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Response No. 57

It was one of those bits of coincidence: The day I learned that several theatre operators were refusing to book Michael Moore's controversial "Fahrenheit 9/11" even as at least one other was allowing all ages to enter the R-rated film, prompted by all the anti-Moore rhetoric at that particular cable network I mused, "Fox News will like the former, but not the latter." Turns out they don't much like most exhibitors, I discover, as that same day I came on a diatribe by Fox News' Neil Cavuto, available at foxnews.com/story/0,2933,124621.00.html. You might want to send your own comment to this Cavuto chap; here's an edit of ours.

Dear Mr. Cavuto:

Perhaps an apology is in order? That need would hardly be new to your show, which if you made proper apologies would contain little but them during each telecast—I do realize that. But it would be very nice if you could make an exception here, and reverse your judgement about movie theatre operators—that they are "sniveling, phony, ticket-pushing pimps" who are bold-faced liars to boot.... [Note: He meant "bald-faced."] The industry has a long tradition, continued today, of being peopled by good Americans of every age, gender, creed, color and political persuasion, toiling on countless corners throughout the land. I take it that you don't appreciate that what has long been a common practice in overseas cinemas has been becoming more and more part of the American exhibition landscape: the display of commercials before the feature film begins. I do understand that Fox News is a rabid variant of journalism, but your believing that your personal dislike of seeing ads in theatres means that you can call these hard-working Americans, quoting again, "sneaky worms" is more frothing at the mouth than even Fox News should require. Beyond that, you have an oddly "communitistic" take on capitalism here—apparently, selling tickets (the "ticket pushing" these "pimps" do) is akin to a criminal act in your eyes. How Marxian of you! Also, your recommendation that exhibitors charge different ticket prices for with-ad and without-ad screenings is a particularly ill-considered idea (again, I do realize that ill consideration is your stock in trade), in that at all but, perhaps, the very largest plexes [with numerous prints] that would create a scheduling nightmare, in that such a practice would require an exhibitor to stagger each "version" of a film it was showing, and thus inconvenience many attendees [wanting to attend at a particular time]. The last thing a movie theatre operator would want to do is give potential patrons extra reasons not to go to the show.... So give the wonderful people at all the multiplexes and independent theatres a better shake next time. With best wishes, Kim Williamson, Editor-in-Chief, BOXOFFICE

Note to readers: Your letters return next time!