



Woods For Thought

From Pg 1

GLOBALLY, the celebrity endorsement game has come a long way since the UK's Queen Victoria endorsed Cadbury's Cocoa in the 19th century. In India, though, the endorsement game is still in its infancy with a major fillip coming in the last five years when it has become a favourite tool for Indian marketers. Industry veterans say that the talent management — endorsements, appearances and performances — is well on its way to become a Rs 1,000 crore business. It's the top 50 celebrities who garner more than 80% of all endorsement money.

Celebrity endorsers in India fall in three buckets. One set of celebrities are clear that they want money. That is, they will endorse almost any decent brand if the price is right (Shahrukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Shahid Kapoor, Akshay Kumar). So concepts like brand fit do not bother them as brand managers force-fit their image attributes to what suits their products or revel in statements like "but his appeals cuts across all segments, geographies, age groups".

Then there are stars like Aamir Khan, John Abraham and Ranbir Kapoor who are true to their image attributes and usually work with brands whose traits they think suit their image (Till date Ranbir has reportedly refused ICICI Bank, Minto, Coca-Cola and Chevrolet). These men are also deeply involved in taking the decisions of endorsements. The third set comprises the smaller stars, the ones that don't have any positioning and are interchangeable (Neil Nitin Mukesh, Zaheer Khan, Irfan Khan).

SHOW ME THE MONEY!

Celebrity management is still evolving in India

In the last few years, as demand for the top celebs shot through the roof, their rates too looked skywards. Top stars today charge anywhere between Rs 1-1.5 crore a day and industry executives say that even during the slowdown, the rates didn't slide but kept growing albeit, at a slower pace. "The stars get a disproportionate amount of money to endorse a product. Their earning per day for endorsing a product is much higher than what they would earn in a day in a movie or a cricket match," says Manish Porwal, ex-CEO of Percept Talent Management.

While the smaller stars work with the various celebrity management agencies, biggies like Shahrukh Khan, Aamir Khan, Amitabh Bachchan and Ranbir Kapoor, work independently. While most agencies proclaim they will only take endorsement deals that fit well with their stars' image, if you see closely, each star's portfolio is a mish-mash of brands. Probe deeper and even the celebrity managers say that the art of celebrity management is still evolving in India. "Most management agencies misuse the word 'management' while most of the work they do is just broking the deal," says Anirban Das Blah, MD, Kwan, a celebrity management firm.

In an industry that is still finding its feet, events like the IPL and recent rush of new stars in Bollywood provide a fillip. Here anyone with a laptop, phone and a few relationships could set up shop, firms like Percept and Globosport have started bringing in some method in the madness, but boutique agencies and one-man operations still rake in the moolah. And still, many in the business would hide behind statements like "celebrity management is an art, not a science". But some science is creeping in with research studies such as Percept and Hansa Research's CelebTrack and media monitoring agencies like TAM Media starting separate divisions to track celeb endorsements. As the celebrity manager moves from being the gatekeeper to a consultants who help brands find celebrities with the right fit, still the motto of this business largely remains show! me! the! money! as Rod Tidwell (Cuba Gooding Jr) tells Jerry (Tom Cruise) in that famous scene in smash hit Jerry Maguire.

AS OF now, brand managers, except the ones from Accenture and AT&T, are paying no heed to such warnings. While some use a single star for their entire branding effort, others can afford a constellation of stars. Think Airtel Digital TV, Sahara Homes and Pepsi. On one end, that might look as a wise risk mitigation strategy by not putting your entire marketing might behind one celebrity face. But that's where the complexity in the role of celebrity endorsements rears its head. "It makes more sense to put money behind one celebrity rather than use several celebrities for a single brand, which leads to diffused imagery," says T Gangadhar, MD of Group M's media agency, MEC India.

Not everyone agrees though. Anand Singh, director marketing, Colas, Coca-Cola India says it's a case of different strokes for different folks: "It really depends on the creative and the message one is trying to communicate. For example, a creative in line with the brand values of optimism and connections may work better with multiple celebrities. The important point is that the creative thought should precede the celebrity choice."

That debate may be wide open, but on another front, consumer studies on perception of celebrity endorsements show that there is a lot of ground to be covered.

According to the Celebrity Sensor Report released recently by MEC MediaLab, the research conducted among over 1,000 adults in India reveals that multiple brand endorsements by celebrities confuses consumers and reduces correct brand and celebrity associations. The research points out that 66% of the respondents find it hard to match popular celebrities with the brands they endorse.

And now be prepared for even more depressing numbers. Only 35% of consumers feel a celebrity helps them to trust a product. Just 32% believe a celebrity helps them believe that a product actually works. And only 31% say

that celebrities make them want to recommend a brand. But for brand managers the bang from the celebrity buck comes from the fact that celebrities deliver quicker recall for brands in a cluttered scenario.

There are some game rules though. "It helps in creating top-of-the-mind recall, but celebrity endorsements are a means to an end and not an end in itself. What's most important is how a brand uses a celebrity. It's only then that the connect happens better," says VS Sitaram, COO, Dabur, which works with MS Dhoni and Amitabh Bachchan. (See box: How to score a sixer with your endorsement strategy).

Others recommend that brand ambassadors should be used in a holistic manner, beyond the print and television advertisements. Abraham, who is known for being a bike lover, is also an advisor to the management of Yamaha India, with designers from Japan flying down to get his inputs on designs that might work in India and so on. In between, when Yamaha and Abraham did not work together, the star didn't pick another motorcycle brand despite his popularity in the relevant target group. "They came back and the relationship has grown stronger," he says.

Other stars are not that particular about association. Otherwise, why would Amitabh Bachchan endorse a mass product like Himani Navratna Oil along with an upmarket clothing brand like Reid & Taylor? Or what makes Hrithik Roshan endorse both John Players and Macroman briefs? That observation may be a bit harsh, but Abraham defends his ilk. "You can't blame the celebrities entirely. Sometimes, even the brand manager is not convinced in the power of his brand. That's why you see a lot of marriages fail," he says.

Sometimes, brand managers often take the risk by thinking that public memory is short. Trouble often found Bollywood star Salman Khan, be it the alleged involvement in cases like shooting down the endangered Black Buck or allegedly mowing down people who were sleeping on a Mumbai pavement. However, when Perfetti's Chloremint looked for a clutter-free ambassador it stopped at Salman and his brother. Responses from Perfetti India hadn't reached BE at the time of going to print. Other companies who use celebrity endorsements heavily like Unilever, Nokia, and Pepsi didn't participate in the story.

As for the celebrities themselves, it's raining brands when it's not pouring. Shahrukh Khan endorses 17 brands, and Dhoni has 19 in his bag. "At its most extreme, using popular celebrities with multiple endorsement deals can actually reduce brand salience," says Gangadhar of MEC. Brand owners however have a different take altogether. "Our logic is that we would stand out at least within our industry. The association has worked for us and we have signed a contract for another year," says Deepak Jalan, MD, Linc Pens & Plastics.

Ditto for the makers of Reid & Taylor that's just one among the several brands endorsed by Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan. Reid & Taylor has had Amitabh Bachchan as a brand endorser for ten years. Nitin Kasliwal, vice chairman and managing director, SKNL group says, "The first year we signed on Mr Bachchan, sales jumped by 40%. While the earlier endorser Pierce Brosnan addressed India, Amitabh Bachchan addresses Bharat." He adds that the reason for continuing with Bachchan even after ten years is that logic from the sports world — you do not tinker with a winning combination. Some associations might have that magic touch. Or like Tiger, endanger your brand to do the vanishing act.



HOW TO SCORE A SIXER WITH YOUR CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT STRATEGY

Pick the right celebrity and have a long term strategy on how to use them.

Among the most recalled associations — Sachin Tendulkar for Boost, Shahrukh Khan for Hyundai and Amitabh Bachchan for Reid & Taylor, Dabur and Cadbury, all the brand-celebrity associations are almost a decade old, if not more

Have a powerful central thought that strongly binds the brand and celebrity. Use the celebrity beyond his or her recognisable face.

Powerful ideas always get powerful results as proven by Abhishek Bachchan for Idea and Aamir Khan for Tata Sky

Avoid the danger of casting the celebrity as a screen 'avatar'.

Hrithik Roshan may be a great screen dancer, but getting him to dance in all commercials reduces brand recall. Hide & Seek is an example

Beauty brands beware of beautiful faces.

Just a 'pretty face' causes confusion in consumers' minds. Most actresses are glamorous and when used without any differentiation to the brand, consumers tend to replace one beauty with another in their minds. For example, Vivek's celebrity recall is split in the middle between Kareena Kapoor and Deepika Padukone.

Multiple celebrities for a single brand dilute the associations and fragments recall.

Pepsi is an example with only M S Dhoni having a relatively stronger recall and the myriad other celebrities of the brand having far lower recall levels.

Underinvesting in media kills the association without even an opportunity to test the strength of the association.

Examples are Shahrukh Khan for Compaq and M S Dhoni in the case of Titan Sonata

Source: MEC India

with inputs from Moink Mitra

Share Of Celebrity Endorsing A Brand In Overall Advertising Of The Brand

Celebrity	Brand	% Of Ads Featuring Celebrity	% Of Ads Not Featuring Celebrity
Amitabh Bachchan	Binani Cement	100	0
Sachin Tendulkar	Reid Taylor Suitings	100	0
Shahrukh Khan	Boost	54	46
MS Dhoni	Jaypee Cement	99.96	0.04
Priyanka Chopra	Dish TV	72	28
Katrina Kaif	Airtel Cellular	14	86
	Pepsi	55	45
	Boost	70	30
	Lux Peach Cream	90	10
	Lux Strawberry Cream	67	33
	Lehar Slice	99.6	0.4
	Pantene Pro-v	100	0
	Hair Fall Control		

Source: AdEx - A division of TAM Media

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: V Sitaram, Anand Singh & LV Krishnan

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: Anirban Das Blah & Manish Porwal

From Top: An