



For decades Emami has harnessed star-power, enough to light up all of its brands and perhaps even a few towns

Delshad Irani

IN THE 1980s when Rajesh Khanna popped up on cinema screens across India as the chief of Emami in the film *Agar Tum Na Hote*, it was an innovation for Indian marketing history books. Many years later, in 2007, the Kolkata headquartered Emami added another first. National treasure Shah Rukh Khan and a fairness cream is perhaps not a match made in heaven. But if there's anyone who can prove Cupid & Co. wrong and make this relationship work it is Emami. Like it or not, after all the campaign was on the receiving end of a fair bit condemnation (pun wholly intended), not only did the company launch its fairness cream for men with a well-exhausted celebrity

face, they did also launch an entirely new category with the brand Fair & Handsome.

While most brands are content with one, two or perhaps even three celebrities in their kitty, but that just doesn't cut it for Emami. Some brands in its portfolio have multiple endorsers — Navratna has five, Boroplus (a popular brand in Russia and Ukraine too) has four and Zandu Balm has six. A year ago Emami entered the edible oil space and already the brand has over seven celebrity endorsers — in the heady campaign cocktail are Bengali personalities

from different fields — literature, theatre and dance, add a shot of southern superstardom and top it off with a sprinkling of Bollywood spice. According to Aditya Agarwal, director, Emami, there is no fear of celebrity fatigue. “When people were exploring the idea of celebrity endorsers we were already a few steps ahead. Today other brands have one or two celebrities, we have multiple celebrities because each has a quality that appeals to certain target consumer.” Call it what you will, marketing with *sniperesque* precision or a *filmy* fixation, the company’s well-crafted practice of using celebrity and particularly movie-stars, since 1974 that is, has certainly paid off. From the very first — actress Rekha for Emami Vanishing Cream to captain India MS Dhoni, a more recent signing, for Zandu Pancharishta, Emami has mastered the art many are still trying to develop and exploit fully. Lux may have its horde of celluloid beauties from different eras as well as a foam covered King Khan just for a bit of fun, but Emami too has an army of celebrities from different fields that have vouched for its products for decades, sans superstars in the bath. The company has had over 60 celebrities since the early 70s and signed 30 names between 2009 and 2011, some would say a conservative figure by Emami standards perhaps. From cricketers Sachin Tendulkar,

M S Dhoni, Dinesh Kartik, Amit Mishra, Zaheer Khan to Bollywood endorsement regulars Kareena Kapoor, Preity Zinta, Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Bipasha Basu and Madhuri Dixit. And then throw in other sports and fields — Pt. Birju Maharaj, and many more are all part of Emami’s family photo-album. Of course these names don’t come cheap, well, they used too, but not anymore. So every year the company sets aside ₹5 to 15 crore for its celeb-shopping list, the number depends entirely on the brand looking for an endorser-match and the star face Emami has its eye on. (In 2010-2011 they invested ₹230 crore in advertisement and communication, which is 18% of total revenues.)

2010 was also the year the company made headlines again for the role its brand played in another Bollywood film that had everyone from six to 70 year olds talking about Munni and Zandu balm. Interestingly, they sued the makers of the film for using the brand name in this a prime specimen of item numbers. Well, every celebrity affair has its glitches, right? At least this one beat the seven-year itch. All water under Howrah Bridge now, for Emami’s annual report for 2010-2011 begins with the line “*Main Zandu Balm hui, darling tere liye.*”