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Tuesday, August 26, 2003

By Hilary Kramer

## FOX NEWS

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**ADVERTISEMENT** To American movie fans, A-list Hollywood stars like Harrison Ford, Brad Pitt, Meg Ryan and **Demi Moore (search)** are \$20 million per movie actors. Ford is well known for his action hero roles, including characters like Indiana Jones, Jack Ryan from Tom Clancy's book/movie series and of course, Han Solo from *Star Wars*. But to many Japanese fans, he's also known for his commercials endorsing Kirin beer, where he sits in a sauna wearing only a towel, surrounded by middle-aged Japanese men. To Italian fans, he's recognized from his Lancia Lybra car commercials where he resuscitates a dying Bonsai tree by taking it for a spin in his car. Hardly the picture of a macho action hero or A-list movie star.

You'd certainly never catch them hawking any products like that in the U.S. But Ford and his fellow A-listers Brad Pitt, Meg Ryan and Demi Moore have all worked as highly paid celebrity endorsers for an array of foreign products. During the mid-nineties, Japanese companies reportedly paid millions of dollars to top Hollywood stars to appear in commercials that were to be aired exclusively in Japan. After the country sank into an economic recession, the willingness of Japanese companies to pay expensive fees for celebrity endorsers declined. But Italian advertisers were quick to pick up the slack -- and the comparable millions of dollars in compensation -- where their Japanese counterparts left off.

Most Americans are completely unaware that their movie stars also moonlight as high-paid product pitchmen. The actors and their agents go to great lengths to prevent their foreign commercial spots from ever being shown in the U.S. They continue to safeguard their overseas commercial exposure, even in the Internet age of multi-media and high-speed information distribution. In fact, several celebrities have brought lawsuits against Internet sites for posting clips of their foreign ads. The Japanese and Italian markets are attractive to these stars because they expect the lower quality of Japanese and Italian television to attract little or no attention outside of those countries.

Hollywood's top actors and actresses routinely command around \$20 million per movie, but the lure of \$2-3 million for just a few days work can be extremely enticing. Especially because the stars don't even have to travel, since all the work can usually take place at a local studio. As a result, Hollywood's elite is willing to risk their chic image and mammoth movie paychecks for easy money overseas.

Some top Hollywood performers are notably guarded with their American brand, including Julia Roberts, who reportedly turned down multi-million dollar offers from several Japanese advertising agencies. Their movie careers and celebrity persona are certainly the reasons why they rule Tinseltown, so stars are understandably protective of their Hollywood "brands." But just like traditional American consumer brands, Hollywood's top stars are clearly profiting by extending their brands overseas, because American brands are indeed a powerful and valuable commodity

Marketing consultant Interbrand and *Business Week* create an annual list by calculating the value of global brands based on its ability to raise sales and earnings. The top ten includes eight American brands, including such consumer stalwarts as Coca-Cola, McDonalds and Disney, each of which -- the brand, not the company -- is valued between \$20 and \$70 billion dollars.

What may be surprising is that despite antagonism toward America and its politics, American brands -- both products and celebrity endorsers -- continue to translate well in foreign markets. The popularity of American movies overseas has been increasing, which continues to provide the actors who star in them a solid platform to be endorsers abroad. Unlike Hollywood "brands," which ironically succeed because of their American image, traditional brands succeed abroad often because of careful brand management that presents American products in a combination of global and local images.

Global marketing behemoths like Coca-Cola, McDonald's and Disney expend vast amounts of resources figuring out ways to extend into new markets the powerful brands they've carefully developed in the U.S. Consequently, they systematically test, refine, localize and even protect their brands to ensure that their corporate message carries over effectively in all markets.

Hollywood stars follow a similar pattern, though on a significantly smaller level. They

are equally aware that they, themselves are "brands" and that their domestic brands could be effectively expanded in foreign markets. They, too, are careful not to tarnish their local brands -- by guaranteeing their work outside of the United States never airs on domestic television. Yet similar to corporate marketing titans, Hollywood stars and their agents are similarly conscious of localizing their brands to suit foreign tastes. That those tastes tend to portray stars in images that might make American moviegoers cringe is precisely why they chose to keep those commercials airing only in local markets.

Movie stars have to be protective of their brands. For a traditional brand like McDonald's, Americans could likely care less that the Golden Arches offers teriyaki burgers in their Japanese outlets. So Mickey Dee's does present it as a menu item in Japan, thereby localizing their fare and increasing their global brand value at the same time.

However, we probably wouldn't view tough-guy Arnold Schwarzenegger the same way if we knew that the gubernatorial candidate hawked Ramen noodles by heaving a dozen kettles of the stuff over his head in a cheesy Japanese commercial -- which he did for a handsome sum at the height of his movie career. Coke may be "It" in any culture, but the Terminator pitching Ramen noodles? That'd be a brand new image for us.

**Hilary Kramer** serves as a business news contributor at FOX News Channel. She joined the network as a regular guest on **Cashin' In** in May 2001.

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