

Who Should Pitch, Angelina Or Dylan?

A new breed of corporate consultants is matching celebrities with ad campaigns

How much is a celebrity worth? Advertising agencies don't really know how to calculate the dollar value of star power. Hollywood talent agents are no help: They represent the star's interests. So along comes a new breed of consultants promising corporate clients that they will take away some of the mystery.

A half-dozen of these boutiques are already operating in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and New York--among them **Creative License** (www.creativelicense.com). Their pitch to marketers: All the information, expertise, and insight needed to structure the best deals is at our fingertips. The firms track market prices for the celebrities (accurate at least until the next scandal). And they offer research to determine which stars are truly influential--and which are merely celebrated. Working either on retainer or for a percentage of the total deal, the agencies negotiate everything from cameos at corporate events to appearances in national ad campaigns for brands such as Ford, Wal-Mart and Sprint.

One advantage these small outfits offer is that they are run by people familiar with the insular movie and music industries. "Think of scenes from [the HBO show] *Entourage*," says John Osborn, president and chief executive of BBDO Worldwide, an ad agency owned by Omnicom Group Inc. "If I were to pick up a phone and call an agency, I have no idea if I'm getting the right price, or talking to the right person. I need someone who can navigate this world."

Most important, the firms can sometimes shift the balance of power between big stars and big brands. When talent agents and managers hear the name of a prominent brand, they can start "seeing dollar signs," Osborn says. "You need someone who can play hardball, and that's usually not the talent/business affairs department at an ad agency."

These firms are also introducing a new twist in that familiar Hollywood staple, the bidding war: Now it's the celebrities who are doing the bidding. **Creative License** is looking for compelling music or musical celebrity artist for its next ad campaign but doesn't want to pay top dollar to license an existing tune by the likes of John Fogerty, Stephen Stills, or Bob Dylan. So **Creative License** invites major recording artists to submit a song on spec. The client gets a tune from a leading songwriter, and the artist gets a promotional boost, plus a paycheck. Which artists are considering it? John Fogerty, Stephen Stills, and Bob Dylan, to name three.

MEASURING INFLUENCE

When it comes to calculating a fair price for more traditional endorsements, the agencies can tap a wealth of information about recent deals. They also collect personal information, such as which causes interest the stars. When **Kevin McKiernan, President and CEO of Creative License**, approached Sheryl Crow for Subaru last year, they went in knowing Crow felt strongly about environmental issues. Representatives showed her Subaru's low-waste manufacturing plants and talked about its commitment to being green. She agreed to the deal.

Measuring a celebrity's influence, of course, is as much art as science. Q scores, the measure traditionally used to track stars' popularity, doesn't look at how good they are at persuading consumers to buy. Will Ferrell, for instance, is funny, and Angelina Jolie is beautiful, but a company might wonder whether anyone would take either's endorsement seriously.