



Nat Rigby

Harnessing the power of celebrity

Celebrity endorsement is a powerful marketing tool, but it's not just for global brands. IWONA TOKC-WILDE hears how some innovative businesses have managed to get a star to back their product.

Global brands regularly take advantage of the massive exposure celebrities can provide by being seen with, or tweeting about, their products. But, as a small business, how do you get a celebrity interested in your product?

Doing it on a shoestring

Of course, the straightforward approach to getting a celebrity to promote your product can be incredibly expensive. But there are ways of achieving the effect you want without a huge price tag.

For example, a well-known figure within a particular industry could provide better value for money than a national celebrity.

"To endorse a horse-related product, an equestrian business could sign up a celeb horse owner, a famous jockey, trainer or a commentator for a relatively modest fee," says **Ron Mowlam**, senior commercial agent with The Celebrity Group. "The same logic applies to local businesses employing local celebrities – the captain of the local football team could be approached to endorse a local sports shop."

Or, rather than an outright fee, you could pay the celebrity a cut of the profits they will help generate. **Cliff O'Gormann**, managing director of soft furnishings e-tailer Bath, Bed and Home, has recently signed up the 80s pop star Paul Young: "Paul will receive a percentage of all web sales over the next two years, in return for recording an introductory video for our

website and for Paul's Picks, a monthly selection of discounted products."

If you don't aim too high, you can get a celeb to 'endorse' or try your product for free. "Say, you run a hair salon," says PR consultant **Caroline Ratner**, of Caroline Ratner Communications. "You could offer a TOWIE (*The Only Way Is Essex*) person a free hair do. Then you ask their permission to call the press and you might get some paparazzi outside." Next day your local paper or *OK!* runs a photo of them leaving your salon and you (hopefully!) get a spike in bookings.

"The whole paparazzi thing is a bit murky," admits Caroline, and you definitely need to think twice about tipping them off without the celeb's agreement. "For example, if you know a celebrity has been ill and you give them a weekend retreat in your hotel to recuperate, you'd do your business more harm than good by getting the paparazzi turn up."

Approaching celebrities

"We put a request on Response Source (a PR directory) asking PRs if any of their famous clients wanted to try a new spray tan," says **Liz Hawthorne**, founder and owner of Unreal Sunless Tanning Solutions. "Jessica-Jane Clement's agent got in touch (BBC's *The Real Hustle*, last year's *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*). We didn't have to pay her and she sent us a photograph and a testimonial for our website."

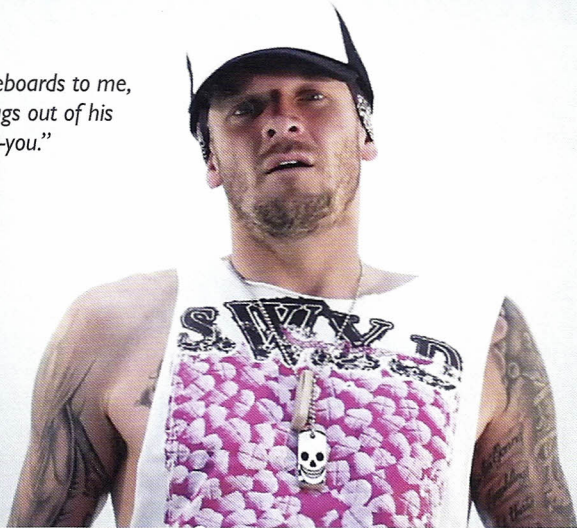
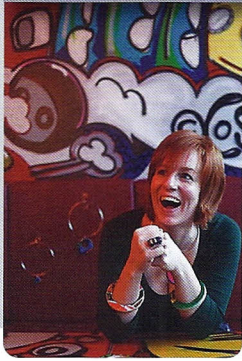
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Matt Pritchard

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Nat Rigby, owner and maker of Thrashion Recycled Skateboard Jewellery, 'bagged' professional skateboarder and TV personality Matt Pritchard (MTV's *Wrecked* and Channel 4's *Balls of Steel*) on Twitter. "I tweeted him about my website and he endorsed me by tweeting about it to his followers," says Nat. "He also donated some old skateboards to me, so I made him some dog tags out of his own skateboard as a thank-you."

Also on Twitter, Liz Hawthorne follows celebs who use fake tan. "If someone mentions they've had a fake tan disaster, I'll say 'This won't happen if you use our product, let me send you some,'" she says. However, Liz admits it's a numbers game: "Many people don't tweet back." Nat Rigby says the trick is to be a bit cheeky when you first contact celebs. "Also, once you do get to send them your stuff, don't expect miracles – you may never hear from them again," she says.

Then, there's the back-door approach. Apparently, Tess Daly wore Unreal tan to the 2012 National Television Awards. "We supply her beauty therapist," admits Liz. "We haven't got a testimonial from Tess herself so it's a bit tricky but we know that she uses it so we say in our marketing: 'As used by Tess Daly'."

Finally, do you know a celebrity you

could approach directly? "Paul Young has been a personal friend and an ex-neighbour of mine," says Cliff O'Gormann. You can also go through their agent, says Caroline Ratner. "To get hold of an actor's agent, try spotlight.com. If you're after an author, go through their publisher. If it's a footballer you want, go directly to the football club."

The risk is that, if you go via a third party or a PA, your product may not reach the celebrity. "The celebs I contacted on Twitter direct-messaged me their address," says Nat Rigby. "I went via an agent once because the celeb didn't want to give me her address, but if you can contact them directly, don't bother with their agent."

Finding the right match

Don't bother at all if you haven't got a great product. "You have to have something unique," says Nat. "They won't endorse something that's already used by everyone."

Up and coming pop stars and models love anything bespoke and artisan, says Caroline Ratner. "If you make wedding bouquets out of buttons and were to get in touch with a minor celebrity who's getting married – that could work."

If not niche or bespoke, glamorous products work best, provided that your brand enhances their brand. You wouldn't think to offer fake tan products to Lord Sugar, would you?

Besides, would anyone believe if Lord Sugar started tweeting about fake tan? "The celebrity must be relevant to the product – they must be the right match," says Caroline. "Their reputation is very important, too. If they're in the press for all the wrong reasons, just because they

might give a free endorsement may not be so good for your business."

The celebrity must also be the right match for your target market. "Paul Young resonates with our customers," says Cliff O'Gormann. "Women who followed his music career are now the mothers in the age group we're trying to attract."

Think laterally, though. "I've sent some pieces to Canadian actress Raquel Riskin," says Nat Rigby. "She doesn't ride but was in a skateboarding photo shoot and wanted a piece of jewellery as a reminder." Closer to home Nat recently used Twitter to approach actor Joseph Millson (Dr Luc Hemingway in *Holby*) who's a keen amateur skater. He ordered some cufflinks and tweeted about Thrashion to his followers.

A legal minefield

"What you want is photos and testimonials to use in your marketing," says Caroline Ratner. But what you use and how you use it has to be agreed with the celebrity first. Ron Mowlam of The Celebrity Group comments: "Celebrity endorsement is a legal minefield and best not attempted without specialist advice." Otherwise, can you be sure you can use those images or quotes without getting into trouble?

Liz Hawthorne is more relaxed about it. "I contacted Kristina Rihanoff (*Strictly Come Dancing*) on Twitter and sent her some products. If she comes back and says 'I thought they were great', I'll use this in my marketing."

What is the return on investment?

"When we posted on our Facebook page and Twitter about Tess Daly, the number of visitors to our web page doubled and there was a 40% uptake in sales," says Liz. After Matt Pritchard tweeted about Thrashion, Nat Rigby now gets other pro skaters sending her their skateboards and tweeting about her business, too. "Last year I tripled my profits," she says. It proves that you can really do it by yourself. "People are scared to approach celebs directly, but I think you just have to," says Nat. "Not everyone is going to like your stuff, but someone, eventually, will."

Caroline Ratner offers her final comment: "There's a perception that celebrities sell products, but it's not true unless you use celebrity endorsement as part of a proper marketing campaign. There's also a lot of vanity involved in this and, sometimes, there are better ways of spending your marketing budget." ♦

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