



Celebrity Products Are Coming to 'GETCHA, GETCHA, GETCHA'!

Stars Are Putting Their Names on Everything from Scents to Stockings—but Are They Good Deals?

By Emily Shebak

It all began back in 1989 with Elizabeth Taylor's first perfume, *Passion*—or was it Johnny Carson's sporty clothing line that started the celebrity-product craze? Now, nearly 20 years later, celebrity products are everywhere. Capitalizing on their fame, Jennifer Lopez, Beyoncé, Britney Spears, Madonna, and countless other stars—male and female—have stamped their brand names on fragrances, makeup, clothing lines, ghost-written books and even restaurants.

While celebrity product endorsers have

always been around—Nicole Kidman recently snagged a reported \$5 million just to star in one ad for Chanel No. 5, for instance—celebrities creating their own products or licensing their names to companies creating products for them is a trend that has gathered momentum in recent years. Britney Spears' perfume, *Curious*, racked up sales of \$36 million in just four months last year, reports *The New York Times*. In 2000, according to the same paper, celebrity scents represented two percent of the total fragrance market; today they comprise six percent. *The Hollywood Reporter* notes that celebrity-

licensed products accounted for \$3 billion in retail sales last year. Clearly, this big business is getting bigger.

Where will it all end? When Paris Hilton starts capitalizing on her dubious fame by marketing upscale canine fashions, maybe it's time to start asking whether celebrities are barking up the wrong tree. After all, how much hype can we women take before saying, "Give us a break"? Have celebrity products gone too far—and why do we buy them, anyway? Are they worth the money—or are wishful-thinking consumers paying a premium in the hope that a little star quality will rub off on them?

FOR LOVE—OR MONEY?

In one sense, celebrity products are a natural extension of the celebrity craze that's been defining the media in the last few years. Gorgeous models once routinely graced the covers of women's magazines and were featured as product endorsers in ads. Now Hollywood stars are filling those roles. If you can't get enough of your favorite celebs in the pages of the supermarket tabloids, no problem: just go shopping. There's Aussie pop singer Kylie Minogue's lingerie and hosiery line, *Love Kylie Legs* (www.love-kylie.com); British actress Elizabeth Hurley's beachwear, cleverly called *Beach*; singer/actress Mandy Moore's *Mblem* line of "vintage contemporary" T-shirts (they match her personality to a T.) (www.mblem.net); and Lauren Hutton's *Good Stuff* makeup. Serena Williams isn't just a tennis superstar anymore; she's a fashion designer with her own line of clothing, *aneres* (hint: spell it backwards). And Jessica Simpson isn't just singing and making movies—she's put her name on some delectable body treats (www.dessertbeauty.com). Pamela Anderson, Reba McEntyre, Anna Nicole Smith, Kelly Osborne, and Victoria Beckham (a.k.a. Posh Spice of the Spice Girls) have also jumped on the "brandwagon."

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Some of these stars simply are smart businesswomen, seeing an opportunity to make some extra dough by licensing their names while they're hot (and more power to them). Others see an opportunity to express themselves creatively in new ways (Serena has said that she considers herself a born designer) or they do it for charity—or both.

Like Serena, Gwen Stefani has always had an interest in designing, but she opted to wait for the right time to come out of the closet, so to speak. "I think that if I do a clothing line, it has to be like everything else I do—home-grown; it has to be real. I wouldn't do it just to make money," she commented in a 2002 issue of *Elle Girl* magazine. She got her start in the fall of 2003 as a guest designer for *LeSportsac*, designing bags, then launched her own clothing line, *L.A.M.B.* No black sheep, *L.A.M.B.* is going strong. Check out Stefani's fashions on www.shopbop.com or www.l-a-m-b.com.

Playing matchmaker of sorts, hooking up celebrities who want to make a difference with charities in need of dough, a company called *2 Love* (www.2loveclothing.com) commissions stars—Mischa Barton, Brittany Murphy, and Mandy Moore, among them—to design tops and tees, which are sold online and in boutiques nationwide. "All participants are offered a small percentage of the sales," says spokesperson Marisa Menzel, "but most choose to donate their portion to the charity their tee benefits, on top of the proceeds that the charity receives from the sales." Proceeds from the sale of Mandy Moore's shirts (some of which have

lyrics from her songs screened on them—for instance, “Gonna getcha, getcha, getcha...” from the Blondie song she covered on her latest album, “Coverage”) go to organizations dear to her, such as Trinity Kids Care.

Stefani's designs “holla back” to charitable inspiration as well. Collaborating earlier this year with *Marie Claire*, she created a T-shirt to wear on the cover of the magazine. Ten thousand of those shirts were sold to benefit the Duang Prateep Foundation, one of the charities created to aid families left homeless after the tsunami in December 2004.

Sometimes revenge is the motivating factor when stars branch out to create their own businesses. The first model to negotiate a million-dollar multiyear cosmetics deal (with Revlon in 1974), Lauren Hutton was given the boot shortly after her 40th birthday, according to www.Forbes.com, because, as Hutton explained, “they told me they’d done market research and women over 40 didn’t wear makeup.” To prove them wrong, she invested \$600,000 of her retirement money in Lauren Hutton’s Good Stuff, a makeup line that she created for women over 40. Good Stuff, now sold through the Home Shopping Network (www.hsn.com), as well as in other retail outlets, expects to do \$20 million in sales in 2005, reports Forbes.

Here’s a bit of celebrity gossip for you: Sarah Jessica Parker is introducing her first perfume, called ‘Lovely,’ this fall.

Other celebrities, Jennifer Lopez and Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen among them, may not be as creatively involved from inception to finished product, but they do take a hands-on, quality-control approach to both their products and the all-important packaging those products come in.

Are you gonna getcha one of Mandy Moore’s tees?

Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen grew up before America’s eyes on the sitcom *Full House*. Later, a music video called “Brother-for-Sale” solidified their fan base. I don’t think they ever finalized a deal on their brother, but the song was a big hit. Its success led to more TV series and now movies. As these girls became women, they’ve also become successful businesswomen, making their own decisions and taking charge of the Mary Kate and Ashley “brand.” You can find many of their beauty products, books, CD’s, dolls, footwear, jewelry, a clothing line for tweens, and even furniture at Wal-Mart, Target, and Linens ‘n Things, among other stores—all of which can also be seen and purchased on www.mary-kateandashley.com.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Okay, so we’re inundated with celebrity products. Still, the stuff wouldn’t be out there if consumers weren’t buying it. Why are we willing to pay the price? It’s one thing to spend \$3.49 a week for a copy of *People* or *Us Weekly* to get your celebrity-gossip fix, but celebrity fragrances, clothes, jewelry and dolls—and let’s not forget Paris Hilton’s doggie duds—aren’t cheap. What does this trend say about us as consumers?

Not to worry. Psychologist Marcia Eckerd, Ph.D., thinks it’s all harmless fun: “Celebrities provide a kind of fantasy life, just like romance novels do. Some might say that people who lack excitement in their lives are more likely to buy into this celebrity-product craze; I’d say they’re just letting their hair down and looking for a little light



entertainment.” But, she cautions, “there’s a breakdown between fantasy and reality when we take celebrities more seriously than we take ourselves.”

Clinical psychologist Allison Acken, Ph.D., has another explanation for the current celebrity craze. She speculates that “Camelot came to an end with the assassination of J.F.K. in 1963. President Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy were striking models of American intellect, humor, courage, and style. Generations of American youth have been left without heroic role models. Sadly, celebrities’ media-created images have filled that gap.”

Taking a more pragmatic view, Rochelle R. Bloom, president of The Fragrance Foundation (www.Fragrance.org), comments that “celebrity fragrances attract mostly younger consumers who aspire to be like these people. They give consumers a small piece of something they could not afford. They can afford the fragrance, but not the outfits” that these stars wear.

THE SNIFF-AND-TOUCH TEST

No analysis of this trend would be complete without a sniff-and-touch test. I knew I needed to sample some of these celebrity products, so I went on a shopping jaunt through the Philadelphia area. Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen’s bedroom furniture was a bit difficult to track down, but I finally found it at Karl’s Furniture, a small boutique on Chestnut Street. The twins’ “Country Chic” and “City Style” mix-and-match beds, armoires, vanities and desks, available in 20 finishes, would be at home in any storybook setting. All I can say is that it’s a good thing I don’t have a daughter of my own yet. Even at prices ranging from \$675 to \$1,250, I’d be walking out of there with a complete set. I can just hear my future daughter now: “Who cares about how much it costs, Mommy? Mary-Kate and Ashley made it!” I know I wouldn’t be able to resist.

Next, I ventured into Lord & Taylor for some whiffs of celebrity fragrance. Britney

Spear’s Curious smelled a little too floral and woody for my taste. JLo’s Miami Glo is as sexy as its name sounds. The coconut and tropical fruits combine with sunny florals to create the perfect summer scent. A 3.3 oz. bottle of Curious runs \$50, and a 3.4 oz. bottle of Miami Glo will set you back \$56.

As for the various star clothing lines out there, while I’m not generally starstruck, I have to confess I’m tempted to buy Mandy Moore’s “Gonna getcha, getcha, getcha” tee. Like Mandy, I’m a T-shirt kinda gal—and a Blondie fan—so even at a pricey \$54, I feel like I’d be getting my money’s worth.

Go ahead and buy the newest celebrity fragrance, if you want it—and can afford it. But don’t expect it to infuse your life with the sweet smell of success. That’s still up to you.

Sure, some of these products are worth the dough, but when they are, it’s not because they carry a celebrity’s name. It’s because of their quality. My best advice to all of you shoppers out there is to listen to your inner diva. Gwen, Mandy, JLo, and Mary-Kate and Ashley found ways to use their talents to express themselves and made millions doing so. They believed in themselves. Maybe *that’s* the star quality that’s really attracting us to their products.

So go ahead and buy the newest celebrity fragrance, if you want it—and can afford it. By the way, here’s a bit of celebrity gossip for you: Sarah Jessica Parker is introducing her first perfume, called “Lovely,” this fall. But don’t expect it to infuse your life with the sweet smell of success. That’s still up to you. □

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