



How to Choose the Right Athlete to Endorse Your Brand

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Sports athletes and celebrities draw huge attention from corporate sponsors and media since they appeal to many demographics. An athlete endorsing a product can transform a brand (of course, it can also backfire and create an undesired outcome).

Initially, the endorsement creates exposure for the brand. From that starting point, it can then achieve an array of positive results – from association to recognition, consideration, favorability, loyalty and ultimately to increased sales of a product. It is thought that consumers purchase athlete endorsed products based on a number of reasons. These include enjoyment of the sport, entertainment value, respect of the athlete, and even nostalgia.

So, if that is the logic of endorsements, **who would you choose to endorse your product? What attributes do brands look for in an athlete?**

In a successful product endorsement, the athlete does so much more than sell the product. The athlete actually becomes a 'human brand' in his or her own right. The key attributes can be broken down into two groupings – those you see on the field and those off of it – and these two groupings have to be wrapped in consistency and authenticity. Derek Jeter's endorsement of Gillette Fusion, for instance, must appear genuine and authentic. If not, then Jeter won't persuade you to buy the razors. The perceived benefits will not be there.

On-field attributes

- ◆ Performance quality
- ◆ Winning record
- ◆ Skill
- ◆ Style
- ◆ Potential

These attributes speak for themselves. Brands want their endorsers to be successful, to be skillful and to play the game in style. This explains why champion basketball player Michael Jordan's association with Nike was so successful. Linking with the very best in the game proved to be a successful strategy for Nike. Jordan became arguably the most recognized athlete on the planet and Nike became the stand alone leader in sports shoe sales.

You also need to look at potential. Tennis champion Maria Sharapova signed endorsements with Nike and Prince rackets at the ages of 11 and 14, respectively. At the age of just 17 she won her first major and later became world number one. She quickly gave positive returns to those brands that supported her at a young age.

In some cases, companies will try to predict who the next big star will be. For example, New Zealand hosted the World Cup of rugby in 2011. With a huge year looming for the game, Adidas approached New Zealand player Sonny Bill Williams, even though he was mostly a newcomer to the scene. Adidas eventually signed Williams to join a group of global superstar athletes including David Beckham and Lionel Messi (from soccer) and Dwight Howard and Derrick Rose (from the NBA). It is perhaps the largest endorsement ever for a rugby player.

Off-field attributes

- ◆ Personality
- ◆ Attractiveness
- ◆ Uniqueness or unique personal background
- ◆ Role model
- ◆ Relationship with fans

Brands should look for athletes who possess most of the off-field attributes listed above. Obviously, athletes are human beings with shortcomings, but companies want those shortcomings to be limited (and out of the spotlight). Athletes can sometimes appear bullet proof, but that's never the case. Even superstar athletes like Tiger Woods can be knocked from their pedestal. Due to his mistakes, Tiger Woods lost about \$22 million in endorsements when companies like AT&T, Gatorade, and Accenture all dropped him. As it turns out, Woods is still the biggest earner in terms of product endorsements in world sports. Woods now earns about \$70 million (most of that from Nike) in endorsements, according to *Sports Illustrated*.

David Beckham is a classic case of an athlete having a personality, the looks and a relationship with fans that strongly appeals to brands and products. Beckham, in his late 30s, no longer plays in the strongest leagues in soccer. So, you could argue that his on-field attributes are not as high as they once were. However, Beckham still earns around \$40 million a year and much of that income is derived from product endorsements.

In the end, if a company feels that an athlete is reflecting its brand in a positive way and it is resulting in sales, then the company will pay big money to keep that athlete as a spokesperson. It's not without risk, of course... lack of success on the field or scandals off of the field can quickly sour an athlete's reputation. But the rewards of having a beloved sports star sing your praises is so high that athletic endorsements will be a key part of marketing for generations to come.

Source: <http://www.sportsnetworker.com/2011/02/15/athlete-brand-endorsements/>

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