

MarketingDaily

Commentary

The Voice Of Truth

Robert Passikoff, Mar 11, 2010 05:00 AM

A sign of real celebrity is that a voice is often worth more than actual services. That marketing truth came to mind upon hearing how Hyundai -- due to advertise on this Sunday's Academy Awards -- was told that their commercials weren't quite acceptable.

No, no nudity or inappropriate content. This is Hollywood we're talking about after all. No, it turns out that Jeff Bridges did Hyundai's voiceovers, but as a nominee for Best Actor, the sponsor has to make sure that ads featuring celebrities (or celebrity voiceovers) don't run near a segment of the program that might feature that celebrity. Apparently, trying to schedule where seven ads could run without violating Oscar rules was too complicated so seven other celebrities got hired to read the ad copy. This last-minute casting raises some questions.

Is this just a tempest in a teapot? How would hearing the voice of a nominee affect the outcome of the already-completed Oscar voting? Do the voices of celebrities really increase brand engagement, or is that just what the agency tells the client? Do celebrities tell a better "story" than unknown yet skilled actors?

Okay, it is pretty cool to sit in the studio and get your picture taken with some star you'd otherwise never meet. But the truth is that most celebrities view this kind of work as an easily earned new income stream. Some celebrities, like Sean Connery and Julia Roberts, will only do voiceovers, not deigning to appear too commercial by actually showing up in an ad.

But that said, it's equally true that most "celebrity" voices really aren't as recognizable as, say, Garrison Keillor or Orson Wells or James Earl Jones or Winston Churchill (or an unknown yet skilled actor imitating Winston Churchill). And if you hire a celebrity to read copy, what do you get besides bragging rights, an autograph, and the chance to shake hands at the recording studio? Did you increase loyalty or engagement, make more sales, or larger profits? Will you settle for recognition?

Let's see how resonant that recognition is. Below is a list of actors who earned \$1million+ paychecks for lending their voices to commercial ventures. Can you match up the voice to the product or service? Answers appear at the very end of this blog.

1. Jeff Bridges
 2. George Clooney
 3. Sean Connery
 4. Richard Dreyfuss
 5. Gene Hackman
 6. James Earl Jones
 7. Queen Latifah
 8. Julia Roberts
 9. Christian Slater
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- A. Oppenheimer Funds
 - B. Honda
 - C. Panasonic

- D. Pizza Hut
- E. AOL
- F. Budweiser
- G. Duracell
- H. Level 3 Communications
- I. Hyundai
- J. Verizon

Thinking about those products and services, did the big name (or the big name's voice) mean anything to you? Did the celebrity voice engage you better? Did you even remember the voice at all? Or did you use assessments to insure that your brand's values were reinforced and you actually got a real return on your marketing investment?

There's a Native American proverb that say it takes a thousand voices to tell a single story. But today it can take only one to bust the budget.

Answers: 1I, 2G, 3H, 4B, 5A/F, 6J, 7D, 8E, 9C