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Stars hide antics from Western eyes

By Charles Bodsworth
BBC News Online

Imagine Sylvester Stallone advertising ham, Nicholas Cage promoting pinball parlours or the Beckhams selling Castrol oil.

Imagine if you will, because, unless you live in Japan, you are unlikely to see these things.

If you are Japanese, on the other hand, you need only turn on the TV to see Western stars playing the fool in advertisements.

Take for instance the ad in which Sean Connery sings along in Japanese with an inflatable rabbit - in aid of yoghurt sales. Or another where Leonardo DiCaprio defeats a hijacker with the aid of a champagne cork - selling credit cards.

Audiences in the UK are about to get just a taste of this world through the film *Lost in Translation* starring Bill Murray.

Murray plays an out-of-luck American actor who goes to Japan to advertise whiskey, following in the footsteps of Mickey Rourke, Sammy Davis Junior and, again, Sean Connery.

Japan Market Intelligence, a leading research and consulting company in Tokyo, says the going rate for talent is between \$1m and \$3m.

But while they may be happy to take the cash, it seems that some at least are not so happy for their Western fans to see them in action.

But in the internet age it has become more difficult to stop that happening.

Alan Soiseth puts the ads onto his *Japander* website. He calls it "a little bit of fun with an alternate view of celebrities".

But not all those celebrities agree. Lawyers for Leonardo DiCaprio and Meg Ryan have used a little legal persuasion to get him to remove their clients'



Arnold Schwarzenegger - now California Governor

“ As long as there is some entertainment and surprise it never seems to matter what stars do in commercials ”

Financial journalist David Kilburn

BIG IN JAPAN



Charles Bronson started the trend with ads for Mandom hair oil

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ads from the site.

It is not as if those in the West are strangers to film stars plugging products, but there is something different about these ads.

Wallace and Gromit fronted a creme caramel campaign
Madonna declared "I am pure" for shochu alcoholic drinks
The Beckhams are estimated to have a deal worth £5.5m

On the one hand, to Western eyes, there seems little connection between the stars and their products.

What possessed advertisers to match Whitney Houston and investment products? Or Bruce Willis and a chain of petrol stations?

Dig a bit deeper though and Japanese ads turn out to be witty and inventive.

Ringo Starr may not seem the obvious choice to advertise an apple drink, unless you know that ringo means apple in Japanese. And, with a little creative pronunciation Ringo Starr can sound like "made by grinding apples".



Harrison Ford enjoys Kirin beer

Celine Dion took part in a big campaign for an English language school called Aeon, which rhymes nicely with her surname.

David Kilburn, a financial journalist who has tracked Japanese advertising for more than 20 years, puts the apparent strangeness down to the nature of celebrity in Japan.

He says: "Celebrities in Japan live on an elevated plateau, so the inconsistencies between reality and the world portrayed are seldom troublesome."

In other words, no one really minds if, say, Harrison Ford really does drink Kirin beer, as long as he does something wacky while promoting it.

On the other hand, it is easy to imagine why Sean Connery, known for his support of Scottish nationalism, might not want fellow Scots to see him advertising Japanese whiskey.

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