



When the Stars Align

As the industry approaches the 10th anniversary of the FDA's ruling to allow DTC and subsequently the industry's use of celebrities in promotion (do I really need to mention Joan Lunden here?), PharmaVOICE examines the changes in the celebrity endorsement landscape. Learning from past mistakes, the industry has shifted its thinking on celebrities. Instead of abandoning the concept all together, pharma is choosing its alliances with the stars much more carefully.

Back in 2002, the practice of using celebrities by the industry came under increased scrutiny after a blunder involving actress Lauren Bacall on NBC's Today show. (Ms. Bacall mentioned the drug Visudyne, used to treat macular degeneration, and neither Ms. Bacall nor NBC mentioned that she was being paid by Visudyne's maker Novartis Ophthalmics Inc. to promote the drug.) Regardless of how the lapse in disclosure happened, its occurrence may have been a backhanded favor for the industry.

Since that incident, both consumers and the industry are much more cognizant of the implications and ramifications of celebrity health and drug campaigns.

The practice of using celebrities has not lost its luster, *but the industry is more selective in choosing icons that match brand images.*

"Consumers clearly understand that celebrities get paid for their campaign endorsements," says Alexandra vonPlato, executive VP and chief creative officer of Digitas Health.

"Although the media have a heightened desire to scrutinize everything 'pharmaceutical,' consumers are less sensitive about these disclosures as long as the experiences and communications are honest and authentic," says Anne Devereux, CEO of LyonHeart.

Because consumers are smarter, so are the pharma companies; they no longer try to disguise the fact that celebrities are paid spokesmen.

The Today show incident shed light on a really important issue, Ms. vonPlato says.

"The pharmaceutical industry needs to work harder than other industries to be absolutely transparent, because of the public's perception,"

she says. "What people willingly accept from other products and brands, they do not accept from pharma companies. As marketers we have to recognize that all of our promotional efforts are subject to heightened consumer skepticism. If the message feels insincere or overly hyped, there's a greater chance for negative fallout."

Although greater transparency has been a byproduct of increased media scrutiny, Jeff Stier, associate director of the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH), would argue that disclosure isn't the only issue.

Mr. Stier says he is leery of the industry's use of celebrities because he believes health advice should come from a physician, not a movie star.

"To the extent that these types of ads motivate people to become more involved with their own healthcare, I applaud them, but I don't think consumers should rely on advice from a



Our focus is on finding the authentic voice that best talks about the disease and if that happens to be a celebrity, it's an added value. But we are really looking for authenticity as the focus of all patient/consumer communications.

Anne Devereux LyonHeart

companies and agencies have taken a more targeted approach to using star power. Instead of employing them solely on the merit of their attention-getting value, most agencies now align a celebrity's life experience with the brand message, lending authenticity to the campaign. Instead of the celebrity being a spokesperson for the brand, they become more of an overall advocate for patients who suffer from the disease or condition. Two of the more popular examples of this model are Lance Armstrong's Tour of Hope with Bristol-Myers Squibb and Sally Field's Boniva campaign for Roche and GlaxoSmithKline.

Finding the right person can be difficult, because celebrities and brand messages don't line up all that often, says Jay Carter,

senior VP of AbelsonTaylor. "If the exact right fit is found, the program will work out well, but this is like trying to capture lightning in a bottle. This was difficult to do 10 years ago and it will still be difficult 10 years from now, because a Sally Field or a Lance Armstrong only come around once in a great while."

The authenticity of the Lance Armstrong campaign is undeniable, Ms. vonPlato says.

"The use of an iconic individual who overcame a most dreaded disease linked with Bristol-Myers Squibb's commitment to advance the treatment of cancer was a powerful combination of celebrity and strategy," she says. "When used appropriately, celebrities validate consumers' experiences or allow consumers to connect with a disease that they might have been avoiding because of embarrassment."

"There are so many diseases that are associated with a stigma and there is such poor compliance and persistency with therapies that if a celebrity helps validate the need for a medicine, it's a win-win situation," Ms. Devereux says. "Bob Dole was hugely effective because he was able to de-stigmatize a disease — erectile dysfunction — suffered by the majority of the over-50 adult male population."

In today's consumer-driven environment, where people are controlling much of the conversation about the brand, Ms. vonPlato says it

is important to consider the possible conversation and reactions that could result from a celebrity endorsement.

"When we discuss the possibility of using a celebrity, my question is always whether we can sustain the right conversation with that person in the mix," she says. "An athlete or actor in an ad can increase recognition, and even recall, but just as importantly the individual has to be able to motivate consumers to have the right conversation about the product or condition over time. When we evaluate the online chat around celebrity campaigns, we see that there is a lot of the discussion about the

Take the celebrity quiz

HERE'S A QUICK TEST TO EVALUATE THE POWER THAT CELEBRITIES HAVE ON BRAND RECALL. GIVE YOURSELF 10 POINTS FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING CELEBRITY/BRAND RELATIONSHIPS THAT YOU CAN CORRECTLY IDENTIFY.

BRAND

1. Adderall XR
2. Biomet
3. Boniva
4. Prinivil
5. Stryker
6. Voltaren

CELEBRITY

- A. Sally Field
- B. Mickey Mantle
- C. Jack Nicklaus
- D. Ty Pennington
- E. Mary Lou Retton
- F. Cal Ripken Jr.

SCORES

- 60 to 50:** A no-brainer connection — almost certainly there's going to be an ROI
- 40 to 30:** It worked at least half of the time — somebody's making a profit here
- 30 to 20:** Making the celebrity decision isn't a slam dunk — even though everyone knows about Sally and Boniva

Answers: 1-D, 2-E, 3-A, 4-F, 5-C, 6-B

Source: Jay Carter, AbelsonTaylor, Chicago.
For more information, visit abelsontaylor.com.

celebrity, paid or unpaid. They are celebrities, not medical experts," he says.

Mr. Stier does approve, however, of disease awareness platforms if they are plausible.

"We monitor what celebrities are saying in the context of public health and there aren't too many really credible messages," he says.

He notes, however, one good example: Katie Couric's live colonoscopy on national television in March 2000.

Reports published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* showed that colonoscopy rates nationwide jumped more than 20% in the days and months after Ms. Couric's on-air test on the Today show.

The researchers dubbed the phenomenon the "Katie Couric Effect." Ms. Couric, who is an unpaid advocate for colorectal cancer, established the Entertainment Industry Foundation's National Colorectal Cancer Research Alliance after her husband's death.

"Katie's colonoscopy on the air created a lot of buzz and I call that a prime example of a celebrity doing some good in a credible way," Mr. Stier says.

A Targeted Approach

Certainly some celebrity campaigns and endorsements have fallen flat, but since 2002,

celebrity, and not about the brand message or even the condition.”

“When we discuss the possibility of using a celebrity, my question is always whether we can sustain the right conversation with that person in the mix,” Mr. Carter says. “An athlete or actor in an ad can increase recognition, research on the

disease state, and even recall, but more importantly the individual has to be able to motivate consumers to have the right conversation about the product or condition over time. My suspicion is that in many cases the ad generates attention but it becomes more about the celebrity.”

Case in point, Mr. Carter says the

Sound Bites from the Field

PHARMAVOICE ASKED INDUSTRY EXPERTS TO PROVIDE THEIR OPINIONS ON THE USE OF CELEBRITIES AS PART OF A MARKETING CAMPAIGN.



GLORIA M. JANATA, JD, serves as Team Leader at Chandler Chicco Agency, which is a full-service, global healthcare public relations firm. For more information,

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“Partnering with the right celebrity can have numerous benefits for pharma companies. The key is identifying the right celebrity whose positive attributes mirror the attributes of the brand and who can speak first hand about the brand based on personal, often intimate, experience. Ideally, the celebrity should be featured in the PR, advertising, and professional mix to maximize their exposure among all key audiences, for example, Sally Field for Boniva. This integrated approach can truly differentiate a brand in an increasingly commoditized pharma market. From a PR perspective it also is critical to be transparent about the involvement of the pharma sponsor and to always include a medical professional in outreach efforts who can offer balanced treatment advice.”



GUY MASTRION is Chief Global Creative Officer of Palio Communications, Saratoga Springs, N.Y., an inVentiv Health company, and a full-service healthcare

communications advertising agency. For more information, visit palio.com.

“A celebrity should be used only when there is a credible, relevant link to the brand — in other words, that the celebrity or a loved one

the celebrity has cared for is using or has used the product. A celebrity should be used for who he or she is as a person and not as a character, as this undermines credibility. Also, the client and agency need to take great care that the quality of the concept and the execution match the quality of the celebrity’s personal brand or image.”



JULIAN PARREÑO is Senior VP, Pharmaceutical Markets, at Harte-Hanks, which is a worldwide direct and targeted marketing company that provides

direct marketing services, shopper advertising opportunities, and pharmaceutical marketing services. For more information, visit hartehanks.com.

“From my point of view, celebrity usage has slowed. Mandy Patinkin recently has appeared in a Crestor commercial, and he is a recognizable star. I also recall seeing Joan Lunden for Claritin, Bob Dole and Rafael Palmeiro for Viagra, Patti LaBelle for One Touch, and Lance Armstrong as a Bristol-Myers Squibb cancer spokesperson. Today, the focus on advertising seems to be shifting more to the value of patient outcomes, and less on selling more pills — a balance that is hard to achieve in a 30-second format alone. There are more noncelebrity DTC ads, such as the Cialis spot featuring common people, not celebrities, in bathtubs. Viagra’s featuring a group of regular 50-something guys singing ‘Viva Viagra,’ and not sports or political heroes.”



The type of “marketeering” that is perfectly acceptable for sneakers is usually not acceptable for prescription products.

Alexandra vonPlato
Digitas Health

Fields/Boniva alliance works so well because she personifies the brand.

“Sally Field is energetic, positive, and focused on life and health, and on making things happen,” Mr. Carter says. “I admire the campaign — and I had nothing to do with it — because it is really well done.”

Ms. vonPlato has concerns that consumer curiosity about a celebrity can eclipse the brand message. The goal of the Boniva campaign was to get women to recognize osteoporosis and take action, and it does it well. But regardless, people are talking about Sally Field — how old she is, whether she had a face lift, or whether she’s just doing it for the money.

“When using a celebrity, the conversation that happens in the marketplace isn’t always the one the brand team wants,” Ms. vonPlato says.

Just when we think the use of celebrities might level off, it keeps intensifying and I have no reason to believe that this trend is going to abate any time soon.

Bob Brody Ogilvy PR



The Message is in the Stars

Because of pitfalls such as this, marketers are trying harder to match their stars with their brand messages.

“As marketers, every year we get bit smarter about how to best deliver drug and disease information to motivate patients to visit a physician or take their medicine,” Ms. Devereux says. “In the late 1990s and early 2000s, just having a celebrity was a good way to get people to pay attention. Today, messages are most effective when the celebrity has a real story to tell about the disease and can speak in a way that gets at the same insight that the consumer has.”

Like Mr. Carter, Ms. Devereux concedes that the perfect celebrity-brand alliance “doesn’t happen that often.”

An alternative is using “pseudo celebrities,” who can have the same affect or better, Ms. Devereux says.

“Pseudo celebrities are people who are not necessarily recognized by their face, but by their accomplishments,” she explains. “For instance, Olympic swimmer Jenny Thompson participated in a convincing public awareness campaign for Dermik’s Penlac, which treats toenail fungus. Jenny was a very credible spokesperson for Dermik because she suffered from the condition and

the campaign was not about self promotion. She was really talking about an embarrassing problem that she was able to deal with, and because of this approach she was able to find a very authentic communication point,” she says.

Ms. Devereux also mentions that campaigns that feature real-life patients create connections with consumers.

“In these cases, the messages are so real that they have more value than anything coming from Joan Lunden,” Ms. Devereux explains. “For example, Bristol-Myers Squibb is running a series of corporate campaigns for its oncology, HIV, and arthritis franchises involving ‘regular people’ who have agreed to be part of a TV campaign all the while they are bald or feeling poorly. They are talking about the hope they have as a result of therapies.”

“In the past, we controlled most of the dialogue around our brands and now we have very little control,” Ms. vonPlato says. “So we must choose a celebrity endorser wisely — someone who is sincerely connected to the condition.”

An authentic pairing of celebrity and brand message increases effectiveness and gives the campaign more legs, Ms. vonPlato says.

“If the celebrity can sincerely serve as an advocate, then the scope of the campaign broadens to include appearances, public-relations



I don’t think consumers should rely on advice from a celebrity, paid or unpaid. They are celebrities, not medical experts.

Jeff Stier

The American Council on Science and Health

activities, books, videos, and activism,” she says. “A broader platform is needed for integration. It’s not just about the TV spot, it’s about how a celebrity can help the brand engage consumers across platforms.”

The celebrity should never come before the concept. In fact, considering a celebrity should be the last step in deciding what is the best way to deliver the message, Ms. Devereux says.

“A campaign will not ring true if the celebrity is chosen first, and then the creative team is left to figure out what the message should be,” she says. “If there is a benefit to including a celebrity in the message, then do it, but if not, leave it alone. There is considerable resistance to using celebrities unless they are

In 1998, “Good Morning America” host Joan Lunden became the first nationally known spokesperson to appear in a DTC television campaign, which featured Schering-Plough’s Claritin RediTabs.

— *LyonHeart and TBWA\WorldHealth*



incredibly relevant to the cause or if they can augment business results.”

Education Initiatives

Using celebrities for disease education initiatives requires the same sort of discretion. On the PR end, the message must be newsworthy to be effective, says Bob Brody, senior VP/media specialist of Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide in New York.

“The celebrity has to have a good story to tell and a direct connection to a health condi-

The risks of celebrity endorsements are spending substantial money for somebody who doesn't resonate and therefore stalls the growth of the product or worse, gives the brand a bad name.

Jay Carter AbelsonTaylor

tion,” he says. “For example, former NFL Atlanta Falcons Coach Dan Reeves who worked with Merck in 1999 on a campaign addressing heart disease or Dick Clark, who announced his experience with diabetes in 2004, and then became an advocate for diabetes patients.”

Coach Reeves had this type of consumer appeal because he had heart surgery four weeks before coaching his team through the NFL playoffs and earning the right to play in the Super Bowl.

“Coach Reeves bounced back from surgery and was a definite newsmaker,” Mr. Brody says. “The awareness campaign was so successful that eventually the program evolved into an ad campaign. Dan got to demonstrate his value as a spokesperson in real-life terms before the ads started, so in essence he was road tested as a credible spokesperson.”

No. 1 for Mr. Brody is not so much the caliber of the celebrity but the quality of the story and whether the message is relevant.

The connection with a disease or condition is crucial in PR, because exposure requires the story to earn media coverage based on its merits.

“Celebrity health campaigns are an abso-

lute legitimate means of getting people to pay better attention to their health,” he says. “We’ve seen time and again that celebrities make a difference.” ♦

PharmaVOICE welcomes comments about this article. E-mail us at feedback@pharmavoice.com.

Cal Ripken Jr. was the spokesperson for Merck's antihypertensive drug Prinivil, even though he did not suffer from hypertension. Today, his appearance would raise red flags and go against the more effective trend of using celebrities who have a connection to the disease or condition.

— *LyonHeart and TBWA\WorldHealth*

Experts on this topic

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