



CMO Network

## America's Most Loved Spokescreatures

Dorothy Pomerantz and Lacey Rose 03.18.10, 6:00 PM ET

One of the most enduring lessons for marketers from the Tiger Woods scandal is that, no matter how attractive celebrity spokespeople may seem, they're only human. When accusations about Woods cheating on his wife came to light, things got tricky for companies like PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble and Accenture that had spent millions of dollars on ads featuring the golfer.

Sometimes it's better to go with an animated character. Someone who won't grow old, won't demand a pay raise and won't cheat on his wife.

"Using a spokesperson is using borrowed interest," says Greg DiNoto, chief creative officer at Deutsch New York. "Spokescreatures use the DNA of the brand."

**In Pictures: America's Most Loved Spokescreatures**

**Video: Aflac's Star Spokescreature**

When advertisers hit on a spokescreature that works, they can milk it for decades.

Take the M&M characters that have populated Mars' M&M's ads since 1954. According to [E-Poll Market Research](#) of Encino, Calif., they are the most beloved ad spokescreatures in America. The M&Ms got a 64% approval rating in an E-Poll survey of 1,500 people.

"Sometimes the brand and the characters just go so well together," says Gerry Philpott, chief executive officer of E-Poll. "It appeals to adults and kids. Everyone loves M&M's."

The characters are so popular they even have their own store on the Las Vegas Strip, where you can buy everything from multihued M&M's to M&M golf covers to stuffed versions of the ad characters to take home to the kids.

E-Poll asked survey participants to rank 800 characters on 36 characteristics, including sincerity, likability and coolness. For our list, they ranked the characters by their appeal--whether people like the characters or not.

Other iconic imaginary spokespeople who made our list include Mrs. Butterworth, in fourth place, and Aunt Jemima in fifth. Despite accusations over the years that they're racist caricatures, the characters have found a place in Americans' hearts. Aunt Jemima, whose name reportedly comes from an old minstrel tune, was reinvented in the '90s as a chic woman with pearl earrings and coiffed hair in place of a kerchief.

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There's something about pancakes and sincerity. The female pair get the highest sincerity scores of the top 10 on our list, with a 37% for Aunt Jemima and 35% for Mrs. Butterworth.

"People are hungering for authenticity," says DiNoto. "There is something reassuring about those brand icons."

Spokescreatures like the Geico Gecko (tied for fifth) and the AFLAC Duck (seventh) have become key marketing tools for insurance companies.

"They're selling an invisible product," says Al Ries, chairman of Ries & Ries, a marketing consulting company in Atlanta. "If I'm selling an automobile I show a car. With insurance, what's the visual?"

The Gecko and the Duck both play off of their companies' names, which gives people something to remember. The Gecko was born out of a common mispronunciation of Geico, and the Duck came from the sound you make if you say AFLAC several times loudly.

"They're memory machines," says DiNoto. "They're Trojan Horses designed to sneak the brands into the consumers' consciousness." They've done a good job. Of the 1,500 people E-Poll surveyed, 54% said they are aware of the Geico Gecko, and 36% are aware of the AFLAC Duck.

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