

Brokering with The Stars: A View From Hollywood

by Hank Stewart

Tim Cavanaugh knows celebrities. He's been around them for more than 20 years. He knows them, their agents, their managers, their publicists. He is a celebrity broker.

For the sake of clarification, a celebrity broker unites a product or cause with a celebrity. Unlike an agent, a celebrity broker does not represent any specific list of clients. He can pitch any celebrity at any time.

Cavanaugh, president of Cavanaugh & Associates, Inc., in Hollywood, explains. "I'm more like an extended arm or PR or advertising," he says. An advertiser might come to Cavanaugh with an idea, say, to hire Oprah Winfrey to endorse their rocket-propelled grenades for \$20 a year. Cavanaugh would first check on the celebrity's "availability and willingness" to participate. Should things not pan out, Cavanaugh would then research to see which celebrity might be more appropriate for the product and budget. He does the same thing for causes.

"Most celebrities want to be known for some type of cause," Cavanaugh says. He believes this can help further the cause, provided the celebrity involved is genuinely passionate about the topic. "We're a society fascinated with celebrities, and when you've got someone out there talking about something, it encourages people to get involved."

As for the evolution of using celebrities for marketing purposes (cause or commercial), Cavanaugh sites two trends. The first springs from the growing popularity of reality TV shows. Cavanaugh says these shows have created a new

breed of "pseudo-celebrities" (a recent Google search on Omarosa from "The Apprentice" turned up over 200,000 results). "I book a lot of them these days," Cavanaugh says. "They're real people, and viewers can connect with them."

Cavanaugh also notes how the reality TV trend has now infiltrated the celebrity realm with shows that have celebrities dancing, skating, cooking, log-splitting, etc., under the "...With the Stars" banner.

The second celebrity trend Cavanaugh mentions is the satellite media tour (SMT). The official definition of an SMT, as described by Medialink, is "an interview with an author, performer, executive or other spokesperson promoting an upcoming event, product, movie or book release. SMTs generally are conducted from a studio but can originate from remote locations and may be aired live by the television station or recorded for a later airing."

Cavanaugh cites the SMT as an effective way to get the impact of a celebrity endorsement at a fraction of the cost. "You book a celebrity for three to four hours, put them in a studio, and they can conduct 30 three-minute interviews in one morning, hitting 30 different local markets. You can hire a celebrity for \$100,000 or \$200,000 for one day, instead of millions of dollars for a year."

Cavanaugh doesn't see America's interest in celebrity fading anytime soon. "There is a certain fascination with celebrity in general, and I don't think that will change," he says.