

# Brand Sense Partners

The Latest By Megan Elliott *The Licensing Book* December 01, 2007

## Licensing's Walk of Fame

**With instant name recognition and constant media presence, celebrities are top targets for brand extensions. Consumers love products endorsed by the rich and famous, and some of those celebs even continue to have lucrative careers from beyond the grave. Find out what it takes for a star to move from the red carpet to the retail aisle.**

It seems like it would be an instant recipe for success: Find a hot celebrity, slap their name or photo on a products, and watch it fly off the shelves. But in the high-profile world of celebrity licensing, finding success is not always that simple. The fallout from bad publicity or a shift in the attention of fans can negatively affect the value of a celebrity brand. Yet with the right person and a carefully crafted approach to licensing, celebrity brand extensions can be successful.

"We create a stand-alone brand with a name and brand identity. It's not so overtly about the celebrity, so it can be sold to people who don't necessarily think of themselves as hardcore fans of the celebrity" says Ramez Toubassy, president of Brand Sense Partners. Brand Sense has developed lucrative brand extensions for celebrities like Britney Spears, and is currently working on new partnerships for Sheryl Crow and Desperate Housewives star Nicolette Sheridan.

For Crow, Brand Sense has created the Bootheel Trading Co. brand, which will launch next fall with a mid-tier denim line in partnership with Western Glove Works. Eventually, the brand may expand to other categories like footwear and accessories.

Though the target consumer for the denim line is a 25 to 34 year-old woman who lives in middle America, Toubassy says that Crow's broad appeal will likely propel the brand to wider-reaching success.

In developing a brand identity for the singer, Brand Sense employed a formula that it has used to good effect in the past. It is one that helps guard against the pitfalls of fame and ensures a steady stream of revenue for everyone involved in the licensing agreement. Even though Britney Spears, for example, has suffered from a mountain of bad publicity over the past year, her fragrances have nonetheless continued to sell well. Her Curious and Believe scents have done hundreds of millions of dollars at retail despite her fall from grace in the media, says Toubassy.

"The smart celebrities are doing licensing for exactly that reason – to have an income stream that continues whatever happens to be going on in their core movie or music career," he explains. "Most of these celebrities are sophisticated enough to know that they may not be America's darling tomorrow."

But not every celebrity is guaranteed to find long-term success with a licensing program. Stars have to have a unique quality that appeals to a broad base of consumers, be able to fill a particular market niche and really be passionate about supporting the products that their name is attached to.

"We hand pick the celebrities that we want, because we really want to find the ones that have a certain image and look, and have a uniqueness to a certain market," says Rob Stone, president of Stone America. Stone America is currently concentrating on expanding its licensing programs for Olympic swimmer Amanda Beard and actress Jennifer Love Hewitt.

"Amanda is really the first Olympic athlete that has successfully been able to capture her popularity and take it to another level as far as branding," explains Stone. Beard hopes to capitalize both on her success as an athlete, as well as on the fame she's achieved as a Playboy cover model and through her appearances in Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition and Maxim. The Amanda Beard Signature Lifestyle Collection will include products like apparel, accessories, health and beauty products, jewelry, calendars, posters, eyewear, exercise equipment and instructional DVDs, and is beginning to hit stores now.

Jennifer Love Hewitt, on the other hand, is reaching out to teen girls who are seeking elegant evening dress up clothes. Her approach is different from the many celebrities who have opted to develop casual-wear for that demographic.

"She wants to be able to show girls that it's really cool and classy and elegant to dress up at night to go out," says Stone. "This is a real elegant, timeless, Audrey Hepburn-esque type look." The Jennifer Love Hewitt collection will be a direct-to-retail initiative and hit stores for the 2008 back-to-school season.

Both Toubassy and Stone agree that the key in celebrity licensing is focusing on a star's unique qualities, avoiding what Stone calls "ambush licensing," and finding someone who is truly committed to the licensing program.

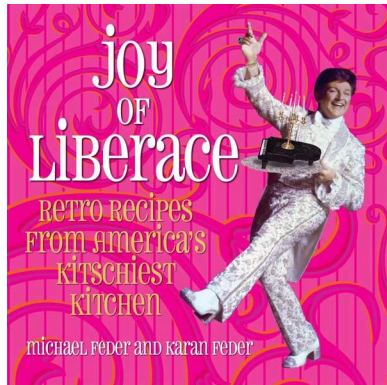
"There's nothing worse than a celebrity affixing their name to something in a category and then using a product made by someone else," says Toubassy. "And you see it all the time."

For deceased celebrities, the problem is not guarding against the antics of an unruly star, but figuring out how to keep someone who has been dead for years in the public eye.

"The biggest challenge is that we don't have him available to us to make appearances and go on tour," says Laura Lizer, manager of the Dean Martin Trust. While new technological innovations can help – last winter Martin, who died in 1995, went on a virtual tour with Martina McBride – dealing with a finite quantity of material is a major obstacle. "It's very difficult, time consuming, costly and it's the biggest challenge," says Lizer.

**Despite the unique difficulties that they present in terms of licensing, old icons often strike a chord in younger**

consumers, Dean Martin has tens of thousands of MySpace friends, and his indelible charisma and style have endeared him to a new generation of fans. Similarly, The Liberace Museum and Foundation has reinvigorated the licensing program for the famous pianist in recent years, crafting a new identity for him as the “King of Bling.”

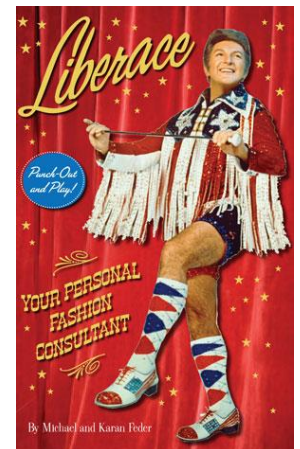


“You’ve got his traditional, aging fanbase, that want to see him in one light, and then you’ve got the potential to reintroduce him to the younger generation in a more nostalgic, camp, kitschy kind of way,” explains Darin Hollingsworth, executive director of the Liberace Foundation and Museum.

The solution has been to introduce products that appeal to the younger generation, such as a line of Liberace sneakers from Kashi Kicks that launched at MAGIC in August (one shoe even features a removable cape), and to also move into categories that will appeal to the more traditional Liberace fan, with products like Pink Piano Hot Chocolate Mix and Luminous Lemon Drop Martini Mix.

Because The Liberace Foundation is a non-profit organization (all the profits from the sale of licensed goods go to support scholarships in the arts), it was important to find a licensing agent that understood the organization’s unique situation. Fame Farm approached the Foundation about developing a licensing program for Liberace, and Hollingsworth says that Michael and Karen Feder, the team behind Fame Farm, have been an invaluable resource because of their passion for the brand.

“Fame Farm came forward to my predecessor and said, ‘this is a brand we believe we can really take to market in a fantastic way,’” he says. The Feders have even authored two Liberace books, *Joy of Liberace: Retro Recipes from America’s Kitschiest Kitchen* and *Liberace: Your Personal Fashion Consultant*.



“They see the market potential that exists for the brand,” says Hollingsworth.

Elvis Presley has had the kind of licensing success that most celebrity brands can only dream of. More than 600,000 people will visit Graceland this year, and Elvis Presley Enterprises (EPE) has hundreds of partnerships with companies like Hershey’s, MeadWestvaco and American Greetings. Recent deals include partnerships with 3eTrading, David Carey Inc. Santa’s Best, Little Earth and Wilson’s Leather. But even EPE has to take the time to remind people that the Elvis brand is still current.

“Our biggest challenge is educating retail buyers, some of whom were not yet born when Elvis was still performing,” says Carol Butler, vice president of international licensing for EPE. “Some people have a pre-conceived perception that since Elvis has been gone 30 years, the demand for his music, movies and merchandise has passed. But this group has not yet taken the time to understand the Elvis phenomenon. Elvis is as current today as he has ever been.”

The true advantage for those active in celebrity licensing is the built-in PR machine that exists for those who have already made their mark in fields like film and television. That media presence keeps celebrities in the public eye and is key in inspiring consumers to check out their licensed products.

“I don’t want to say that all press is good press,” says Toubassy. “But I definitely would say most press is good press.”

However, while a star’s name can get consumers to pick up a product, it’s ultimately quality and price that will get them to open up their wallet. Successful brand extensions sell briskly not because of the name on the package, but what’s inside.

“A celebrity can get a consumer to a product at retail to check it out, but a celebrity’s involvement cannot get most consumers to actually buy the product,” says Toubassy. “The product has to sell itself.”