



Marvel deal will build on Disney's Pixar model

Much of the response to the deal has been positive and appears to take note of the happy marriage that Disney has achieved with Pixar.

By **Gloria Goodale** | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor
from the August 31, 2009 edition

LOS ANGELES - The headlines may be groan-worthy - "Spiderman caught in Mickey's web" and "An entertainment giant makes a hulking deal." But Monday's announcement that Walt Disney Co. will buy Marvel Entertainment Inc., the comic-book publisher, is being met with cautious optimism.

It's a good strategic move to combine Marvel and its popular characters with Disney, which has multiple outlets including theme parks and cable TV, says Arvind Bhatia, a senior research analyst at Sterne Agee in Dallas. "This will extend Marvel in areas Disney is strong in and expand opportunities for much greater character development by Marvel," he adds.

The \$4 billion deal won't conclude until year's end and will have to overcome questions about possible antitrust violations. But everyone from comic-book fans to Hollywood producers is already pointing out the possibilities.

This will give Marvel much more leverage, says Michael Uslan, producer of the Batman films. "Particularly as the company begins to run out of first-tier characters, these kinds of resources will help with the second- and even third-tier ... characters down the line."

As the news broke Monday morning, Internet fan sites were awash in mostly positive commentary, says Ron Richards, co-founder of iFanboy.com. "It may be surprising," he says, "but the majority of response tended to be supportive of the possibilities the merger offers."

This willingness to see the bright side of the world's biggest entertainment company swallowing a quirky and independent-minded one can be traced largely to the happy marriage that Disney has achieved with Pixar Animation Studios, which it bought in

2006. Everyone in the creative community held their breath after that purchase, but, says Ian Ford, a discount-ticket aggregator at Undercover Tourist in Florida, "look at what it's done with Pixar; that's been a great partnership." He also says, "Maybe if [the Marvel] deal had happened under the former Disney chief, Michael Eisner, there would be some fear about Marvel losing its independence. But the current head, Robert Iger, has shown great restraint when it comes to that sort of creative relationship," such as the one with Pixar.

Marvel is home to such iconic figures as Spider-Man, X-Men, and Captain America. In prepared statements and in a conference call, both Marvel and Disney executives stressed the need to give the comic-book firm creative autonomy.

"As long as they don't 'Disneyfy' Marvel, it is a great win for Marvel fans," Mr. Ford says.

Nevertheless, some in the Los Angeles creative community are raising questions about the wisdom of consolidation. "It's hard not to see the possibility that there will be fewer films coming from Marvel as it has to fit into the larger Disney stable of production," says Mr. Uslan, the producer.

The merger also raises the question: Will Disney pressure Marvel to help it in its strategic needs? Indeed, the move was largely motivated by Disney's desire to beef up its appeal to teen boys, a target audience of many Marvel comic books.

But even if the home of such nostalgic icons as Cinderella and Snow White encourages Marvel to, for example, develop a new character line that appeals to a younger audience, says Mr. Richards, that would not be all bad. The comic-book fan base has been slowly aging, he points out. "There's a critical need to develop the next generation of fans," he says, so a deal like this with a company that has the reach of Disney "could be good for the comic-book world."