



Reversing the Curse and Advancing the Brand

If you've been eating your daily dose of the "breakfast of champions," you will have noticed that Wheaties has been reasonably cautious when determining what sports idol they recognize for their athletic achievements. It was Cal Ripken Jr. in 2001, Hank Aaron in 2002, and Wayne Gretzky just last year – all, to put gently, with "mature" and "fulfilled" careers.

According to the New York Times, tight marketing dollars have forced companies to sign endorsements with athletes who are known for their long-lasting successful careers rather than athletes only known for their "one hit wonder." Stability and consistency are preferred over a fleeting phase and momentary stardom. As a result, don't expect to see Anna Kournikova gracing her beauty on the orange box any time soon.

So, when every marketer grabbed at the idea of endorsing the Boston Red Sox, despite what some may call a lucky win, it no longer conformed to the idea of, "let's stick to continual success." Whether you despise them or worship them, everyone can admit that the Red Sox victory was a truly memorable, inspiring, and significant event in American sports history.

In addition, the Red Sox and their infamous curse have a national following, one that encompasses numerous generations. While many might consider the championship a fluke that won't happen again for another 86 years, the mere fact that it has been so long since the neglected Red Sox have been victors presents an opportunity for Brands to jump on the band wagon and endorse the Bambino's old team.

In a time when Brands clutter our every thought, associating with or endorsing an athlete, actor, or any other prominent figure offers a Brand the ability to break through the noise and have consumers relate the two: the Brand and the celebrity. Nike has proved extremely successful in endorsing athletes and, thus, creating a relationship between the two: Nike and the successful victor.

Nike's poignant portrayal of a family of fans cheering at Fenway Park through eight decades of changing times and continual Red Sox defeats has been noted by many as a powerful and effective Nike endorsement (view it at "<http://www.nike.com/usa/justdoit>"). The viewer leaves the commercial creating a relationship between Nike and the struggles of the Red Sox, a claim that, through the good times and the bad, Nike will be there.

The advertisement ran twice nationally, more often in New England, and was responsible for a 10% surge in traffic to Nike's mini-websites. Additionally, according to Nike's ad agency Wieden & Kennedy, the site received the most visitors ever who went online for the sole reason to watch an advertisement. Without a doubt, the strength of the brand Nike only grows stronger after endorsing national icons. Well done.

Undeniably, not all Brands can capitalize on the Red Sox legend and victory. The bond must be one of relevance and meaning to the consumer, or it could backfire and confuse them. Metamucil, for example, found it appropriate to also endorse the Red Sox. In their full-page advertisement, Metamucil stated, "Congratulations Boston on your World Championship. Let's hope it becomes a regular thing!" Awkward?

The correlation between the functions of Metamucil and the Red Sox win does not seem strong enough to create a strong Brand image in the mind of the consumer. When people think David Beckham, they think Adidas, when people think William Shatner, they think Priceline, and when people think Michael Jordan, they think Nike. When people think Red Sox, or baseball in general, they think Nike, Budweiser, or ESPN, not a fiber supplement.

Who is Metamucil trying to reach? Is it the retired husband-and-wife duo, which all of their pictured advertisements suggests, or is the chip-eating, beer-guzzling baseball fan and his team of buddies? Perhaps Metamucil notices an opportunity to attract a younger audience, or maybe they are seeking to stand apart from competing brands such as Citrucel or FiberCon.

Despite the reasoning behind the attempt to associate Metamucil with the Red Sox, using the victory as an opportunity to connect to baseball fans seems unlikely to prove effective. An endorsement should directly equate the product to the appeal of a celebrity; the lack of this association could potentially weaken Metamucil and confuse or discourage loyal consumers.

Endorsements prove to be excellent ways to create a genial relationship between your product and the person or team being endorsed. Just be wary of capitalizing quickly on a media event if it does not suggest being advantageous for the Brand. A celebrity endorsement boils down to the ability to communicate to the target market that not only the celebrity can benefit from the Brand, but the consumer can too.

So, go grab your appropriately celebrity-endorsed Wheaties box and pair of Air Jordan Nike shoes, because, you and your Brand, in today's clutter, can become champions too.