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## trends celebrity endorsement



# Don't just reach for the stars

Consumers are attracted to celebrity endorsed products and many want to see more local stars being used, but there is growing cynicism of their blanket use and of personalities having multiple brand deals.

### By Jo Roberts

Celebrities have an enchanting hold over us mere mortals. We are so seduced by the sight of

a famous face that one in four of us profess that we will buy a product simply because a celebrity is promoting it. And more than half of consumers (55%) worldwide believe that a star makes a brand stand out, according to MEC's MediaLab global sensor report.

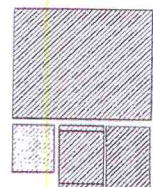
However, the research also warns that brands must think more strategically about the celebrities they choose and how they are used to promote the brand. With one in four brands globally now using celebrity endorsement, it is a crowded market.

The research, which asked more than 24,000 consumers around the world about celebrity endorsement, reveals that most people believe too many products are promoted by stars.

Not that everyone is tired of famous names and faces. Almost half (45%) of respondents admit that hearing about or reading about celebrities is important in their lives.

Tiger Woods' recent car crash, followed by around-the-clock news reports about a string of

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**One in four ads feature a celebrity.**

**One in four say they buy a product because it is promoted by a famous face.**

**52% say that a celebrity adds to the brand's personality.**

**55% say that a celebrity makes a brand stand out.**

**68% of people say they have difficulty remembering famous endorsers when they promote several brands.**

## thefrontline



**Simon Duffy**  
*Co-founder of male grooming brand, Bulldog*

I don't think it's too surprising that one in four people say they buy something because it is endorsed by a celebrity, as we live in a very fame-focused world. However, fashion and beauty brands have a set way of doing celebrity endorsement: get incredibly successful people and then not get them to do very much; they're like wallpaper.

We wanted to do something different to engage, reach out and bring people into grooming. We teamed up with Peep Show star David Mitchell to write an online show called Soap Box. He had creative licence to write whatever he wanted. We decided on comedy because we thought it was a great way to represent our brand and appeal to our market.

If you use celebrities in an innovative way as part of your marketing strategy, whether online or offline, then you can boost word of

mouth. It's down to choosing the right celebrity and then the right idea that can make the celebrity partnership successful.



**Mark Izatt**  
*Global consumer marketing manager at luxury mobile brand Vertu*

Brands select the wrong celebrity or rely too heavily on the right celebrity at their peril. Such a partnership should be effortless, not gratuitous. The fit should be natural.

When we embarked on our brand campaign for Vertu, we wanted to capture the "forces of nature" who use the brand in their everyday lives. We think that inspirational people such as Jean Todt and our latest partner, Alain Ducasse, are the embodiment of our values.

Nespresso and George Clooney is an example of an exceptionally good fit. He is the right person, captured in a spirit which reflects both the product and the individual.



**Carl Howell**  
*Founder and chairman of hair loss treatment company Advanced Hair Studio*

A celebrity endorsement helps to show customers that our product works. Many celebrities ask us for help with their hair and occasionally we'll ask if they'll be our ambassador.

We chose Michael Vaughan to front our campaigns because he's high profile and he has all the attributes that we're looking for: he's fit, sporty and good-looking. He appeals to our target audience.

He follows in the footsteps of Shane Warne and Graham Gooch as our brand endorser. It's not a deliberate move to have cricketers; it has just worked out that way, because they all have the qualities we are looking for and are seen as sporting heroes.

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affairs and Woods' admission of personal "transgressions" demonstrates the public appetite for celebrity news.

All age groups apart from the over-55s show a keen interest in the famous, but younger people are more likely to engage with a celebrity via a blog or website through posting comments and discussing a star.

While Woods' personal reputation might be in question right now, MediaLab believes there's a much larger problem than simply one star's personal reputation.

Damian Thompson, head of consumer insight at MEC MediaLab, warns that many celebrities are being seen as over-exposed and that parts of both North America and Europe are becoming much more cynical about endorsement.

"It's clear that a proportion of society is genuinely interested in celebrities," Thompson admits. "But in North America and Europe, the media is saturated with celebrity stories so the population is bound to be more cynical.

"In countries such as China and India, it's a different story. There's a great degree of aspiration – people haven't had a chance to get bored of celebrity culture."

Apart from consumer cynicism, the research reveals that another danger brands face when choosing a celebrity to front their marketing is the diminishing return on investment if that individual already associates themselves with other brands.

For example, when people are asked to name which brands supermodel Kate Moss endorses, only Rimmel and Topshop receive decent unprompted recall responses, with 21% and 10% respectively within the UK. Other endorsements, such as her deal with Burberry, fly under the radar.

Outside the UK, consumers are even more confused by Moss' role as a brand spokeswoman. In Mexico, for example, no brand receives even 2% of unprompted recalls for being associated with the model.

The only country where multiple endorsements don't seem to cause a problem for consumers is India. The desire to see famous faces in advertising makes Indian consumers adept at associating a celebrity with multiple brand deals.

One of the contradictions thrown up by the research is that while a brand's products might become more desirable when fronted by a star, it appears that consumers do not trust celebrity-fronted brands any more than others. Nor are they convinced they work.

Even word of mouth doesn't seem to be boosted massively by using celebrities. Just 26% of people say that a famous face would motivate them to talk about the brand.

However, the hardcore consumers who are classed as "fans" because of their engagement with their favourite celebrities do promote their endorsed products through word of mouth, with

61% admitting they do so.

A local celebrity is a prudent choice when it comes to signing an endorsement deal. Latin America and Asia are especially keen to see more of their local stars promote brands, with 52% of Latin Americans and 46% of Asian consumers wanting to see more famous faces relevant to their country.

Thompson says that focusing marketing on one celebrity in multiple territories can work if you choose the right one: "Occasionally, you'll get a global deal that works because the person that is used is so pre-eminently famous, like Tiger Woods."

But getting a celebrity to front a brand is not the end of the job for businesses. The brands that invest money, use the celebrity in different styles of communication opportunities and invest in endorsement on a long-term basis will be the most successful, according to Thompson.

He explains: "The best example is Nike and Michael Jordan. The unprompted recall of Michael Jordan and Nike is vast; twice that of Tiger Woods in the US."

Thirty per cent of respondents in the US link Nike with Tiger Woods, with 42% of respondents in Singapore making the same association. ▶

Although Michael Jordan has long retired from basketball, the choice to match a sportswear brand with a sports star is an obvious match. But other companies go for less blatant choices, and in some cases it appears companies are simply picking the most famous face they can think of to promote their wares.

Fashion retailers, cosmetics brands and supermarkets face the greatest challenge because so many of these types of businesses rely on stars or famous voiceovers, especially in their broadcast advertising.

Thompson says these sectors in particular are going to have to work harder over the coming years to get noticed. "It's all very well saying 'we have to use a celebrity', which is what happens in the fashion and beauty category. But look at how brutally ineffective celebrities are," he adds.

He says that in the sectors of fashion and beauty, celebrities have simply become wallpaper. He notes: "There is real room to break convention in the fashion, beauty and perfume sectors."

While consumers still seem very much in love with celebrities in a general sense, the reliance of so many brands on selling themselves through famous faces is eroding the value of such endorsements.

If celebrities continue to be just the pretty pictures in ads and not part of a strategic integrated communications initiative, investing in a famous face could prove to be worth less than brands think. ●