

How to Identify the Right Celebrity to Partner with Your Franchise Brand

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Franchise brands face a unique complexity when considering signing on a celebrity partner. Unlike product brands and other global, national and regional companies that do not employ the franchise model, there is a layer of heavily invested franchisee stakeholders whose interests also must be taken into consideration.

To that extent, the choice in a celebrity partner for franchise brands must go beyond just amplifying awareness nationally – it has to have an impact locally for franchisees. The strength of the connection between the celebrity icon and the brand should reverberate into the local

markets your franchisees serve, bonding consumers even more profoundly with your brand's location in their neighborhoods.

For us at Pearle Vision, our recent campaign dubbed "Olivia" included the celebrity participation of Billie Jean King. King serves as an inspiration to a young girl struggling with her vision, Olivia, in a one-minute spot. In the film, a Pearle Vision optometrist presents Olivia with a photo of the tennis star during her exam, which elicits an immediate reaction of joy because the optometrist did more than diagnose Olivia's visual acuity issue during the exam –she took the time to learn about Olivia's unique interests. The message for the Pearle Vision brand is powerful because the neighborhood optometrist goes beyond simply selling eyeglasses and cares about individual as a whole.

If you are interested in making a similar type of impact in your franchise system at the local level, here are three considerations to keep in mind when partnering with a national celebrity:

1. Resonate with multiple audiences

A relatable celebrity placement has the power to resonate across a multitude of different geographic markets and connect emotionally with audiences no matter their background. Often, when a likeable cultural icon such as Billie Jean King or celebrity is involved in a campaign, it tends to leave a lasting effect that stamps an indelible mark on the intended audience. In fact, according to a recent *AdWeek* article citing industry research, "a study by Harvard professor Anita Elberse found that high-profile endorsements 'generate a 4 percent increase in sales'" (Janet Comenos). An icon can evoke an immediate emotion

from viewers, triggering positive sentiment and a call to action from the consumer unto the brand.

Pearle Vision's use of King in its new ad campaign does just this. In "Olivia", King is used as a symbol of empowerment. The use of this particular cultural icon in the ad immediately evokes a sense of strength, pride and triumph. King is known for her prowess on the tennis court and nothing defines her legacy more than the famous "battle of the sexes" game where she beat her male opponent in a professional tennis match. However, King is also known for being a glasses-wearer and is synonymous with corrective eyewear. It is widely acknowledged that if she were to forego glasses amid pressure that the highest performing tennis players couldn't wear them on the court, she would have never reached her potential.

Leveraging an iconic, yet extremely relatable celebrity can carry an emotional appeal that is easily transferrable across local markets. Audiences are able to immediately connect their own experiences and aspirations to the message the celebrity is conveying.

2. Perception is reality

Iconic figures used in marketing campaigns also have a unique ability to shape the perception of your audience toward your brand, transcending geography and multiple demographics. A cultural icon that is on point with the brand's messaging should have a strong enough appeal to reinforce social and brand perceptions that are often common among consumers.

"Olivia" aims to shape perception on two levels. First, on the social level, the use of Billie Jean King in the campaign shows that wearing glasses is not a hindrance; in fact, having glasses can enable individuals – young, adult and senior-aged – to break through barriers. Second, "Olivia" also continues a brand initiative to differentiate Pearle Vision from others in the optical space. Whereas many of our competitors market themselves around price discounting, "Olivia" helps Pearle Vision convey the high-quality patient care available with the neighborhood optometrist.

3. Strengthen the credibility of the brand

The saying goes, "you are the company you keep," and for franchise companies that use celebrities, the "company" has to include high profile individuals that further enhance brand value across the franchise system. Consumers, and your franchisees, place a higher value on a celebrity placement because of the trust and admiration already established with the star. In another *AdWeek* article, Comenos also notes that choosing the right endorser comes down to aligning with "a high character celebrity." The credibility factor for your brand can be transformative, because it is clearly established that the celebrity has given his or her stamp of approval.

In our case, Billie Jean King understood from her experience the importance of empowering young women combined with how glasses can provide a powerful boost of confidence. The fact that she wanted to get involved in the project with Pearle Vision spoke to her appreciation of the message of the campaign, thus signaling the trust that she has in the brand.

