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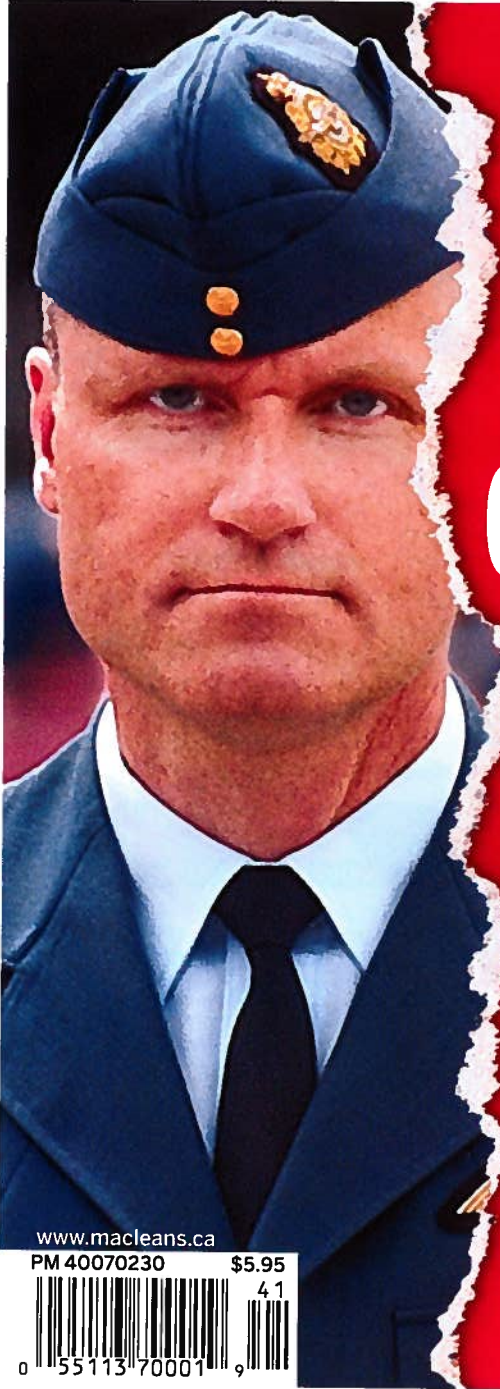
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MARKETING

THAT MAGIC SOMETHING

Celebrity spokespeople can't always control just what it is that gets people talking

AT THE RECENT 25th anniversary party for *Fashion Television*, Jeanne Beker was the centre of attention. (The “Jane Goodall of fashion,” as *National Post* gossip columnist Shinan Govani calls her, has hosted the show since it began.) But instead of talking about *FT* or Beker's new clothing line at the Bay, everybody was talking about how thin she looked, and rumours she was on Herbal Magic. Beker later confirmed she'd been using the Canadian weight-loss product, a program that can include meal plans and supplements, and taken off 20 lb. “She was skinnier than some of the models,” gushed *Fashion* magazine editor Bernadette Mora on Twitter. Beker “certainly looks a lot better than poor Elizabeth Manley,” the product's official spokesperson, journalist Karen von Hahn wrote on her blog.

Manley, an Olympic medallist in figure skating, has been pitching for Herbal Magic since last year and, after losing almost 30 lb., she looks fit and trim. But who makes a better spokesperson for the company is an open question. Canadians have seen Beker at countless fashion events over the years, but can picture Manley barbecuing in the backyard. On the Herbal Magic site, Manley wears a sweater and jeans; Beker is a high-fashion icon. Even so, von Hahn seemed to suggest that Beker (who isn't an official Herbal Magic spokesperson) might provide some stiff competition for Manley.

A lot goes in to picking the right spokesperson for a weight-loss brand, and glamour is often surprisingly low on the list. Experts have long understood attractiveness and expertise to be two crucial qualities in any spokesperson, says Mike Basil, a marketing professor at the University of Lethbridge. More recently, identification—a feeling of knowing the celebrity personally—and admiration have been pinpointed, too. The latter caused a problem for Tiger Woods: the golfer's very public fall from grace cost him \$22 million in endorsement deals. (As of July, Woods remained the world's highest-earning



Branding: Beker has a clothing line at the Bay; Manley is a spokesperson for Herbal Magic



athlete.) The ideal spokesperson, says Amanda Bower, an associate professor of business administration and marketing at Washington and Lee University, “is a dead one. Any time you're dealing with actual human beings, you never know what they're going to do.”

For that reason, fictional characters, like Count Chocula or the Maytag repairman, are a good choice for many brands—but weight-loss products generally aren't among them. Consumers need a role model they can identify with, which means a live human being. “By having a spokesperson who's struggled with weight in the public eye, you go through it with them,” Bower says. A star who gives the impression of having expensive advantages—like access to a personal trainer or a plastic surgeon—wouldn't work, which is why Paris Hilton probably wouldn't be the best choice. (Hilton has appeared in ads for the Carl's Jr. fast-food chain, soaping down her Bentley while chomping a massive burger, which could be called the antithesis of a weight loss ad.) Nutrisystem has gone with NFL players, which has worked in some cases—like Dan Marino—but not in others. Earlier this year, the company dropped Lawrence Taylor after he was charged with rape.

Herbal Magic emphasizes that Manley has taken off the pounds the same way any other client would: “Some people might think Liz has a special chef or a coach, but she doesn't,” says chief marketing officer Duncan Robinson. And she's easy to relate to. Most Canadians grew up watching her on television (she won the silver medal for figure skating in Calgary, back in 1988), and she's spoken openly about struggling with depression after her mother passed away. On the Herbal Magic website, Manley, sporting a purple sweater and shiny blond bob, keeps a blog to build a bond with clients, common among weight-loss spokespeople: Jason Alexander, who's been pitching for Jenny Craig, blogs too.

Their weight issues might make them easier to identify with, but if a spokesperson puts a lot of weight back on, their credibility takes a hit, Basil says. After Kirstie Alley left Jenny Craig and her weight began to climb—a common pitfall for dieters, and one many people would understand—critics were still harsh. And Perez Hilton once criticized Jared Fogle for putting on extra pounds, suggesting he'd “fall[en] off the Subway wagon.”

Beker's recent weight loss was no doubt a coup for Herbal Magic, but that doesn't necessarily mean she'd be a better representative for it. Like a pair of pants, Bower says, when choosing a celebrity endorser, “it's all about fit.” **KATE LUNAU**