

Celebrities: Who's using who in public relations?

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Publicity comes in many forms. For my clients, I recommend a multi-pronged marketing approach: news releases, newsletters, "expert" articles, print and broadcast ads, web content, social media, a celebrity.

A celebrity spokesperson can attract attention and new business. For a charity, a celebrity can raise new dollars and attract people to an event, often at no cost if they like your organization or cause, or know the person extending the invitation.

Using celebrities dates back at least 150 years: European beverage, Vin Mariani, got endorsements from Queen Victoria and Popes Leo XIII and Pius X.

A blend of Bordeaux wine and coca extract, the drink later came to America and evolved into Coca Cola.

One person's "celebrity" is another's "Who's that?" My wife teases me for not recognizing Kix Brooks last year when we bumped into half of the C & W duo Brooks & Dunn in Atlantic City. I thought he was their bus driver. He still chatted with us for 10 minutes.

Celebrity guests can be expensive. Results aren't guaranteed. In the 90s, a non-profit client gambled \$30,000 for Henry Kissinger as guest speaker. A year later they paid \$20,000 for Coretta Scott King. Each event raised over \$225,000 and attracted new donors. These events helped put the school in the news - and on the map.

Having a celebrity spokesperson can be risky. Things change overnight. Adulterer/tennis pro Tiger Woods was a product-endorsement gold mine for Nike, Titleist, Gatorade, Gillette, Amex, Buick, etc.

Local celebs will appear in person or in ads to promote a worthy cause. Many teams and media outlets require in-house celebs to "give back to the community."

In the 80s for a charity's phone-a-thon, I invited legendary wrestler Killer Kowalski. He headlocked volunteers, pretending to bash them with phones. Great publicity shots. Killer killed 'em, and didn't charge.

When Gov. Michael Dukakis and Ed King, fierce opponents, accepted my telethon invitation, I convinced them to sit near each other to make fundraising calls. That photo appeared on page 1 and on TV. Enemies joining forces for a good cause. Page One.

A few months ago, Cardinal Sean O'Malley was the guest of honor at a client school. Speaking to the Cardinal's aide, I bemoaned the fact that no TV reporters were present despite my best efforts. "You can make page 1, but you'll have to trip the Cardinal," the aide quipped.

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