

Industry Insider: Derek Boyle

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Industry Insider

This interview was conducted by Steve McKelvey, associate professor and graduate program director in the Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Vice President of Industry Affairs for the Sport Marketing Association.

The process whereby companies identify and engage athletes as endorsers has historically been a rather inexact science. The decision-making process has ranged from which athlete the CEO “would like to hang out with” to which athlete has a high level of awareness, likeability, and/or popularity. Typically, little emphasis has been placed on ensuring a meaningful “fit” between the company’s brand and the athlete’s brand. The emergence of analytics has, however, started to change this process. One company at the forefront of this paradigm shift is Sports Identity, a Boston-based athlete marketing firm that has recently launched a product called BrandMatch Score (BMS). In an effort to gain more insights into this changing landscape for selection of athlete endorsers, Vice President of Industry Affairs Steve McKelvey interviewed Sports Identity founder and president Derek Boyle, the creator of BrandMatch Score.

SMQ: The business of aligning athletes with corporations has historically been based on the use of survey-based services that measure the general likeability and popularity of athletes. One such service that most of us are familiar with is “Q-Scores,” the long-time industry standard. What in your opinion has been the flaw with this process?

BOYLE: In the past, corporate marketers have had no reliable and objective resources for determining the best match for their specific brand needs at any given moment. Some go with the CEO’s choice, some attempt to cobble together various data points that exist in the market, and some just throw darts at the board. The data currently available for marketers who are looking to validate a major investment in an athlete endorser is limited, incomplete, and most important untimely. For instance, Q-Scores has historically provided a snapshot of an athlete’s popularity through annual surveys that don’t account for the particular athlete’s popularity at the precise time that a company may be looking to secure an athlete endorser. As such, the information can

quickly become outdated. Furthermore, the scoring of athletes’ popularity does not necessarily correlate directly to the brands’ key attributes or the specific campaign the brand or agency is looking to execute. Historically, the process of selecting athlete endorsers has been costly and labor intensive and typically leads to subjective evaluations. Also, the services currently available to the marketers can be expensive, which precludes small and emerging businesses from access to affordable resources.

SMQ: Can you share with our readers the thinking and research behind the creation of BMS?

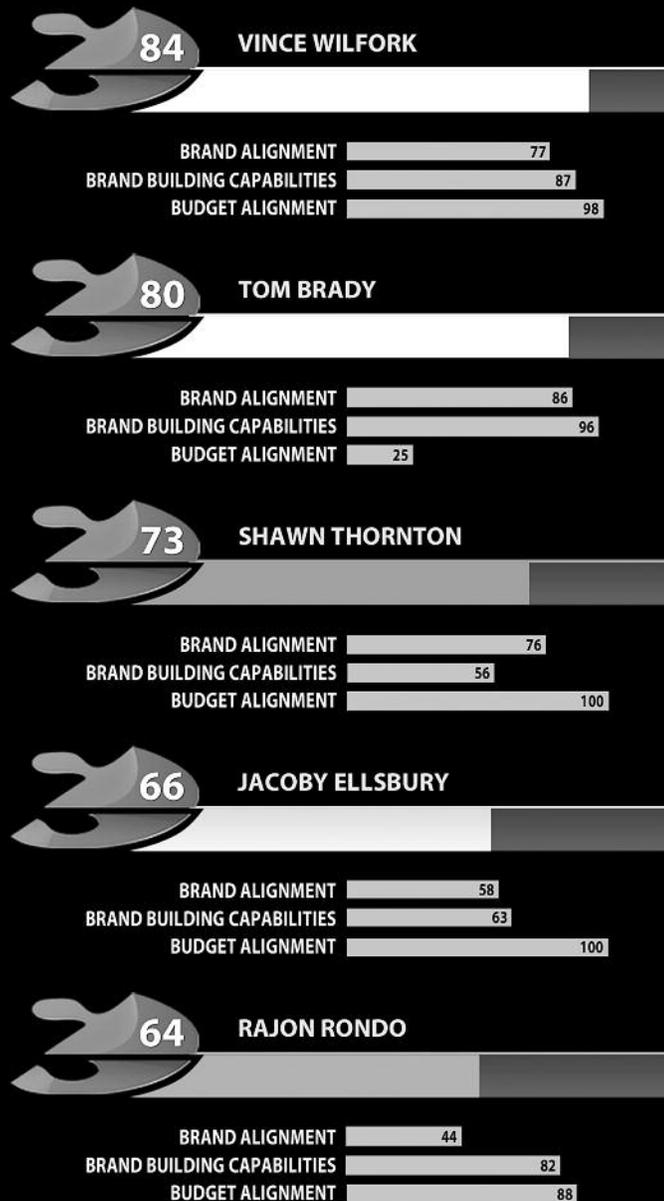
BOYLE: For years, we’ve seen brands take unnecessary risks. Either their marketers spent countless hours internally researching information on a particular athlete through web searches, or they paid for products such as Q-Score. We found that no existing service or tool actually took into account all the factors of selecting an endorser. For instance, likeability and popularity alone will not tell you if an athlete aligns with a brand’s core attributes or if the athlete has the influence to carry a particular campaign to solve business challenges.

There are several major factors for endorsement decisions that have been proven as critical and ignored by current products available today. Our creation of BMS was based on a review of theory and analysis of a number of academic research studies. For example, Roobina Ohanian, in 1991, in his article on “matchup hypotheses,” explained that the core values of the brand must align with those of the endorser.¹ However, this cannot be based on what a group of executives believe to be true, or what a survey of a general population says. For the matchup to be accurate and valuable, the target consumers of the brand must be the subjects of the surveys making that determination.

In 1995, Paul Schaaf wrote an article discussing the function of career success in determining marketability that also influenced our thinking.² His research suggested that while products like Q-Score measure likeability and popularity, it fails to address the fact that influence

BRANDMATCH SCORE

Rates the overall alignment between a Brand and potential endorser.



is a measure of on-field performance in conjunction with off-field marketability. For maximum exposure and for identifying the athlete that will best solve a brand's business challenges, only considering popularity can lead to a failure of reaching the desired target audience.

Another element we incorporated into our development of BMS were findings by Bayram Zafer Erdogan and Philip Kitchen (in 1998), addressing the integration of business objectives to the larger marketing strategy.³ Their research suggested that when considering the use of an athlete endorser, it's imperative that the campaign

developed must be sound enough to solve the business challenge on its own. The use of an athlete endorser is meant to enhance the potential success of the initiative. Therefore, to properly identify an athlete, the athlete must not only meet the matchup criteria, but also be believable in performing the duties required of carrying out the campaign.

SMQ: Take us through a typical example of how a company would access BMS to identify a potential athlete endorser.

BOYLE: Once a company has signed up for the BMS service, they have access to our online platform. The

BRAND ALIGNMENT

Quantifies the relationship of mutual attributes & positioning through the eyes of your targeted consumer.

The Venn Diagrams represent how well each endorser aligned with your brand attributes, selected characteristics and desired psychographics. The more overlap, the stronger the mutual connection.



platform is built to not only gather the appropriate information needed to conduct a study, but for brands to get a complete understanding of what goes into the process of finding the best match.

When initiating a BrandMatch Score study, marketers input specific information about a planned advertising or promotional campaign, including the length of the endorsement and activities to be performed (such as an appearance, a radio spot, or a TV commercial shoot), the approximate budget allocated for the athlete endorser, the brand's target demographics, their key brand attributes, their desired athlete

traits, and the list of 5-10 athletes that they are considering and thus wish to have measured by BMS.

BrandMatch Score then gathers real-time consumer insight via certified panels as well as empirical career data specific to each potential endorser. This information is then collectively measured through three components: Brand Alignment, Brand Building Capabilities, and Budget Alignment. The results are delivered online and allows marketers to drill into each assessment area for more detail behind the score.

SMQ: What do you feel makes your BMS a more unique or appropriate product?

BOYLE: While competitors continue providing static and syndicated data, we're positioned as the first to provide comprehensive measurements, in real time, of how well endorsers align with each brand specifically across all key marketing and business factors. By integrating all the major factors for endorsement decision making into one score, brands will no longer have to gather multiple sets of data and attempt to decipher for themselves which athlete may or may not be the right one for them. The data provided through BMS allows brands to view the entire picture, make calculated decisions based on empirical evidence, and have complete confidence in their investment.

SMQ: Could you describe in a bit more detail the methodology behind BMS?

BOYLE: BrandMatch Score integrates expert hypotheses, evolves current models and introduces new methodology using proprietary algorithms and real-time data collected through our Application Programming Interface (API) to empirically ensure greater compatibility and endorsement value. Determining a BrandMatch Score begins once a brand's attributes, marketing objectives, and budgets are communicated to us. The process then combines this data with statistics and consumer surveys to mathematically calculate the results.

We provide three distinct components that when collectively measured produce a BrandMatch Score for each athlete selected. The first component is so-called "Brand Alignment," which quantifies the relationship of mutual attributes and positioning by calculating a variety of factors including brand attributes, athlete traits, psychographics, target audience, and celebrity influence. The second component is what we refer to as "Brand Building Capabilities," which identifies potential influence measured by on field performance and marketability. This measurement provides the level of exposure a client will receive from one particular athlete compared to another and explains how each can best assist a company in their brand building efforts. The third component is what we refer to as "Budget Alignment," which evaluates fees and athlete responsibilities (or activities required) to maximize campaign value and create negotiation leverage. It is calculated by considering quantitative and qualitative athlete pricing factors combined with a client's budget and campaign requirements such as campaign length, total hourly time commitment, geographical region of focus, endorsement aspect, athlete responsibilities, and travel requirements. The results determine the compatibility of each athlete to the brand and its marketing objectives.

SMQ: Today, more and more athletes are using social media to help build their brand. How does BMS incorporate social media influence of the celebrity athlete?

BOYLE: As currently constituted, social media integration is limited to an athlete's online reach—followers, likes, etc. Beyond factoring in social reach, sentiment data is still an evolving science. It would be great if we could substitute consumer surveys with data aggregated from social web platforms, but there are too many unknowns. It's very difficult, if not impossible, to completely determine the demographic makeup of consumers online. Therefore, the data collected through targeted consumer surveys is an irreplaceable component of determining a BrandMatch Score of a particular athlete with a specific brand.

SMQ: What have been the biggest challenges you've faced in launching BMS?

BOYLE: The most obvious challenge for us, in launching a product that arguably is a paradigm shift in how companies identify and select athlete endorsers, has been in disrupting the status quo. Q-Scores has been the long-time industry standard. Nielsen, an established player in the ratings industry, has a similar product called N-Score. And Omicom, a giant in the ad industry, has its product called Celebrity Davie-Brown Index (DBI), which extends beyond athletes to all entertainment celebrities.

Brands either have been using our competitors' products for years or have an internal process that they feel works fine. And sometimes decision makers simply don't want to go out on a limb and bring something new (even though they may find that it's a better product) to the table and take a risk. Their job in theory will be safe if something went wrong with an endorsement if they just used what the company has been using forever.

Additionally, we've recently seen larger promotional agencies align with competitors. For instance, GMR recently partnered with Brand Affinity Technologies, an online endorsement platform, and Repucom partnered with DBI. These large advertising and promotional agencies will obviously turn to these new partners that provide competitive products.

However, we believe that our product provides a number of unique features that our competitors do not, including our Career Progression & Marketability Indices that create our most unique form of duplication defense.

Endnotes

¹ Ohanian, R. (1991). The impact of celebrity spokesperson's perceived image on consumers' intention to purchase. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 31, 46-53.

² Schaaf, P. (1995). *Sport Marketing: It's not just a game anymore*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.

³ Erdogan, B.Z. & Kitchen, P.J. (1998). "How to Get the Most out of Celebrity Endorsers," *Admap*, 33, No. 4 pp. 17-22.