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BrandAnimation: Equal Opportunity Positive Branding

By Erik Hauser



It's Saturday and I'm working on a column that was supposed to be turned in two days ago while getting the ultimate NFL junkie's fix: the 2006 NFL Draft on ESPN.

This is simultaneously the most boring and the most interesting thing on television all year. Take, for instance, that the can't-miss, best-in-years, already-signed-with-Adidas consensus top pick in the draft ... was not going to be picked first! To put this in perspective, imagine if the producers of "Lost" had a chance to cast Johnny Depp as the leader of the Others but instead chose me. It could be that big.

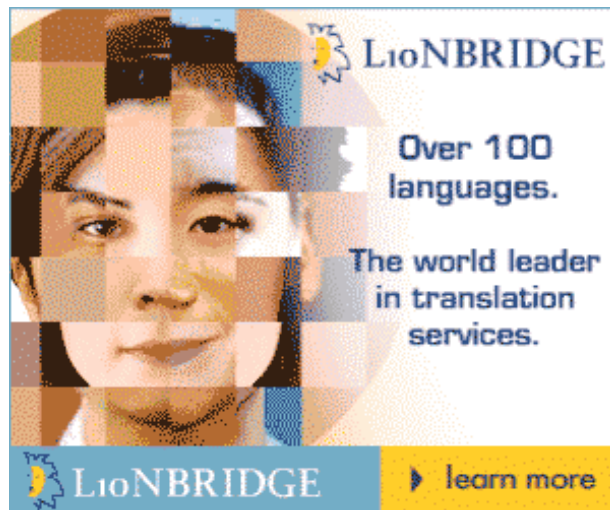
Now what do brands such as Adidas, Hummer, and Subway, who have already signed the previously assumed Houston-bound Reggie Bush to marketing deals, do with someone who will be playing in New Orleans, the 43rd largest TV market?

From Reggie Bush to Mia Hamm to Derek Jeter to Jeff Gordon, athletes sell products. And if you look carefully, you will see that for every major endorsement deal is the carefully managed image of an athlete. And if Reggie Bush and LeBron James are any indication, the cultivation and management of a star athlete's image is starting earlier and earlier. The marketability of athletes, as with any other celebrity endorser, is completely dependant upon a very carefully maintained image that is aligned with the brand and products they are selling.

Companies usually put an enormous amount of thought and research into determining who should endorse their brand. They find the perfect face for TV, the perfect voice for radio—people who fully embody the brand essence.

(On a side note, I believe it should be mandatory to use Barry White for all radio ads. I mean, look at that use experiment in England where the scientists used Barry White's voice to increase the sexual activity among sharks in captivity. Now that's what I call smooth.)

In the world of marketing, however, there is a great divide between the mass-medium channels and the rest of the marketing media when it comes to brand ambassadors. This divide results from companies' not using EOPB: Equal Opportunity Positive Branding. Brands understand the importance of having the ideal person on

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TV and radio but not when it comes to nontraditional media. When brands spend millions of dollars to get their products or services in the hands of their target market, how do they justify overlooking the last mile of interaction? While you can easily blame the brand, I think the ultimate responsibility falls on the agencies.

Take event marketing. All too often agencies develop great field programs but spend a large portion of the money at the administration level. When it's time to execute, an inexperienced account executive handles an undertrained field staff. This has been a source of frustration for me for years because, way back in the day, I was the one running around the country handing out samples and collateral. Generally my direct supervision was inexperienced and ineffective. As a result, so were many of my fellow field staffers. Countless cases of soda and boxes of premiums "disappear" on the road. And these staffers are supposed to be your "brand ambassadors"—the face of your brand taken to where your consumers live, work, and play.

Over the course of a large-scale program, the brand ambassadors will have extended contact with tens of thousands of consumers. Can the same be said for [John Madden](#)? Putting poorly trained, poorly supervised promotional staff in the field is only one example of not using EPBO. Don't get me started on customer service and store employees.

So we're at the point where a brand just spent \$5 million on a field-marketing program and now has undertrained, inexperienced field people trying to communicate their message. Does this make sense to you?

The perfect representative on TV (famous or not), the perfect voice on radio (famous or not), but in the field just some guy/gal who happened to have a spot open during the day and needed some extra cash. For EOPB, the industry needs to pay much closer attention to all its consumer touch points, as they are much more likely to influence purchase than Reggie Bush ever will.

Erik Hauser is creative director/founder of San Francisco-based marketing firm [Swivel Media](#) and founder of [IXMA](#), the International Experiential Marketing Association. He also moderates the [Experiential Marketing Forum](#) and pens the biweekly [BrandAnimation](#) column for CHIEF MARKETER.

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