

Points you should keep in mind to choose a celebrity as brand ambassador

[Business](#), [Company](#)



I once attended a Board meeting of a Cocoa producer in their offices in London. The GM of Marketing was making a case for an extraordinary budget item to have a specific premium blended product endorsed by a renowned celebrity. The CEO was supporting this initiative because he was clearly 'a fan'. I made the case that while the company produces, refines, packages and supplies cocoa to premium chocolate brands, it never sells directly to the end consumer.

The GM countered that bringing in this particular 'Ambassador' would help the company justify the premium which would be asked for on this new blend. As our back and forth escalated, the CEO (admittedly 20 years' experience ahead of me in this field) attempted to force a close, 'if we do not get endorsed, this product will either be sold at cost or not leave the warehouse at all'. 'Then we have a whole different problem', was my response.

If you think your product or service will only sell if you engage a Brand Ambassador, it is going to be a tough run for you. The jury is still out on how to quantify the return on investment of advertising. Gauging the benefits of a celebrity endorsement is exponentially harder.

Having said that, let's say, all the smart heads in your company ran through multiple feasibility reports, crunched the cost figures (there are few ways to predict revenues for such campaigns), interviewed various Advertising and PR agencies, and decided that you need to get someone of 'stature' in your marquee tent. There are certain important aspects to keep in mind.

I will spare you from the Branding 101 discussion about mapping your TG with the celebrity's fan base demographics. Gone, or going fast, are the days when a basic description, such as Male/20-30 years of age/Graduate/Income INR 25k-2L, was enough to match with your celebrity's fan base. Today's consumer learns fast and relates better with smartly positioned campaigns.

Pick the one who is picky.

If a celebrity profiles you and your product, there is a high chance you are in good hands. The celebrity who understand her brand positioning and is careful to endorse products only in line with what she could relate with, or use, will do half your work. Not only will she will come across as genuine, she will also pull the right crowd towards you.

Do not underestimate the intuition of the end user.

I remember a famous Bollywood star (who I personally admire) was advertising Signature Villas in Dubai. Apparently, these villas were 'designed by' the celebrity himself. They ran what seemed like a very expensive campaign with heavy OOH and digital advertising. The result, a big fat flop! While they would line up hours to take a selfie with the celebrity, the end users saw right through the ploy of the developer.

They questioned how the celebrity could endorse a house which has half the per square feet build cost of his own villa and is in the middle of nowhere. Furthermore, what value does he add to the design? Lesson – get a celebrity architect as Ambassador. Or, save the endorsement fee, and put better quality material in your product.

Do not fall for the belligerent star.

Stay wary of the prospective Ambassador, or her agent, who is keen only to discuss upfront MGs, revenue shares, or keeps fussing about their busy schedule and how they ‘charge’ for everything. Even if you pay them enough, they will do the bare minimum to promote your product and will look uninterested while doing it (probably because they are busy planning their next deal). These kinds will not be good flag bearers of your product and may even alienate some of your loyalists.

Beware of the mega-endorser!

Hair oil, 2-minute noodles, and Sports Car models do not belong to the same endorsement portfolio. The celebrity who sells everything is a bad fit, and in the mid to long run, the consumer will feel exasperated by how many times this person appears on the TV screen pushing something. In the best case, this mercenary-Ambassador is mindful of her shelf life and is trying to stack up as much as possible. In the worst case, she is underestimating the intelligence of your customer.

Don’t be desperate. Stick to your budget. Work on alternatives.

Surely you know there is no rate card for such campaigns. The agents will try to gauge your willingness to pay based on how vigorously you seek them. Any sign of weakness – starry eyes, shaking knees, over dressing – when you meet with your prospect could be used against you.

Therefore, have a firm figure, based on your assumptions, and stick to it. If you feel you have hit a wall, don’t hang around, move to the next celebrity on your list.