



'Passion' items tap Christian market

Christian-products market generates \$5.6B annually, giving 'Passion' items a huge sector to tap.

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LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Got a penchant for all things "Passion?" You are not alone. A lot of people do.

Mel Gibson's film "The Passion of the Christ" is ringing up sales for tie-in products ranging from "witness cards" with prayers on them to "nail" pendants that signify the spikes driven through the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.

The Mel Gibson movie about the last 12 hours in the life of Jesus has sparked heated debate about its religious themes even before its debut on Ash Wednesday next week.

Christians have not only thrown their support behind the movie, it appears they are putting their money into religious-themed "Passion" products, too.

Dwight Robinson, marketing chief for Southern California's Bob Siemon Designs which is making "Passion" jewelry, including the nail necklace, said the company has sold over 1 million of the witness cards since they went on sale in January.

Along with the cards, the company is selling a cross pendant, bracelet and a key ring via the "Passion" Web site and in specialty retailers like Christian bookstores. But it is the nail pendant that is among the best-selling items.

"If you see someone wearing a nail, that is really going to cause someone to ask 'what is that,'" Robinson said. "It gives the wearer the opportunity to share their faith."

Bob Siemon specializes in Christian products and made the popular WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelets a few years back.

Robinson said the "Passion" jewelry hit retailers only five days ago. The company has shipped 100,000 pieces and is producing 10,000 a day as demand increases.

Beyond being simply thought-provoking, the nail pendant is fast becoming something else for today's youth. "It's actually pretty cool," said Tom Biggs, founder of Datomana.com, a seller of "Christian tee-shirts with a surfing attitude."

"Products with Christian themes have acquired a much more contemporary design, which is in keeping with the attitudes and lifestyles of today's youth," he said.

Biggs said over the past 20 years, clothes displaying designer labels have in many cases given way to apparel with personal messages that allow people to express their beliefs while still being fashionable.

"This is a way to express yourself in a non-commercial way, which ultimately is

what personal beliefs are," Biggs said. "Personal beliefs are not commercial."

Citing statistics from the Christian Booksellers Association, Robinson said the domestic market for Christian-related products is about \$5.6 billion annually giving the jewelry, mugs, cards, and a "Passion" book a huge market to tap.

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