

Next generation brand ambassador

TOKYO, JAPAN: Celebrity endorsements are a powerful marketing tool in the Asian pop market, and so it is crucial for a brand to find just the right celebrity to promote its product.



AKB 48 isn't quite like any ordinary pop group. Currently listed in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the largest pop group in the world, there are currently around 50 members. The organisation of the group is extremely complicated, but for practical purposes at there are 6 members who dominate the group at any one time, as voted for by AKB 48's legions of loyal fans.

To promote its latest candy, sweet manufacturer Ezaki Glico produced a series of TV spots featuring the girls, who released a new song *Aisu no Mi CM*, to tie in with the campaign. Normally only the six most popular girls in the band are chosen to appear in brand campaigns, but Glico campaign featured something different, and previously unheard of - the unveiling of a new member of the band.

Ambassador Aimi

Eguchi Aimi was presented as the newest, most exciting member of the group -elevated straight into the lead six. She appeared on TV, in print and online Glico advertising, and was even featured on magazine covers and interviews.

Commentators were initially moved to comment on Aimi's beauty, and she attracted a strong fan following, in common with other members of the band, although rumours began to spread about exactly how she had appeared from nowhere, instead of rising through the ranks of the band as normal.

Eventually Glico revealed the secret, that Eguchi Aimi was in fact a completely fabricated character, whose likeness was the product of the latest CGI technology.

Upon owning up to the deception, Glico released a 'making of' video that demonstrated the process that created Aimi. A new website was also launched (<http://www.icenomi.com/oshimen/index.html>), in which visitors could make their own version of Aimi.

Results

Full results to follow, but local press coverage suggests that fans were initially shocked.

The 'making of' video has been posted on YouTube by several users, the most popular has received 1.2 million views to date. (June 2011).

WHY IS THIS ON CREAM? If the right celebrity doesn't exist to endorse your brand, this stunt has demonstrated that it is now possible to create them.

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