

## **The Amazing Power of Endorsements**

We all know what endorsements are: Companies use famous people to pitch their products so we'll associate that individual and their success with the product. For example, Bill Cosby endorses Jell-O™ and Kodak,™ Michael Jordan pitches for Nike™ and Hanes™ underwear, and Tiger Woods does Titleist™ golf balls and Buick™ automobile ads. We tend to like products, services, and ideas that are endorsed by people we like, regardless of the quality of the product. Sometimes, we will even buy a product for the first time simply based on a celebrity endorsement.

We naturally want to be associated with fame, fortune, and success. That is why we follow the lead of celebrities we admire, respect, and like. It's also why we use the products they endorse. It is amazing to see teenagers ignore their parents warnings about drugs, but when their favorite star or professional athlete says it's not cool, they stop. This is the power of association.

Endorsements are a huge business. Consider the following tidbits: U.S. companies pay more than \$1 billion to athletes to secure endorsements, about 10% of advertising expenditures are paid to the endorser, and about 20% of all television commercials feature a famous person. All in all, the use of celebrities to endorse products is one of the most popular and effective associations marketers and advertisers use.

Why do corporations spend tremendous resources to find the right spokesperson to bring the right association to their products? We hold our beliefs and attitudes to define and make sense of who we are. By shaving with the right razor or eating the right cereal, we are saying, "I am just like that ball player; I am part of the attractive, "in" group." By purchasing the "right stuff," we enhance our own egos. We rationalize away our inadequacies as we become just like our favorite celebrity."

The critical factor in using a celebrity endorsement is creating an emotional tie or association between the consumer and the athlete/celebrity. The athlete or celebrity's positive associations have been transferred to the product or service. Wearing the same shoes or driving the same car as their hero allows consumers to identify and associate with their idols.

There is a downside to using celebrities to promote products and services, however. Anytime a celebrity gets negative press, that association tends to carry over to the products and companies they promote. In such cases, depending on the severity of the circumstances, the celebrities are usually dropped like hot potatoes. Michael Jackson was once an endorser for Pepsi™ until he was accused of child molestation. The company was quick to pair its product with someone else. Tonya Harding, the Olympic figure skater, was a Nike endorser until she was convicted of assault on fellow skater Nancy Kerrigan. Mike Tyson was also an endorser for Pepsi until he was convicted of rape. O.J. Simpson was once the spokesman for Hertz car rentals until he went on trial for a double murder.