About Schmidt* and *I Am Sam* have helped that transition, but *Lord of the Rings* is its most high-profile project, and has had Oscar buzz since the first installment.

While virtually every film studio brings in some of the dozen or so well-known "Oscar consultants" to run awards campaigns (each usually costing at least five-figures), New Line has put together a large team of diverse industry experts to wage battle for the trilogy's final installment.

Mayer, Sitrick & Co.'s entertainment specialist, has been working with the studio on a year-long contract, which precludes him from aiding other studios in awards campaigns. Also on board are Ronnie Chasen of Chasen & Company, which represents clients such as The Palm Springs International Film Festival; Melody Korenbrot of Block-Korenbrot, who has worked on Oscar campaigns with Sony Pictures Classics; David Horowitz, who has worked with Paramount and Miramax on films including *In the Bedroom*; and Gail Brounstein, who has worked on the other *Lord* installments.