

Madge picks Rihanna

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Can flame-haired pop star **Rihanna** sell a product?

Madonna, an investor in Vita Coco, the New York-based coconut water company, is betting the young singer can sell millions of gallons after signing her on as the face of VC, for an advertising campaign launching this summer.

Rihanna has endorsed a few products including Nivea, Totes Umbrellas, Doritos, Cover Girl, Nike and Barbados Tourism.

The national, full-scale campaign will have Rihanna seductively sipping Vita Coco. She's young, she's hot, and she hails from Barbados, a country where men hack piles of fresh coconuts to make juice on the street.

According to the Davie Brown Index, an independent online rating system to track the marketing power of celebrities, Rihanna scores 75 on a 100-point scale, ranking her at No. 334 out of nearly 2,700 celebrities in the DBI database.

"She is known by more than 82 percent of all US consumers -- she's about as well known as **Gwen Stefani**, **Derek Jeter** and **Sting**," said DBI's **Matt Delzell**, an account director in the celebrity entertainment division of The Marketing Arm, an Omnicom agency.

And among young women, aged 18-to-24, she scores high in the endorsement, trendsetter and influence attributes, with 80 percent of this demographic liking her.

Robert Passikoff, president of Brand Keys, a New York research consultancy, said: "It's a situation where celebrities, or their agents have discovered an interesting new income stream. If she didn't do it, some other singer would.

"With no disrespect to the lady, the position is interchangeable. You have to spend an awful lot of money hiring celebrities and doing campaigns, then, you wait and see if there's positive behavior to the brand, sales and profits," Passikoff said.

Ann Green at Millward Brown, a marketing research agency backed that view. "What celebrities do very well is to help grab attention. But we found that using one does not necessarily persuade a consumer to buy -- unless the messages are relevant, timely, believable and clear." Green said Rihanna was probably a good choice. "Their brand (Vita Coco) right now doesn't stand for much, people don't know it. But they do know Rihanna so they may have an opportunity to very quickly establish equity and messaging through her."

Julie Earle-Levine

Bipartisan

It finally took **Bob McCann** and his team at UBS Wealth Management Americas to bring together former Presidents **Bill Clinton** and **George W. Bush** in New York last Monday night, industry sources tell On The Money.

The two, days before, passed on a White House invitation to join President **Barack Obama** visiting Ground Zero, after the American mission to kill bin Laden.

The former presidents spoke at Jazz at Lincoln Center at a private UBS client event on revitalizing the US economy.

Phil Gramm, former Senator, vice chairman at UBS Investment Bank was there along with ex-Clinton hand, **James Carville**.

In a Q&A session with McCann, CEO of the Swiss bank's Americas brokerage unit, Clinton and Bush paid tribute to the administration's recent handling of bin Laden, a source said.

Earlier, the UBS Americas business released a survey showing the national debt is wealthy investors' top worry. "U.S. investors' concerns about global competitiveness, the budget deficit, unemployment, and the dollar have inspired us to initiate a conversation with our clients about what it will take to revitalize America," said McCann, former brokerage chief at Merrill Lynch.

Both ex-presidents, more pals than pols at Lincoln Center, expressed "supreme confidence that we have the collective ability to overcome these problems and to innovate and grow," a source said.

John Aidan Byrne

Neighborly

John A. Thain, chairman and CEO, CIT Group, Inc., became the dinner chairman of the Parkinson's Disease Foundation's annual Bal du Printemps on Tuesday in a most unusual way.

Thain's wife, **Carmen**, used to play in the backyard in New Rochelle with neighbor **Page Morton Black**, the foundation's chairwoman, when she was a youngster.

Page recently went to her and asked if Carmen could set up a playdate with her husband, the former chairman of Merrill Lynch and chair the event. After much persuasion he agreed, **Robin Elliott**, PDF executive director, disclosed at the event.

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