

The fame game

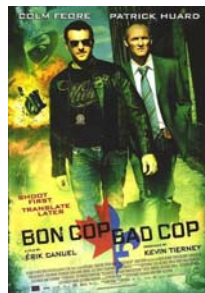
Marketers shouldn't have stars in their eyes when using Québec celebrities

by Eric Blais

Mike Bullard had a simple explanation for Global's decision to cancel his talk show: "It's way too hard doing a nightly talk show in Canada... We're beside the behemoth of popular American culture. Viewers here expect stars to sit in the guest chair. You can have Canadian stars like Don Cherry or Tie Domi on the show or a politician, but there are only so many big name Canadians that viewers will tune in to see."

While it's true that Canadian celebrity culture is rather limited, there is no shortage of celebrities in Quebec. The homegrown star system feeds Quebecers' fascination with their "vedettes." They read the gossip about their love lives and their struggles in tabloids and tune in weekly to watch talk shows such as *Tout le monde en parle* on Radio-Canada to hear them chat with other stars while sipping wine.

The recent release of the bilingual movie *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* and its record-breaking box office success in Quebec demonstrates once again the power of Quebec's star system. Directed by Erik Canuel and starring Patrick Huard and Colm Feore



as police officers, the movie exploits the English/French differences of two cops forced to partner to solve a crime. The more significant difference however lies in the way the movie is promoted in each market. Compared to the relatively

modest promotional effort in English Canada, the Quebec campaign promotes this movie the way U.S. blockbusters are usually hyped in the media. And the main focus is, of course, on its star, Patrick Huard.

“Quebec celebrities can become powerful spokespersons for marketers anxious to build strong relationships between their brands and consumers.”

While homegrown stars like Huard can help generate \$1.4 million at the box office over a weekend, Quebec's celebrities can also become powerful spokespersons for marketers anxious to build strong relationships between their brands and Quebec consumers.

But before signing up a popular Quebec face to pitch your product or service, here's a few things to keep in mind.

Clearly determine how the celebrity will be used. This is critical for contract negotiations but it's also important from a brand management standpoint. Celebrities often become bigger than the brand they're promoting. Will the celebrity act as a spokesperson? Play a role already well known to the public through TV/film appearances? Play an original role seen only in the advertising? There is little research on

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which approach is most effective. But a study conducted in the U.K. in 2002 suggests that simply using a celebrity for a testimonial instead of weaving him or her into the story is perceived as gratuitous and the brand spokesperson is seen as only doing it for the money.

Use fame with caution. Because they are famous, celebrities can make your brand famous and multiply the impact of the advertising investment. But they can also embarrass you and your brand. So don't overlook morality clauses. Quebecers love to read about their stars' struggles in the tabloids. As the lines between fiction and reality blur, your brand might become part of the gossip.

Objectively assess the celebrity's brand image. How does the target feel about the star? There are quantitative studies available in Quebec providing marketers with an objective assessment of a celebrity's awareness and appeal. Modelled after the Q Score in the U.S., Ipsos-Decarie's Indice D provides scores for more than 300 Quebec celebrities. Céline Dion gets a high score but then so does Lucien Bouchard. How different segments of the population rate a celebrity should also be assessed. We recently considered using a well-known and very attractive young woman in one of our campaigns only to find out the female target wasn't that fond of her, but their husbands certainly were. There must be a connection...

Keep creative control. It's not unusual for a Quebec star to act on stage, host a radio show, write a column in a local magazine, appear in a TV series and design jewelry. While it's this artistic talent marketers wish to benefit from, developing effective commercial persuasion is usually best left to

marketers. Welcome their creative input while making sure you're executing your strategy.

Choose carefully and don't overpay. There are rumours all over the TVA building in Montreal of how much certain stars are getting from advertisers. There is a huge pool of very good "comédiens" to choose from. A lesser-known face might be a better fit for your brand and your wallet.

Integrate the celebrity in all your activities. While contracts should clearly define the scope of the celebrity's role, don't overlook the importance of involving him or her in other marketing activities such as customer events, sales meetings, POS, store openings, etc.

In a market where using a well-known spokesperson has been common practice since the early days of made-in-Quebec advertising, choosing the right celebrity is critical. But only by using him or her with imagination will you ensure your message gets noticed.