

Advertising

## America's Most Loved Spokescharacters

Jeff Bercovici, 03.14.11, 6:00 AM ET

"The Man Your Man Could Smell Like," as the nameless spokesman for Old Spice body wash is known, has a strong jaw, a sculpted torso and a resonant voice. He's athletic, handy with tools and thoughtful with presents. He also smells pretty good.

From the point of view of Procter & Gamble, which makes Old Spice products, he's even more perfect than that because, a little over a year after he first stepped out of the shower and into our living rooms, he's already one of the most popular corporate spokescharacters, according to survey data from [E-Poll Market Research](#) of Encino, Calif. "It shows you what a new character can do," says E-Poll Chief Executive Gerry Philpott.

Every month E-Poll surveys 1,500 people aged 13 to 49. Respondents are asked whether they are aware of each character, and, if so, whether they like him or her as well as whether they find the character "cool," "funny" or "intriguing."

### [In Pictures: America's Most Loved Spokescharacters](#)

Some 66% of respondents last month who recognized The Man Your Man Could Smell Like (played by NFL-er turned actor Isaiah Mustafa) said they liked him somewhat or a lot, giving him the second-highest appeal score of any brand-affiliated character. Only Snoopy, who appears in commercials for MetLife, had a higher appeal score, notching a 71%. (Rounding out the top five are the talking M&Ms, Allstate's Mayhem man and the Most Interesting Man in the World, who pitches Dos Equis beer.)

Snoopy, of course, is a far more established figure than the Old Spice Man, however viral the latter's videos may be on YouTube. It shows in the awareness figures: While only 19% of those in E-Poll's sample recognized the handsome fellow in the towel, a full 62% knew the beagle from "Peanuts."

But creating a character from scratch, rather than drafting an existing one, has its advantages. "To license a very popular character can be expensive," notes Philpott, while creating a character of your own means the licensing dollars flow in, not out. (Mars Inc.'s talking M&Ms, No. 3 in the appeal ranking, are available in plush doll form.) Moreover, licensing a pre-existing character means working around the predefined attributes of that character. Want Snoopy to sing a song about the joys of good insurance? Too bad--Snoopy doesn't talk.

On the other hand, Snoopy doesn't age, or have a contract rider that dictates what brand of sparkling water must be available in his trailer during shoots. And he certainly doesn't do what a distressingly high proportion of real-life celebrity endorsers do at some point: get caught in a personal scandal that makes their sponsors cringe. "That's why a lot of advertisers are tying brands to characters they can control, because actors and celebrities you can't control," says Peter Murane, CEO of BrandJuice. "It allows you to deliver the brand message you want without any of the downside that comes with [real] people."

The bigger the celebrity, the bigger the downside, as Nike, Accenture, P&G and other sponsors of golfer Tiger Woods learned the hard way in late 2009. But even unknown actors, being humans, can cause grief for their sponsors, as when Benjamin Curtis, a.k.a. Steven the Dell Dude, was arrested in 2003 and charged with buying marijuana.

---

On the other hand, not all bad attention is bad attention. E-Poll also asks its survey-takers about the characters they dislike. Topping that list are the Burger King and the Geico Caveman, with "negative appeal" scores of

38% and 29%, respectively. Explaining their dislike, similar proportions of respondents described each character as "annoying." Still, both had awareness levels more than twice as high as that beloved Old Spice guy.

"It's memorable," says Philpott. "It's one thing where someone just doesn't like the character; it's another where it's kind of a love-to-hate. I don't think it's necessarily a negative for them."



#### No. 1: Snoopy

Company: Metropolitan Life Insurance  
Brand: MetLife  
Appeal: 71%

Charles Schulz's cartoon beagle has been the black-and-white face of MetLife insurance since 1985. A detailed set of guidelines govern how his likeness and those of other "Peanuts" characters can appear in MetLife brand materials. For instance: "Snoopy should never be closer to the MetLife logo than '2x,' where 'x' is a variable based on the height of the MetLife 'M.'"

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)



#### No. 2: Old Spice Man (a.k.a. The Man Your Man Could Smell Like)

Company: Procter & Gamble  
Brand: Old Spice body wash  
Appeal: 66%

A commercial starring actor Isaiah Mustafa as an impossibly debonair heartthrob caused an immediate sensation upon its debut last year. Old Spice body wash sales increased by double-digit percentages, and the campaign was the year's fourth-most-buzzed-about in social media, according to Zeta Interactive.

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)



#### No. 3: M&M's

Company: Mars  
Brand: M&Ms  
Appeal: 64%

Anthropomorphized, candy-coated chocolates have been part of the M&Ms brand since 1954, but the characters still have legs, so to speak: A commercial titled "Hostages" was the most memorable spot from the 2011 Academy Awards broadcast, according to Nielsen data.

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)



#### No. 4: Mayhem

Company: Allstate  
Brand: Allstate  
Appeal: 64%

Actor Dean Winters--perhaps best known as Liz Lemon's no-good ex Dennis on *30 Rock*--stars in these spots as the personification of various expensive contingencies: car accidents, falling branches, absent-minded teenage landscapers, etc. Although the campaign has only been running for eight months, one-fourth of consumers are already familiar with it.

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)



#### No 5: The Most Interesting Man in the World

Company: Heineken  
Brand: Dos Equis  
Appeal: 62%

Like the Old Spice Man, the Most Interesting Man in the World--played by actor Jonathan Goldsmith--is a fellow with comically large reserves of charm and dash. Consumers buy it: 46% of respondents said they found him intriguing. Most intriguing of all, however, may be the lukewarmness with which he endorses his product: "I don't always drink beer, but when I do, I prefer Dos Equis."

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)



#### No. 6: Smokey Bear

Company: U.S. Forest Service/Ad Council  
Brand: N/A  
Appeal: 60%

Smokey's roots go back to World War II, when an undermanned Forest Service, deprived of firefighters by the draft, launched a campaign to cut down on man-made wildfires. He's the least controversial figure on this list: Only 2% of respondents disliked him.

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)



#### No. 7 (tie): Chick-fil-A Cow

Company: Chick-fil-A  
Brand: Chick-fil-A  
Appeal: 56%

Like the "[I Can Has Cheezburger](#)" cat, the Chick-fil-A cows can spell, but badly: Since 1995 they've been urging fast-food aficionados to "Eat Mor Chikin." Not only is it funny (according to 66% of poll-takers); it also makes a lot more sense, when you think about it, than the company's previous mascot, a chicken named Doodles, who was strangely OK with the slaughter and sandwichizing of his species.

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)



#### No. 7 (tie): E\*Trade Baby

Company: E\*Trade Financial Corporation  
Brand: E\*Trade  
Appeal: 56%

Online stock trading so easy an infant could do it? Ad agency Grey New York brought that idea to life with humor--and slightly creepy computer animation--for the 2008 Super Bowl, and the company has never looked back--not even when actress Lindsay Lohan filed suit over a joke about a "milkaholic" baby named Lindsay that she interpreted as a reference to her own substance-abuse issues.

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)



#### No. 9: Elmer Fudd

Company: Geico  
Brand: Geico  
Appeal: 54%

Geico seems to have more spokescharacters than it knows what to do with. There's the gecko, the cavemen, that hammy B-movie narrator guy, and Elmer Fudd, who stars in a jokey spot playing on his speech impediment. Why the overkill? "To make the brand stand out and the product more interesting," says E-Poll's Gerry Philpott. "When you get into money and financials, you want people to feel kind of warm about you."

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)



#### No. 10: Snuggle the Fabric Softener Bear

Company: Sun Products  
Brand: Snuggle  
Appeal: 53%

This fabric softener-shilling teddy bear isn't quite so cute once you get to know him. For one thing, despite his teensy-weensy voice, he's 28 years old. (That is, he's appeared in Snuggle's ads since 1983.) For another, some 4 million plush copies of him had to be recalled in 2002 after it was revealed that his eyes and nose could come off, posing a choking hazard for small children.

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)



#### No. 11: Geico Gecko

Company: Geico  
Brand: Geico  
Appeal: 47%

It's pretty easy to understand how a company called Geico picked a gecko as its main emblem. But why the British accent? Maybe that's why 12% of respondents in E-Poll's survey said they found him intriguing.

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)



#### No. 12: Poppin' Fresh (a.k.a. The Pillsbury Doughboy)

Company: General Mills  
Brand: Pillsbury  
Appeal: 47%

This little fella's been around since 1965. Unlike his cousin the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man, Poppin' Fresh has no interest in destroying Manhattan. He just wants you to poke him in the belly so he can giggle. Is that too much to ask?

Source: [E-Poll Market Research](#)