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Hook Your Store to a Star

How to use local celebrity endorsements to generate word-of-mouth advertising and traffic.

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In our celebrity-obsessed culture, there can be no more powerful marketing initiative for a retail jeweler than establishing a sponsor relationship with a celebrity.

For the past four years, two celebrities local to my retail location in Newtown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, have worn my jewelry: Lynn Doyle, host and executive producer of *CN8's, "It's Your Call With Lynn Doyle,"* an issue-oriented television talk show; and former professional football player and Super Bowl champion Vaughn Hebron, who appears weekly on the *Comcast SportsNet* program, "*Eagles Post Game Live.*" I met the two under different circumstances and today regard them both as personal friends. But it was more than friendship that led to what have become mutually beneficial relationships.

Doyle was a customer in my store long before she started wearing my jewelry on the air. When she first visited, I introduced myself and, as I do with all of my customers, I asked a lot of questions about her jewelry needs and tastes. She bought a few pieces and began to stop by fairly regularly. Over time, I began loaning her special pieces for important events, such as an Emmy presentation, and she began to rely on me more for her jewelry needs. It was a natural progression when she started wearing my jewelry on the air.

Doyle wears only my jewelry on her program, which airs six nights a week with a viewing audience from Maine to Virginia, including Washington, D.C. I am credited on each program as the supplier of her jewelry, either through a visual ad, vocal announcement, or in the program credits. She also wears my jewelry for all of her public appearances and speaking engagements, and for those situations I am either credited in the program or vocally acknowledged.

Fate played more of a role in the development of my relationship with Vaughn Hebron. When Hebron moved into our neighborhood he was playing with the Denver Broncos and was on the cusp of a Super Bowl championship. We became friendly with his family—so friendly, in fact, that he asked me to design his girlfriend's engagement ring and flew me and my then 13-year-old son to the 1999 Denver Broncos Super Bowl game, where the night before his team won the game, he presented the ring and proposed to his girlfriend. (Heady stuff for a small town jeweler like me!)

After Hebron retired from football and established himself as a broadcast personality, I asked if he would wear my jewelry for on air appearances and special events. As a commentator on the Eagles program, which airs weekly after each game throughout the regular and post-season, he usually wears a combination of 4

carat diamond stud earrings and various cuff links. At the end of the program, I am credited as his jewelry sponsor through a vocal "shout-out," in which the other commentators, including Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell, frequently participate. I've even appeared on the show myself to participate in the closing ritual, which I must say I found tremendously satisfying.

Reflecting on these sponsorships, it's evident they have had tremendous impact on my business. Not a week goes by that someone doesn't enter my store and mention that they heard my name, or inquire about a piece of jewelry that Doyle or Hebron wore during a television appearance. Personal friends and associates of both have been referred to me for their jewelry needs. My visibility within Bucks County, and indeed the greater Philadelphia region, has skyrocketed, spawning word-of-mouth advertising that is a hundred times more worthwhile than the results of any direct mail or print advertising dollars I have spent.

Sponsor Relationships

Based on my experience, I offer the following advice for other jewelers seeking similar sponsor relationships:

Operate your business with integrity and professionalism. As a well-known Bucks County resident, Lynn Doyle would never have walked into my store was it not for my professional reputation within the community. Continually educate and update your gemologist and appraiser certifications with professional organizations.

Be visible and involved in your community. Many celebrities are involved with local charitable associations and civic activities. Become involved with these associations in meaningful ways to increase your visibility and build your reputation.

Take the direct approach. If your prospective celebrity is not a customer or you are not mutually involved in any other activities, send a letter or e-mail proposing the sponsor relationship and how it could be mutually beneficial. Include detailed biographical information and explain how you distinguish yourself among other jewelers. Follow up with a phone call and an invitation to your store to look at your collections and discuss a potential arrangement.

Consider a contract. My arrangements were cemented on a handshake and a promise, which has worked out well for us. However, if you're dealing with the celebrity's agent or other representative, or if you feel uncomfortable not defining each party's responsibilities and limitations, you might want to consider developing a legal contract. Items to include might be timing and duration of the jewelry loan period, how you would be credited or promoted as the sponsor jeweler, arrangements for non-televised appearances and events, etc.

Once the relationship is defined, some extra things to keep in mind: Make sure the jewelry is big! Modest rings and bracelets don't cut it on the television screen. Choose large, showy pieces, such as necklaces and earrings, which will be noticed by viewers.

Consult with your insurer to make certain you're covered for any significant pieces you're loaning out. If you're worried about losing items of lesser value, than you probably shouldn't be loaning jewelry in the first place.

Finally, don't despair if you're unable to establish the sponsorship with your celebrity of choice. Loaning

jewelry to your very best customers for special events and parties can deliver a similar impact. Your act of goodwill and generosity will undoubtedly pay generous dividends when your customer is asked, "Where in the world did you get that gorgeous necklace?"

David Craig Rotenberg is the owner of David Craig Jewelers in Newtown, Pennsylvania, which he has operated for the past 25 years. A member of the American Gem Society, he is the past president of its Jewelers Education Foundation. He is a certified gemologist appraiser and is one of the only jewelers in the country who is a certified triple CAPP (certified appraiser of personal property) in gemstones and jewelry. Rotenberg can be reached at david@davidcraigjewelers.com.

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