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MARKETING / BRUCE HOROVITZ

Matchmaker Was First to Rock Ad World

Coca-Cola might not have had to hire Hollywood super-agent Michael Ovitz last week if eight years ago it had only listened to Jay Coleman.

Jay who?

Coleman is hardly a household name. But the rock superstars that his New York music-marketing firm Rockbill has linked up with Pepsi-Cola certainly are. He placed Michael Jackson at Pepsi's doorstep. He brought Lionel Richie to Pepsi at the peak of the singer's career. And it was Coleman who, last summer, persuaded Pepsi to sign on with rapper M. C. Hammer.

Eight years ago, before it was common for major advertisers to keep company with rock stars, Coleman approached Coke executives about signing on Jackson. They cordially listened, then declined. Since that time, he has brought a parade of rock stars to Pepsi.

And now Coke-looking to improve its global image is paying the price. In fact, Coke admitted as much last week when it hired powerful Creative Artists Agency to help shape-or perhaps even reshape-its global image.

Just as intriguing as the things Coke has done wrong in same recent marketing ventures are the many things that archrival Pepsi has done right. Pepsi's New York ad agency consistently creates "big idea" campaigns that seem to take on a life of their own.

Its top executives have left the door open to risk, which has occasionally backfired but more often paid off handsomely. And Pepsi has time and again latched on to rock stars and celebrities at the peak of their popularity.

"Some agencies use celebrities as golden dog tags, but we put together a package that always starts with an idea," said Philip B. Dusenberry, chairman and chief executive of the New York office of BBDO Worldwide, Pepsi's longtime agency. "The trick is to only use celebrities in the context of a big idea."

Pepsi's agency has seldom been lacking for big ideas. Central among those ideas is to consistently place superstars in the most human of situations-such as Michael Jackson running into an equally surprised look-alike on the street, or Michael J. Fox climbing out of windows and facing all sorts of hazards just to bring his gorgeous new neighbor a Diet Pepsi.

But Coleman says the right idea-and the right celebrity-are equally important.

Coleman was among the first to coax the rock world to sell out to the corporate world. It was Coleman who, in 1981, persuaded Jovan fragrance to sponsor the Rolling Stone's concert tour. Nothing on such a dramatic scale had been done before between a major advertiser and a rock group, industry sources say.

Although Coleman is no Ovitz and for that matter, has few connections in Hollywood—he is plugged into the rock world. And for soft-drink makers, eager to tap the thinking of teen-agers, rock is where the action is.

Coleman first began to recognize the power of rock music as a marketing tool about 20 years ago when he was in college. He was able to persuade advertisers such as Budweiser to buy ad space on posters that he handed out at rock concerts. "Once I started Rockbill, it took me about five years to persuade the ad community that rock 'n' roll was kosher," Coleman said. Still, in 1983, mid-level marketing executives at Coke and Pepsi nixed his proposal to sponsor

Michael Jackson's "Victory Tour." That's when Coleman directly approached Roger Enrico, then president and chief executive at Pepsi. Enrico bit. And about \$5 million later, Pepsi had the nation's hottest pop singer in its pocket.

In 1987, Coleman again linked Jackson and Pepsi for a reported \$10 million. This time Jackson played 200 concerts, where fans found themselves surrounded by Pepsi ads on everything from the programs to the tickets.

More than just landing the big names, Pepsi's campaigns are so consistently good that its ad agency has a knack of making even bigger names of established celebrities.

"Ray Charles is not what you'd consider in the stratosphere of today's rock stars," pointed out BBDO's Dusenberry. But BBDO made him the focus of its recent "You got the right one baby, uh-huh," campaign, and his career has taken off again. And so have Pepsi's domestic sales.

Meanwhile, always searching for rock stars on the brink of mega-stardom, Coleman keeps watching and listening. "The object is to keep Pepsi on the cutting edge," Coleman said. "Our job is to give Pepsi access to rock 'n' roll's crystal ball."



Jay Coleman



Philip B. Dusenberry, chairman of the -New York office of BBDO Worldwide, Pepsi's agency.