

MARKETING/OPERATIONS IDEAS

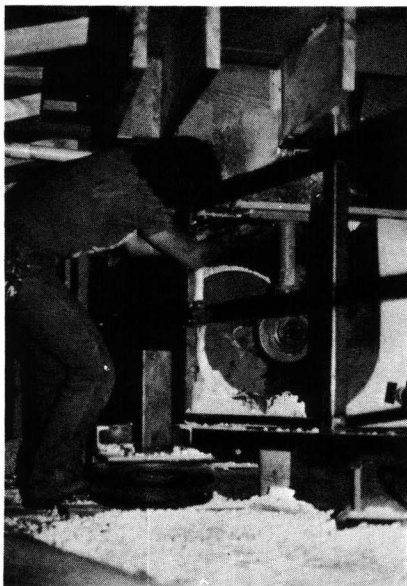
Selling Hollywood: A kernel of luck and a swelling reputation

Martin Sprocket & Gear had never dreamed of getting into the movies. Van Stone Conveyor Co., a distributor in Monrovia, CA, had never imagined trying to sell to a film production crew. To their good fortune, the movies came to them looking for a way to move enough popcorn to fill a two-story house until it burst at the seams.

The movie was *Real Genius*, released this fall, in which a college physics wiz turns prankster to overcome academic boredom. In one scene, this character fills a house with corn kernels and uses a laser to create the Jiffypop effect, exploding the house like a foil-covered tin on the stove.

It was a *Yellow Pages* ad that paid off for Van Stone. The special effects company working on the movie had a scene it needed to produce and, backed with a big Hollywood budget, went to the local phone book to find the material handling equipment it needed to pull it off. Van Stone served as supplier and on-site consultant, specifying the components needed for a simple and practical way to transport 20,000 lb of already-popped corn from a hopper (which composed most of the rear of the house) to the interior stage area of the Victorian home set.

According to Ken Ramage, the Van Stone salesman for the project, four 24-in. Martin screw conveyors laid horizontally under the floor of the set moved the popcorn 12 ft from the hopper base to where 11 16-in. vertical screw con-



A plan to explode a house with 20,000 lb. of popcorn turned into a good bit of business for Martin Sprocket & Gear, Inc. and one of its distributors when a Hollywood special effects company came looking for the hardware to do it. Van Stone Conveyor Co. provided the conveyors and some of the genius for the film *Real Genius*.

veyors pushed the popcorn up through the floor, through a 6-ft swimming pool and into the stage area. As the house filled up, cleated belt conveyors (white to match the popcorn) spilled the popcorn out of the windows and through cracks in the corners and eaves of the building opened by hydraulic jacks.

Ramage said he also sold the movie company a couple of belt conveyors to feed the corn kernels into huge furnaces built just to pop the corn, and then to transport it to some 30 truck trailers for storage. He said they popped corn for six days straight.

In all, Ramage said he sold the movie project about \$10,000 worth of equipment and services, about 1% of Van

Stone's annual volume. He said he doesn't know what other opportunities there are for conveyors in the movie industry, but he was recently called for help on another simple movie project: a gadget to make a soda bottle teeter and wobble on a table.

"We kind of specialize in weird stuff, anyway," Ramage said. "We do the stuff nobody else wants to do."

Certainly, there's some value in that kind of a reputation—like another one of those lucrative movie contracts. Ramage said they have his number. □