

The very public risks of celebrity endorsements



Pam Garfield

Vice President and General Manager, Patient Health Perspectives, LLC
Seattle, WA

THE NEGATIVE attention surrounding Paula Deen’s surprise Type 2 diabetes confession (three years late) and her introduction as a pharma spokesperson have kept many crisis management teams busy. But this situation highlights a bigger issue that has been brewing, and it’s time for our industry to face it head-on.

The question: Should celebrities be enlisted to promote pharmaceutical brands?

Americans love celebrities. In the last decade, a new type of “journalism” has evolved, focusing exclusively on watching every move celebrities make. At the same time, a new category of celebrity

has emerged with the rise of reality TV, and these “celebrities” don’t need to have any skills or accomplishments. As millions of viewers tune in to watch housewives, teenage moms, and would-be fashion designers, it seems “infamous” and “famous” are merging.

With so much emphasis on celebrity culture, it’s no surprise that anyone who can possibly swing it is angling for an endorsement deal. And, with so many famous faces to go around, celebrities are promoting everything from free public

sions really on par with choosing between a BMW and a Mercedes? And what happens when a celebrity goes off message, gets a DUI, or is photographed eating a hamburger?

Celebrities can have a place in the marketing mix. They can raise awareness of the need for screenings or particular diseases with a single interview or PSA. And the right celebrity can capture the attention of a target demographic with lightening speed. But a marketer who ties a celebrity to a specific brand does so at great risk.

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restrooms (Kim Kardashian for Charmin) to artificial butter (Ozzy Osbourne for I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter).

But are pharmaceutical products really in the same category as mascara, cars, toilet paper, and margarine? Are healthcare deci-

There is a better way. For delivering information about your brand, nothing can beat the authenticity of a real patient, sharing real success, with real passion —without compensation or a hidden agenda. Healthcare is not entertainment. It’s real life. Let’s give it a real voice.



Patient Health Perspectives, LLC

Pam Garfield | Vice President and General Manager
Patient Health Perspectives, LLC
206.971.0506
E-mail: Pam@PHperspectives.com
www.PHperspectives.com