



## Celebrity Brands: Extending 15 Minutes of Fame

By Vivian Manning-Schaffel

Hamish Pringle, author of *Celebrity Sells* and director general of the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising in the UK, says ad campaigns gave celebrities and the beautiful people license to go global in aligning themselves with products. "It legitimized commercial activity," he says.

Pringle cites Paul Newman as a pioneer in making self-branding a class act. "Here was a distinguished Hollywood actor doing a commercial product line. Even though all profits went to charity, it gave him and everyone else permission to become a brand, without a damaging effect on their career," Pringle explains. "The benefit of doing your own brand campaign is that it keeps you in the public eye 365 days a year."



And thus, many respected celebrities have discovered a myriad of ways their talent and taste can translate into products that make big bucks. Actress Sarah Jessica Parker joined with Coty to launch two successful fragrances. And no celebranting article would be complete without mention of the almighty JLo brand. Actress, singer and designer Jennifer Lopez has become all but a household name, with two clothing brands and six fragrance lines tucked under her trim belt.

But in today's raucous, media-fueled cult of personality, a whole new breed of celebrities has emerged, and becoming a brand is the first item on their to-do lists. Thanks in part to the advent of reality TV, it's no longer required for a celebrity to excel in their craft—be it acting, music or modeling—to inspire consumers to crack open their wallets. It may just be enough to look good and walk the earth.

Some of these reality-show stars are now perceived by certain market segments as beauty icons in their own right, and they are eager to get in on the game while it's being played. "Most people who are wise know that fame is fleeting. These reality-show stars will do whatever they can to extend their fame while they are considered a viable commodity. They are striking while the iron's hot to ensure some kind of longevity, or at least financial security," says Katherine Rothman, president of KMR Communications, Inc.

And, for a marginal fee, consumers get a product that brings a little of that fame into their lives. "There is this Andy Warhol thing going on. Consumers are lifting scenes from other people's movies. They are cutting and pasting the lives of these celebrities to produce their own story, and it extends into buying the products that they make or buy," Pringle says.

Why should companies hitch their wagons to an instacelebrity in building a brand? "From a publicist's perspective, having a recognizable face associated with a brand is invaluable," Rothman says. "If consumers see a look that they want to emulate, even though the celebrity might not be a beauty expert or a fashion model, it's going to be an equally profitable brand. A company looking for instant buzz might do well in picking a Victoria Beckham or Kim Kardashian [to launch a product with] because at the moment, those people are in the limelight. In some cases, it can even leverage more attention than someone more knowledgeable about beauty who's been out of the limelight."

Both Pringle and Rothman cite Paris Hilton as the ultimate example of someone who's turned instant fame into big brand success. Hilton, once only famous for being an heiress that dances on tables, has parlayed her celebrity into record deals, reality shows, a hairpiece line, a watch line and (count 'em) six successful lines of perfume. "Paris Hilton is the ultimate business model," Rothman says. "Anyone who is famous today in that capacity is looking to what she did in trying to establish themselves as their own brand."

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Parlux Fragrances, Inc., the manufacturer of Hilton's fragrance and watch lines, recently announced that Fairy Dust, Hilton's most recent fragrance, sold approximately US\$ 7.5 million by the end of 2008—and it only began shipping in late September. To date, sales for all of Hilton's brands are approaching the US\$ 100M mark and are expected to crack US\$ 150M in the next few years.

These are impressive numbers for someone who is famous for being famous. In recent months, nearly 400 people in Lancaster, PA, shelled out close to US\$ 200 each for a Paris Hilton fragrance, gift bag and a two-to-three-minute audience with Paris herself.

That's a big chunk of change in financially challenged times, but those times are ripe for consumers to escape into a celebrity-driven fantasy. "If people can't afford a Chanel bag, they will buy a Chanel lipstick to live a little bit of that lifestyle. Paris Hilton represents a certain glam fairy tale life. By buying something from Paris Hilton, consumers are buying a little bit of her lifestyle, a little bit of her fairy tale," Rothman says.

But without adequate support, a venture—even if launched by one of the world's most beautiful people—can fall flat. Model Heidi Klum wanted to launch her 100 percent fat-free German candy brand as My Favorite Candies by Heidi Klum in the US a few years ago, but the venture soon met its demise.

"Heidi is a wonderful businessperson, but we just couldn't find a market for her product," says Susan Rosenthal, VP marketing and export, Hillside Candy. "The package didn't work out as best as it could. We did want to have a picture of her and couldn't do it. And as we were launching, she announced she was pregnant with her first child and she was kind of out of the public eye at that point. The timing was off."

What about the long term? What's the expected trajectory of brands that promote looks over substance? "Paris could be a fluke," Rothman says. "If these other people who are famous not for anything tangible prove themselves as brands over time, then it might be an ongoing trend. If Paris is the only one, then companies might shy away from aligning themselves with them. If our economy continues to be weak, people are going to really want to bank on a sure thing rather than take a gamble on someone without substance."

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