

# CELEBRITY STAR POWER: When does it work?

*With celebrity-brand partnerships playing a significant role in 21st century marketing, Charlotte Cowan explores which liquor brands and categories are benefitting the most from celebrity backing.*



While celebrities jumping on the liquor bandwagon isn't a new thing, the proliferation of famous faces in the world of drinks

has grown exponentially over the last few years.

Since Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt's launch of Miraval Rosé in 2011, there is now a huge amount of wine produced by and/or endorsed by famous faces, including Sarah Jessica Parker, Kylie Minogue, Post Malone, John Legend, Jon Bon Jovi and *Godfather* director Francis Ford Coppola.

Cameron Diaz is the latest Hollywood A-listener to launch a wine company. Together with businesswoman Katherine Power, Diaz recently unveiled Avaline – an organic wine brand which includes French Rosé and a Spanish white, both described as “clean”, with no added sugar.

In New Zealand, wine company Invivo & Co began a collaboration with UK chat king Graham Norton in 2011 and in 2014 they produced their first wine together under the Graham Norton's Own brand – a Sauvignon Blanc.

Invivo and Graham Norton have since produced a South Australian Shiraz, New Zealand Rosé, Italian Prosecco and Graham Norton Pink and Irish Dry Gin.



Invivo & Co joined forces with *Sex and the City* star Sarah Jessica Parker in 2019

and have recently announced they are set to produce their 10 millionth bottle of wine this year.

More recently, in 2019, Invivo & Co joined forces with *Sex and the City* star Sarah Jessica Parker to create a new Sauvignon Blanc under the Invivo X brand, and this year they added a Rosé to the mix. The Sauvignon Blanc has gone on to win a number of local international awards for both the wine and the label which features an X drawn in acrylic paint by Parker.

“[Celebrity involvement in the brand] has opened doors with buyers and customers all around the world, without our partners it would have been nearly impossible,” says Tim Lightbourne, co-founder of Invivo & Co.

According to research from global liquor analysis company, The IWSR, celebrity collaborations and endorsements with genuine celebrity interest or investment can help propel liquor categories forward. In the US, tequila is a prime example.

Along with the premiumisation of tequila

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(by brands such as Patrón), celebrity influence from A-listers including George Clooney, Chris Noth, Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson and Sean 'P Diddy' Combs has meant the category has seen rapid growth in the last few years.

Clooney co-founded Casamigos Tequila in 2013 and IWSR data shows that tequila volumes in the US grew 42.2% between 2014 and 2019. Volumes are forecast to grow by another five million nine-litre cases by 2024.

Further research recorded by the IWSR shows that from 2018 to 2019, there was a 31.7% volume surge of tequilas endorsed by influencers.

And leveraging the power of celebrities as 'influencers' in ad campaigns has a strong ability to capture consumer attention when other advertising may fail.

According to data from US brand researchers Kantar (formerly Millward Brown), advertising featuring celebrities perform better on key measures analysed than those without a celebrity.

For example, leading up to 2014, US bourbon brand Jim Beam had suffered from years of declining sales. It had picked up the reputation of a cheap 'party fuel' and, as a result, had grown increasingly irrelevant to millennials.

In February 2014, advertising agency StrawberryFrog announced actress Mila Kunis as the new face of Jim Beam. She was featured in a number of ads and videos for the brand and was the first woman ever to be featured in a marketing and advertising campaign for an iconic American bourbon.

"We partnered with a genuine bourbon drinker worthy of every female and male's attention," said StrawberryFrog.

"Not just another gorgeous talking head, the choice of Mila also genuinely represented our movement against

the patriarchy associated with drinking bourbon for equality and modern brand."

According to research from Kantar, following the campaign, which has been labelled "the greatest result in the Jim Beam brand", bringing Kunis on board "was an efficient use of the brand's marketing budget, and delivered a greater return on investment in both the short term and the long term."

However, not all celebrities are made equal. The choice of celebrity in ad campaigns – and their reputation now and in the future – can significantly affect sales.

Caro Jensen from Sip NZ told *The Shout NZ*: "A great fit can boost a brand immensely, while a bad one can damage it forever."

One positive case is Ryan Reynolds who, in 2018, became the owner of American craft brand Aviation Gin. Gin volumes in the US declined 6.5% between 2009 and 2014, but this decline softened to 0.3% from 2014 to 2019.

According to IWSR, Reynolds uses his trademark humour to connect his fans to Aviation through videos and television appearances and data shows that his involvement in the brand has had a significant impact on the brand's consumption in the US. The brand has been so successful that last month, Diageo purchased it for more than US\$600 million.

"Consumers can tell if someone is being paid to promote a product versus really excited about sharing something they've had a hand in producing or genuinely love drinking," says Brandy Rand, IWSR Chief Operating Officer for the Americas.

"In some cases, like Matthew McConaughey and Wild Turkey or Ryan Reynolds and Aviation, scripted commercials or video shorts actually reflect the actors' talent for producing entertainment – if they can capture consumer attention through well-curated content (especially humour) it's also a win."

However, the downside to celebrity endorsement is the constant threat of celebrity scandal. Caro Jensen says other



Mila Kunis was the first woman to be featured in a campaign for an iconic American bourbon





George Clooney co-founded Casamigos Tequila in 2013

## THREE KEY QUESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE USE OF CELEBRITIES:

### Who is the celebrity?

It's important to establish how well known they are among your target audience. Overall, the effect of the fame of the celebrities differs by country: for instance, in the US and UK, well known celebrities can help slightly with branding. However, in China (Shanghai) there is little difference in key measures whether the celebrity is well recognised or not.

### Is the celebrity well liked?

While it isn't essential for a celebrity to be liked, this can have a significant impact on the emotional response to an ad. The effectiveness of likeable celebrities is more similar across countries: enjoyment is higher when the celebrity is liked, in all countries

### What does the celebrity represent?

It's important to understand how well the celebrity fits with the brand, or with where you want to take the brand. When the celebrity is perceived to be appropriate, communication can be enhanced. The 'right fit' celebrity can enhance key measures.

*\*Excerpt from Kantar's [Millward Brown] 'Celebrity-based ad campaigns: What are the pros and cons?'*

brand deals, previous projects and certain lifestyles of that person in the past might be detrimental to brands now.

"Although the celebrity collaboration might be for a limited time only, it's important to do your research when choosing a celebrity to help endorse your brand," she says.

According to research done by Stefan Hock, a marketing professor at the University of Connecticut, from 1988 to 2016 there were 128 incidents involving 230 publicly traded US companies where celebrity endorsers generated negative publicity. Fifty-nine percent of the endorsers were athletes, 24% TV or radio personalities, and 17% musicians; 70% were male and half the incidents occurred from 2010 to 2016, "suggesting that the pace of celebrity scandals has accelerated".

The boom of social media has had significant influence in that respect as it is a powerful platform for direct celebrity-to-consumer influence.

Invivo & Co's Tim Lightbourne says their wine company has strong brand awareness through their partners' following on social media.

"In the case of Graham Norton and Sarah Jessica Parker, they have over 7.5 million combined fans on social media who are excited when we launch a new wine!" he says.

But conversely, whatever a celebrity has said or done in their past is easily found and brought to the public eye.

Bob Williams, CEO of Burns Entertainment, told *Harvard Business Review* that looking at a celebrity's social media history is one way companies perform due diligence.

"It's impossible to completely avoid the risk of scandal; few celebrities are squeaky clean," he said.

"The best approach is to invest in the selection process and then draw up a contract with a very strong morals clause and the ability to exit quickly if necessary."

Brands can also use the power of social media to help choose the right celebrity who will fit their marketing campaign.

"Involve your followers," says Caro Jensen. "Ask them who you should team-up with, check if any celebrities are following you and who your followers are engaging with."

But ultimately, the prevailing message when it comes to star power behind a liquor brand is that the appeal of the celebrity to the consumer will always come first.

"It's less about consumers believing the connection between the brand and celebrity and more about the celebrity's appeal to consumers," says IWSR's Brandy Rand.

So how can you find the right celebrity?

Dede Fitch, Global Analyst at Kantar, says finding the right celebrity ally is "as much art as science".

"The biggest, most familiar names may lend cachet, but they carry a hefty price tag," she said in a report. "The character of the trendiest new star is often untested and may prove to be a liability.

"A brand owner looking for a safe but successful association might do well to look further back in the celebrity pack for the person who can best represent the brand's values and aspirations.

"The degree to which the character matches the needs of the brand will prove to be much more compelling than fame alone."

Invivo & Co's Tim Lightbourne says it's important to choose a celebrity partner that is 100% in on the project and fully involved.

"Their level of involvement means that they can offer their input on the brand's direction," he says.

"Take your time choosing your partner, make sure they're in it for the long term and they're not already aligned with too many other brands.

"And make their participation with your brand authentic and not gimmicky."

With star power shown to boost sales internationally, positive celebrity involvement in the liquor industry seems likely to remain a significant part of future liquor marketing and advertising. ■

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