



Disney picks Pixar brains for Muppets movie



The Muppets are getting Pixar-lated.

Principals involved with Disney's upcoming live-action pic toplining Jason Segel flew to Pixar headquarters in Emeryville, Calif., on Wednesday for a table read of the project with the animation powerhouse.

The involvement comes just months after Pixar helped shape reshoots for Disney's upcoming sci-fi tentpole "Tron Legacy."

In other words, this is the second recent example of the animation house assisting parent Disney with a live-action feature.

Some of the members of the so-called "Pixar Brain Trust" -- filmmakers John Lasseter, Brad Bird, Pete Docter, Andrew Stanton, Michael Arndt, Bob Peterson and president Ed Catmull -- were there for the consultations. Docter is a particularly avid Muppets fan, so he almost certainly was one of the attendees. On the Disney side, Muppets director James Bobin and producers David Hoberman and Todd Lieberman were likely in the room along with Segel. Neither Pixar nor Disney would comment.

Beyond whatever advice might have come down for the project at hand, the fact that Pixar has its fingers in the Muppets pie suggests that Disney, under the new regime of Rich Ross and Sean Bailey, is intent on taking advantage of its subsidiary's storytelling abilities.

Pixar still is batting 1.000 with critics and commercially, with "Toy Story 3" being its 11th hit in a row.



The film has grossed \$366.9 million since its June 18 release, becoming the top domestic grosser of the year, surpassing the \$334.2 million collected by Disney's "Alice in Wonderland." (Worldwide, "Alice" still is far ahead with \$1.02 billion in grosses; the global tally for "Toy" stands at \$634.4 million as its international rollout continues.)

At the same time, the new Disney regime has been hampered by a string of underperformers -- "When in Rome," "The Last Song," "Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time" and the just-opened misfire "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" -- that it inherited from the studio's previous administration.

Despite his success at the Disney Channels, Ross has no feature filmmaking experience, and Bailey, though seasoned as a producer, is new to top studio management.

As they develop their own slate, the new Disney team is eager to avail itself of Pixar's expertise -- and the filmmakers involved don't appear to harbor any reluctance about taking advice from Pixar, either.

"If you want to get good ideas, why not talk to the Brain Trust?" Bailey said several weeks ago in remarks about the "Tron" meet-up, which took place in March.

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