



# WHAT'S IN A BRAND? YET ANOTHER BRAND.

By **HOLLY M. SANDERS**

Nike ran with Apple, Barbie got a makeover by M.A.C. cosmetics and Gap teamed up with Bono's Project Red to help Africa.

It seems no brand - no matter how successful - wants to go it alone these days.

The "co-branding" craze that swept through fast-food chains, credit cards and car companies has carried over into nearly every other sector, ranging from home construction to charitable causes.

Co-branding, or pairing your name with another brand, has existed in some form for decades, but the deals have grown increasingly complex—and in some cases confusing—in the last year.

Marketing experts predict that corporate coupling will become more prevalent in 2007 and beyond as more companies, desperate to cut through ad clutter, reduce costs and target niche audiences, turn to each other for help.

"It's because of the pressure on tried-and-true advertising vehicles that marketers are being forced to try to change the game," said Allen Adamson, a managing director at brand-consulting firm Landor Associates.

How else do you explain Burger King's alliance with music and fashion mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs to create a co-branded channel, DiddyTV, on Internet video site YouTube?

The motivation behind most of these deals is straightforward: Two like-minded companies exploit each other's brands to expand their audiences.

Apple grew the customer base for its iPod music player with the help of several big brands, including

placing the device in Nike running shoes and wiring it into BMW sedans.

While many marketers are trying to build a broad audience, plenty of others are forging unconventional partnerships to target niche markets.

For instance, Nissan teamed with New York designer Marc Ecko to create custom SUVs that appeal to fashion-conscious men.

"I feel like this is about smart targeting," said Marian Salzman, chief marketing officer for JWT, the world's largest ad agency. "It's about becoming more intimate with the consumer."

Many marketers are simply following in the footsteps of Target, which went from mass to class by striking a series of co-branded partnerships with big-name designers such as Isaac Mizrahi.

With so many jumping on the co-brand bandwagon, companies run the risk of boring and confusing consumers by watering down their messages, experts say.

Movie marketers—among the first to embrace co-branding by pairing "Star Wars" and "E.T." with brands like Burger King and Atari—managed to take things to new and almost scary levels last year.

Beyond conventional partners like Burger King and Pepsi, Warner Bros. struck a dizzying number of deals to promote "Superman Returns" with Duracell, the "Got Milk" ad campaign, Samsung, Perfectmatch.com and Quaker State Oil, among others.

"It's overdone, and it will go through a cycle when people will realize it's doing more harm in many cases," said Landor's Adamson.