

Simply, Better

**Does the face still fit?**

**Can Celebrity Still Sell in  
21st Century Advertising?**

“What’s great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke. Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too.”

The Philosophy of  
Andy Warhol, 1975

**Andy Warhol, the great curator of 20th century fame noted this nearly 40 years ago - using celebrity to promote brands and sell products is hardly new.**

And whilst much in the media and advertising landscape has changed over this time, many of the same rules still apply – **celebrity will lend your brand fame, it can aid cut through and ideally some of that celebrity aura is transferred to your product or brand.**

Our current cultural climate is that of a connected world. Celebrities are *everywhere*; our modern fascination with media fed by 24 hour surveillance and abetted by instant updates through our various devices. Celebrities have been labelled

the new aristocracy; and with that comes an even trickier minefield to navigate. We love and hate celebrities - they are more prevalent and face more scrutiny than ever. The bottom line? It is not enough to simply stick a celeb in your ad and reap the rewards by proxy.

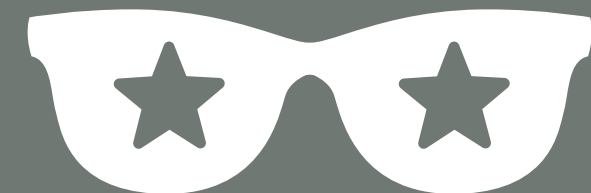
It might be the elephant in the room, but people are becoming desensitised to the constant barrage of communications clambering over each other to get *you*, the consumer, to consider *them*. People are savvier now; they can identify a tenuous plug when they see one.

So what are the rules for ensuring that you can utilise celebrity in the right way to create the right story for your brand?

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## Values

One of the most critical elements to consider, is whether the celebrity stands for the same ideals you want your brand to share? Puma have recently utilised Mario Balotelli in their advertising. They're embracing bellicosity, not inappropriate for the category, that borderlines on officious, and who better to encourage people to channel their inner 'troublemaker' than a man who is no stranger to controversy?

It helps too that Balotelli's mercurial reputation has traditionally scared off marketers, meaning there is less chance of 'diluting' your celebrity's impact through multiple endorsements.

Usain Bolt fronts the same ad but his copious commercial commitments mean the link to Puma is not as immediate as Gary Lineker is to Walkers. Which leads us to the next point – recruiting a celebrity and taking advantage of their fanbase is one thing, but is the fanbase similar to your brand's target?

## Fit

How appropriate is the celebrity for your brand? And crucially, *is the fit obvious to the consumer?*

The celebrity is there to shape and augment a brand's image but you can't shoe-horn somebody famous and expect it to do wonders for your brand. The more tenuous an association is, the more likely it is that consumers will switch off.

Remember Sharon Osbourne at the height of her X-factor fame being recruited by Asda to front a new campaign, relating to everyday Mums. They quietly parted company seven months later. Naturally Sharon was initially chosen due to her huge fame and likeability at the time of the campaign. But fame can be a double edged sword...

## Overexposure

Ads wear out. People will get fed up of seeing the same ad over and over again. Of course, locations change and the plot might be modified, but it's essential to mix it up. Celebrities are a switch to viewers - they recognise a familiar face which piques their interest, but a lazy approach to the creative provokes a lazy response from the viewer.

A star's light can also shine so brightly that you need to avert your eyes, and the constant media channels, various endorsements and borderline obsessive focus on celebs can result in over-saturation before an ad has ever aired. There are seemingly still a few exceptions to this rule – Brand Beckham for one.

## Overshadow

And as with Beckham – if you're fortunate enough to bag a super-star you need to ensure that star doesn't eclipse your brand. We know from our research in online advertising that celebrities can have a very strong impact on persuasion, but can also deflect attention from the brand if not used well. Remember, the brand is the hero, not the star.

The brand can be the punchline but its presence should be felt after seeing the ad. You want a recognisable face to boost salience but you don't want them to be the only thing people recognise. (Especially if they hit the headlines for the wrong reasons).

## Collateral Damage

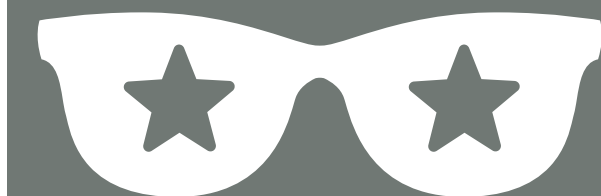
This is a major issue for brands and unfortunately, not something a brand can control. In the event that scandal hits (infidelity, controversial comment via social media, brushes with the law, etc) then the brand can also suffer from association, if the relationship is not terminated quickly.

Churchill had to act swiftly when the voice of their brand, Vic Reeves, was arrested for

suspected drink driving. The result? Terminated contracts, the ads pulled from circulation and the costly call of investing in a new campaign. Can you mitigate that risk by choosing a different type of celebrity? Apparently not in Churchill's case, when they chose to part company with actor Martin Clunes after he picked up points for speeding, which resulted in a driving ban.

“We didn't need dialogue. We had *faces*”

Norma Desmond, Sunset Boulevard



## So when is a celebrity useful?

Against the backdrop of this risk, there are areas where a celebrity can be particularly effective - when launching a brand or reinvigorating an existing brand. In the case of EE, a new player in a congested market, they chose Kevin Bacon. The old parlour game, '6 Degrees of Kevin Bacon' communicated EE's focus on connections (innovation and 4G was a building block for their brand) and he has become a distinct brand cue. He is the bell to Pavlov's dogs; a tie to the brand that has been achieved through consistency and his personality and popularity have helped drive salience.

Kev has been used consistently for 2 years; a long time in the transient world of advertising where campaigns are ditched for poor results in a similar way to underperforming Premier League managers.

And here is where creative is once again King. You can't just re-package the same devices ad nauseam. For example, where Aviva succeed is in using Paul Whitehouse in different guises.



Although the basic message is consistent, the presentation of the celebrity is fantastically and creatively varied; an excellent way of keeping the audience engaged and retaining credibility around the Fast Show alumni.

When re-invigorating a brand, using the right celebrities can be extremely efficient. Jaguar recently launched their 'It's Good to be Bad' campaign, featuring Ben Kingsley, Tom Hiddleston and Mark Strong. Although not super-stars they projected esteem, charisma and quality - and are more resonant amongst older, affluent car

buyers. The ad was one of the most shared ads from this year's Super Bowl - generally a fertile breeding ground for getting your ad noticed. In contrast, a reputed 93 percent of viewers who saw Bob Dylan's Super Bowl ad didn't realise it was for Chrysler. Juxtaposed with Clint Eastwood's successful Chrysler ad a few years ago, and the question is there; was the stoic, patriotic movie-star a better fit for the brand than the folksy, alternative singer/songwriter? Or was it just a better ad? The answer is probably somewhere in between.

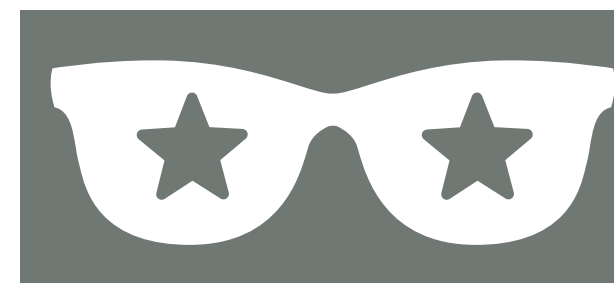
## In summary...

Celebrities are risky. They can be high reward (through amplified recognition or vicarious acclamation) or a costly snafu. A celebrity should, despite the obvious oxymoron, make you distinct. They should augment your brand's personality (or desired personality) rather than drive it or distract from it. The old adage rings true; the brand should be the hero. The most common problem for companies these days is not the ad standing out, it's the *brand* standing out. In that sense, a celebrity in an ad is almost comparable to the use of a popular song; it can loiter in your head, but do you make the link back to the brand?

Ultimately, this all boils down to the creative. An engaging idea, well executed, will beguile the best of viewers. A celebrity can only add their celebrity; a creative can optimise. You can put a Ballon d'Or winner into any team, but if the rest of the squad doesn't perform, victory isn't a guaranteed. A-list status is not an assurance of success (see Brad Pitt and Chanel) and equally, perceived obscurity is not a campaign-coffin-nail. After all, Jean Claude Van Damme might not be much of a box office draw these days, but he's a pretty good beer salesman.

"I'm afraid that if you look at a thing long enough, it loses all of its meaning."

The Philosophy of  
Andy Warhol, 1975



At Ipsos ASI UK, we believe advertising and communications research should be fertiliser, not weedkiller, and a force for empowering creativity and building stronger brands.

Using iterative, flexible approaches, we empower our clients to find a big idea that's universal, and founded on human motivations.

We help brands to develop strategies that grow their business by using forward-looking measures of brand relationships that link to real-world behaviour – measures that are simple and intuitive and reflect that brands are heuristics for decision making.

Using neuroscientific techniques, such as Facial Coding and Biometrics, we enable our clients to understand and strengthen the emotional response to their advertising. We derive the impact of advertising on the brand – not by asking people how it affects them - and by revealing underlying and subconscious brand perceptions through Implicit Reaction Time (IRT) tests.

We help brands make campaigns that become famous by evaluating the potential of their activity to achieve virality through measures that reflect online and offline sharing behaviours, and using online ad replacement to test campaigns in the real world, in real time.

Ultimately, we believe that simplicity of purpose, communications and service is just as important to great research as it is to building great brands.

**For more information, please contact:**



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