

## CELEBRITIES ABANDONED FOR ORDINARY FOLKS – BETTER VALUE FOR MONEY, SAY ADVERTISERS



Tiger Woods, before he fell from grace was the face of Buick and the automaker reportedly paid him upward of \$50 million to promote its products. When his infidelity brought him into the news for the wrong reasons and when General Motors Vice-chairman Bob Lutz bluntly remarked, that Tiger Woods “did little to help sell cars.” Questions arose, whether the huge sums of money spent on celebrities was really worth it and advertisers began to explore alternate options. Buick unceremoniously dumped Woods and started featuring “real people,” or ordinary folk, in its marketing campaigns. Craig Bierley, Buick’s director of advertising and promotions said, “I don’t anticipate us going back and having a relationship with a celebrity like Tiger Woods again—I’m not sure anyone really believed that Tiger Woods drove a Buick. I think you start to push the limits of credibility. There are more effective ways of communicating with the consumer without using celebrities, with really great creative.” Millward Brown, reports that only 10 percent of the ads feature celebrities nowadays, that is one in ten ads, from a peak of 19 percent in 2004. This shows that Buick is not the only one that has had a change of heart and loyalty. Scandals keep stalking celebrities and a scandal, even if it not of the phenomenal size that Woods found himself in, can spell disaster for an advertiser and spell curtains to any ad campaign. Ann Green, senior partner for client solutions said, “Advertisers as a whole have to be very smart and very aggressive about how they spend every single dollar,” she says. “A bad phase in a celebrity’s life can damage a brand’s image and significantly erode the return they receive on their marketing investments.” Advertisers believe that when real people are used along with a social message, people relate to it and its impact is even greater. Dove had replaced the –perfect celebrity bodies, with average American women and encouraged women to accept their bodies as they are. A report by Ace Metrix based on 2,600 television ads revealed that non-celebrity ads were more effective than celebrity ads. Celebrity ads can be successful if the right individual and the ad context are in consonance with one another – Ads featuring Charlie Sheen are an example of how a celebrity’s negative image can be used effectively. Branding expert Eli Portnoy says that many celebrities find it difficult to get endorsements, “People have told me, celebrities are surprised they can’t get hired. I know of a couple of fairly A-list celebrities who are looking for endorsement work and are just getting turned down.” However, celebrity endorsements will always be there. They can be expensive, but they are known faces and the rewards too far outweigh the risks. Advertisers haven’t kissed all celebrities goodbye or forsaken them totally. But stricter moral clauses are being installed in their contracts and advertisers are becoming more judicious and cautious. Celebrities can no longer take themselves for granted. But it is also true, that there monopolistic hold on the ad mark has been loosened and there are many more contenders for that, once exclusive, domain.