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High stakes in celeb endorsements

19 Oct 2012 | Nonzwakazi Cekete

WHILE the birth of social networking sites has been a welcome blessing for celebrities like Nonhle Thema it has proven to be a curse - especially when it comes to endorsement deals.



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Bonang Matheba



Nonhle Thema



Lucas Radebe

" You must bear in mind that you just can't arrive that quickly, you have to work harder to earn your stay in this town"

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The day Nonhle embarked on her Twitter shenanigans marked her demise from celebrity endorsements.

After becoming the face of Dark & Lovely about two years ago, nothing fruitful has since come her way after the Twitter scandals dragged her brand down.

Mzansi's leading brand guru, Thebe Ikalafeng, maintains that unlike in the past, when it took longer to create and be a trusted brand, this is no longer the case.

"Nowadays, it takes a shorter time to create a brand and an even shorter time to destroy it. All people need do is go on to a social networking site such as Twitter and say exactly what they think about you - and just like that a brand that took you years to build is destroyed within minutes," the founder of Brand Africa says.

He says in the case of Nonhle it seriously questions her credibility and longevity in the industry, which are important factors.

"You must bear in mind that you just can't arrive that quickly, you have to work harder to earn your stay in this town," he says.

So it is clear that any negative comments a celebrities make or receive can make certain brands and products shun them as their brand's face. If you look at the reputation of top brand ambassadors in the country, it is squeaky clean.

Connie Ferguson who is the face of Lewis Furnishers, Gaviscon and Garnier is one of the celebrities leading the pack.

Musician HHP, who endorses Status Deodorant and Vodacom, and Lucas Radebe, who for years featured dominantly in FNB and Aquafresh ads, do not have a controversial record to worry them.

Ikalafeng says when a brand chooses a celebrity to be their representative they look firstly at what a celebrity stands for and how their values are aligned to that of the celebrity.

"Remember when you are working together you are borrowing equity from each other so that you can both leverage," he says. "You have to stand for the same things, because if you stand for different things there is likely to be conflict. For example, as an animal rights body you cannot go for a celeb who likes fur."

A good case in point is Bonang Matheba, who endorses Lifestyle pads, which has campaigns to help empower women with life skills. Dropping a case of abuse against Euphonik can easily confuse brand messaging.

Secondly, says Ikalafeng, the celebrity has to have access or appeal to customers.

Brand strategist and publicist Simphiwe Majola concurs. He says celebs are chosen based on whether they are attractive, successful, credible, liked and aspired to by the brand's target audience.

"It's important to understand that celebrity endorsements are concerned with the strategic alignment of two parties, for example the celebrity brand and the marketing brand, in which a mutualistic relationship offers the celebrity self-promotion and remuneration while raising the profile of the brand in consumers' minds."

While the trend to use celebrities is growing, this can be detrimental to the credibility of brands as a result of the celebrity's behaviour.

"Celeb endorsement might cause public controversy if the celeb is controversial at that point in time," Majola says.

Adds Ikalafeng: "Any brand association is risky because human beings, by nature, are fallible."

While using celebrities is an appealing strategy the costs of using celebrities can run into millions of rands.

Thebe says the costs could run to three to four times more than an ordinary campaign. This explains why celebs do not mind endorsing more than one product.

A source says: "Minnie Dlamini pocketed close to a million rands after landing the deal with Motions hair products. There is also speculation that people such as Zahara and Eugene Khoza bagged six zeroes on the Nedbank campaign.

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