

creative ear

Episode 33: Out of the Mouths of... Celebrities

Back in the 1800's, Mark Twain was routinely approached for his endorsement. He was invited to slap his name on such ventures as a new form of music notation and an elixir that its maker claimed could cure everything from corns to death. (Twain's letters indicating his keen disinterest are respectful but hilariously biting.) Well, crusty, old Sam Clemmens may have pooh-poohed the notion of becoming a pitch man for money but times have changed - exponentially. Now, there's diamond-encrusted platinum in those hills and few celebrities, especially those who have known the bitter taste of hunger, can resist the offer to simply talk-up a product for an embarrassing amount of cash.

Celebrities bring a lot to the table. They provide fans who will automatically pay attention to whatever they say. Celebrities can transfer instant recognition and an element of prestige to their clients. Some people automatically trust a product simply because they trust the celebrity who endorses it. However, the flip-side also applies. "Troubled" celebrities can bring a load of personal baggage, scandal, legal problems and negative publicity. Most clients don't need this aggravation just to deliver a message. (Mind you, if your client is a criminal lawyer, this might be a good fit.) It's vitally important that the image of the celebrity match the advertising needs of the client.

In this edition of the Creative Ear, we'll hear commercials voiced by Celebrities.

The Unknown Celebrity: While few people know his name, this voice-over giant worked on more than 260 films - usually uncredited. In the 1950's, his distinctive pipes were a vital component of countless Sci-Fi movies. ("People of the earth: Attention!") Then in the 60's, he became perhaps the busiest mouthpiece in the industry. He created the voice of Rocky and Bullwinkle's arch-nemesis, Boris Badenov; Disney's Professor Ludwig Von Drake; Froot Loops' spokesperson, Toucan Sam; and of course, the Pillsbury Doughboy. By the time of his death in 1986, Paul Frees had forged an unparalleled legacy of memorable characterizations and haunting word images. Here's a sample of his work for Sacramento's **Marine World**.

Spot #1: "Africa USA" - Marine World

The Dream Team: Canada is known far and wide for having an abundance of talent. And one of the best shows to ever see a green light in this country has to be SCTV. The humour still stands up and brilliant individual performances ensured its cast members would soon graduate to critical acclaim and international stardom. But to their credit, they never forgot their roots. In 1991, Martin Short and the late John Candy voiced a terrific campaign for **Canada's Wonderland**.

Spot #2: "Question Line" - Canada's Wonderland

The Cause: For many radio stations, the chance to work with a celebrity will be limited to something like: "Hi, this is (_____) and you're listening to (call letters)." However, there may come a time when you actually get to work with them. You'll want to make the most out of their brief time with you - as they did in this spot for the **CHUM City Christmas Wish**.

Spot #3: "Bryan Adams/Mel C" - CHUM Christmas Wish

The Oddball: Tom Cavanaugh has done rather well for himself. In a few short years, he went from screwball waiter at a popular Toronto eatery to the star of that quirky TV show, "Ed". In between, he did his share of commercials. Recently, Cavanaugh (with his easy-going, oddball charm intact) returned as the spokesperson for CIBC.

Spot #4: "Unlimited Chequing" - CIBC

The Head Spinner: Remember when I said the celebrity should match the needs of advertiser? Occasionally, the advertiser needs a celebrity that is their polar opposite for the greatest comedic effect. In this case, "the incomparable Robert Goulet" reads the blackboard writings of Bart Simpson. (Can you imagine

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that creative meeting? "I've got it! We'll get the incomparable Robert Goulet to do a commercial for The Simpsons!") But, because the two images are completely incongruent, this spot really works.

Spot #5: "Robert Goulet" - The Simpsons

Celebrities can be impatient, condescending, irritable, remote, frustrating, disinterested, petulant and downright nasty. Celebrities can also be charming, generous, caring, enthusiastic, gracious, tireless and surprisingly approachable. Their care and feeding are best left to a seasoned producer/director who can match their energy and go with the flow. Nothing can be quite as deflating as meeting someone whom you've admired - only to have them go "Orson" on you. However, if the celebrity is the right choice for the account, and the client has given sufficient creative latitude, there's no limit to what your ads can achieve... with a little "Star Power".

xxx

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