

Patron Behavior

- When people visit their local cinemas to share the communal experience of a movie on the big screen, they cringe—or worse—at **rude patron behavior** (loud teenagers, rambunctious children, crying babies, their neighbors' conversations, ringing cell phones) that distracts them from absorption in the cinema experience.
- While most distractions involve unwanted noise, **visual irritations** have become more common with the prevalence of hand-held devices. Patrons disrupt the ambiance of the darkened theater when they send and receive **text messages** during the movie.
- Nobody is more aware than exhibitors that rude patron behavior can blemish a night out to the movies for everyone. While no single policy or plan can guarantee a distraction-free experience for moviegoers, exhibitors employ a variety of strategies to mitigate rude patron behavior. The ultimate object is to create a **culture of civility**, in which patrons instinctively understand and embrace the rules of comportment appropriate to theaters.
- Exhibitors report success in curtailing rude patron behavior with signage, on-screen public service announcements, live requests by staff, and auditorium monitoring by ushers. Managers and ushers making auditorium sweeps must strike the right balance between being inconspicuous and serving as a deterrent.
- The industry is looking to **new technologies** to help combat rude patron behavior. Auditorium monitoring devices and guest response systems are currently being field tested.
- **Entertaining policy trailers** are especially effective tools in educating movie-goers. Some trailers promoting courteous behavior have been produced by studios and feature stars of current movies—making the program a win-win for the movie business. Pre-show producers, including National CineMedia and Screenvision, include cell phone-specific policy trailers in their programs.
- To ensure the best possible experience for certain movies, some theaters block admissions for **unescorted teenagers and children** after a certain hour or prohibit small children from attending late-night shows.
- France in 2004 legalized **cell phone jamming** equipment in movie theaters and concert halls. In the United States, however, jamming wireless phone signals inside movie theaters is prohibited by the FCC and subject to staggering fines of up to \$11,000 and one year in jail for a first offense. Proposals in the past to change laws and regulations to allow cell phone jamming have been met with both praise and stiff resistance by the movie-going public. Opponents say blocking signals poses significant problems, such as urgent calls from caretakers and babysitters or calls to law enforcement or emergency first-responders watching a movie. Proponents say we survived and thrived for 100 years without telephones in movie theaters; how could these hand-held devices have become essential?