

Obama Digs In for His BlackBerry

This week, Michael Phelps signed a deal worth more than \$1 million to advertise Mazda in China. Jerry Steinfeld earned a reported \$10 million to appear in Microsoft's recent television campaign.

But the person who may be the biggest celebrity pitchman in the world is not earning a penny for his work.

President-elect Barack Obama has repeatedly said how much his BlackBerry means to him and how he is dreading the prospect of being forced to give it up, because of legal and security concerns, once he takes office. [...]

What could the "BlackBerry president" charge for his plugs of the device if he were not a public servant? More than \$25 million, marketing experts say, and maybe as much as \$50 million.

"This would be almost the biggest endorsement deal in the history of endorsements," said Doug Shabelman, the president of Burns Entertainment, which arranges deals between celebrities and companies. [...]

Mr. Obama is an ideal marketing representative, other agents say — popular, constantly in the news and explicit about his attachment to the product.

"You always want the celebrity to be a good fit with your brand, and is anybody considered a better communicator right now than Barack Obama, or a better networker?" said Fran Kelly, the chief executive of the advertising agency Arnold Worldwide. [...]

The maker of the BlackBerry, Research in Motion, recently introduced advertising campaigns and products like the touch-screen Storm that are meant to position BlackBerry as not just a business device but a consumer product like the iPhone. [...]

"The BlackBerry anecdotes are a huge part of Obama's brand reputation," he (Mr Kelly) said. "It positions him as one of us: he's got friends and family and people to communicate with us, just like all of us. And it positions him as a next-generation politician." [...]

Matt Reinhard, the executive creative director of DDB Los Angeles, suggested Apple try to steal Mr. Obama away from BlackBerry as a spokesman for the iPhone.

The message could be, "It's time for change," Mr. Reinhard said.

Jennifer Clifford

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