

AMERICAN AIRLINES - AMERICAN EAGLE

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# AMERICANWAY

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# CAN'T AFFORD A TIGER?

Even without millions of dollars to spend for endorsements, you can find a celebrity pitchman who's up to par.



Nike spent an estimated \$100 million for Tiger Woods' smile of approval. You can spend far less — and still get results — with lesser-known celebs.

**C**heech Marin is counterculture royalty, half of the Cheech and Chong team famed for comedic efforts like the spaced-out "Dave's Not Here" routine and star of scores of movies. So what is the San Francisco comedian's face doing on a bottle of hot sauce sold by David Figueroa's 20-person company from Kenner, Louisiana?

The answer is that when it comes to marketing, the tiny spice maker and the big movie star go together like red beans and rice. Cheech Foods receives a percentage of the gross on every \$4 bottle of Cheech Smokin' Chipotle Hot Sauce and two other flavors bearing the

star's image, while Figueroa Brothers gets its cut for making and selling the condiments. "Cheech sells pretty well," allows Figueroa, who produces more than 100 specialty seasonings, including one in a similar arrangement with Grammy-winning singer Aaron Neville.

By playing on consumers' affinity for well-known personalities, marketing with celebrities can give businesses a special ability to cut through the rising noise of the information age. But when Tiger Woods commands \$100 million to wear Nike, a company like Figueroa Brothers, with approximately \$10 million in annual revenues, clearly has to devise inventive — and inexpensive — ways to enlist celebrities.

A royalty scheme, which typically pays 5 to 8 percent of the sales price to the celebrity, is one way. But it's not the only way to cut through the noise cheaply and effectively with the help of a familiar face. You can also use local celebrities, retired celebrities, and celebrities with a special interest in seeing your product succeed. Paul Cartwright of Sports Celebrity Marketing in Georgetown, Ontario, specializes in hiring sports stars of the '80s, '70s, and even '60s to open shopping centers and kick off sales campaigns. "It's not always best to get the biggest name," says Cartwright. "Sometimes a guy who's more reasonably priced is just as effective in a given market."

## SELECTING YOUR CELEBRITY

Effective celebrity marketing starts with picking the right celebrity. You can contact your chosen celebrity through an advertising agency — many specialize in celebrity marketing — or by contacting the celebrity's agent. Before going too far, however, take a look at how the celebrity's image fits with your brand.

"Having a celebrity for the sake of having a celebrity is not necessarily a boost for the product," cautions David Urban, professor of marketing at Virginia Commonwealth University. "What really matters

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Cheech Marin lent his mug to Figueroa Brothers hot sauce for a share in each bottle sold.

is having a celebrity to whom the target market can relate."

Big companies spend thousands on reports ranking personalities' appeal to specific markets. Small business owners are often close enough to customers to intuitively know what — and who — matters to them. You can also employ common sense; if you know you're marketing to Generation Xers, don't use a retired jock who's been out of the lineup for decades.

Consider also the celebrity's activities when away from the public eye. "Think long and hard about it," advises Figueroa. "You never know what they are doing in their personal lives to damage your brand image." Cartwright interviews retired athletes and even their ex-teammates to ferret out legal and other problems before involving them in marketing projects. "If I think somebody's a risk," he says, "I don't bother."

#### SIGNING YOUR CELEBRITY

Ready to bring your celebrity on board? There are several ways to avoid overloading your budget. Royalty deals call for little or no upfront investment. Paying an ongoing percentage can drag down profits, however. And while most royalties are single-digit percentages, some stretch higher. "It could become prohibitive to the marketing budget," warns Figueroa.

You can hire a retired, local, or lesser celebrity for flat fees that are sometimes surprisingly modest. Cartwright can deliver a well-known former baseball player to hang out at a trade show autographing balls for \$1,000 to \$5,000. If you want to

include a celebrity's name and face in an advertising campaign, however, even lesser luminaries may cost \$10,000 or more.

Don't neglect the personal touch, either. You can sometimes do more with an appeal targeted at a celebrity's special interest than you can with a fatter check. Offer to donate a percentage of sales to the celebrity's favorite charity. Or arrange to feature a celebrity's spouse or child in an advertisement. That can encourage even the endorsement-averse to make an exception.

#### MANAGING YOUR CELEBRITY

Signing a celebrity is only half the battle. You have to manage your relationship with your spokesperson. To begin with, you'll need to monitor your star to make sure nothing he says or does conflicts with the image you want to project.

It's also important to keep the celebrity involved. Try playing to the celebrity's ego by asking for help designing your product or service. David Figueroa stroked the actor in a press release that said, "Cheech has exquisite taste and pushed our development team to new heights of flavors and textures." When it comes to celebrity marketing, this Dave is definitely there. **TM**

## STAR BOOKS



One of the best-known celebrity marketing agencies is **BURNS SPORTS & CELEBRITIES INC.** Burns matches marketers' needs with available celebrities and helps negotiate deals with them. Contact Burns at (847) 866-9400 or [www.burnssports.com](http://www.burnssports.com).

If you're on a tight budget, try **SPORTS CELEBRITY MARKETING** at (905) 873-8405 or [www.sportseelebs.com](http://www.sportseelebs.com). President Paul Cartwright hooks up retired athletes with marketers who need a familiar face to boost a new campaign.

**MARKETING EVALUATIONS** calculates celebrities' "Q scores," which evaluate individuals' appeal to target audiences. Learn more from them at (516) 365-7979 or [www.qscores.com](http://www.qscores.com). — M.H.



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