

Advertisement

EXPLORE NOW

gettyimages
iStock

Rewind: Before Bieber, There Was Marky Mark for Calvin Klein

A Look Back at the Iconic Underwear Campaign

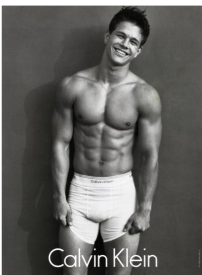
By [Ann-Christine Diaz](#). Published on February 12, 2015.

'Tis the season for spring fashion campaigns, and perhaps the most head-scratching idea we've seen in the space is this ad:



Although others [would beg to differ](#), Justin Bieber reads like a big taint on the sophisticated, seductive and sometimes controversial legacy of Calvin Klein ads (at least in our book, because of his utter douchiness).

It's a clear homage to perhaps what's arguably one of the most iconic celebrity fashion marketing moves to date, the brand's 1992 men's underwear campaign featuring Mark Wahlberg, then known, of course, as Marky Mark.



Mark Wahlberg for Calvin Klein

The print ads and accompanying spots were created by then Calvin Klein Senior VP Neil Kraft, now founder and CCO of Kraftworks, the company behind the [recent plus-sized model ad](#) for Swimsuitsforall running in this year's [Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue](#).

Whether you were a hater or a fan of the pseudo-rapper, it's hard to deny that with the campaign, something pretty powerful occurred at the intersection of celebrity and fashion.

The ads revealed a whole new dimension to Mr. Wahlberg (beyond the six pack) -- and perhaps

allowed you to forgive the fact that he associated himself with a posse called "The Funky Bunch." Looking back, they were a prescient sign of his superstardom to come. And although Calvin Klein was probably *the* name in men's underwear at the time, the campaign helped cement that idea in consumer consciousness.

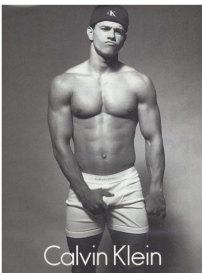


"We were repositioning Calvin's men's underwear line, which at the time was a relatively small business," Mr. Kraft said. "It wasn't like we were casting around for a celebrity, it was more like 'What do we do for the new campaign for men's underwear? Right at the same time, Mark was on the cover of [Rolling Stone](#) showing his Calvin Klein underwear. Both Calvin and I saw it and thought, This is the guy we need."

At the time, CK had no connection to Wahlberg, but Mr. Kraft said Mr. Klein was good friends with producer David Geffen. "We approached [Wahlberg] not knowing what would happen, but thought he would be a great model, and eventually he agreed to do it."

The campaign was shot by the late Herb Ritts and featured solo shots and film of Mr. Wahlberg as well as others in which he's accompanied by Kate Moss.

Mr. Kraft said that the films, in which Mr. Wahlberg raps, grabs his crotch and raves about how his Calvins don't get "stretched out," were all unscripted. "He hadn't done any acting, so we had no idea whether he could act," Mr. Kraft said. "But he had a natural likability. I think it came through in the print and it came through in the TV."



No retouching involved

Mr. Wahlberg ultimately attracted a broad audience. "It was a really nice combination -- he appealed to women, he appealed to gay men and he appealed to men who wanted to be him," said Mr. Kraft. "It all kind of worked together. And unlike Justin Bieber, he's incredibly naturally charming. And we didn't retouch him."

And you can only imagine what would have happened had Facebook or Twitter been around. "This was fifteen years before social media and cellphones, but when we had him up to do fittings, people got word of it and across the

street, they were putting their phone numbers in their windows. To this day, I can't figure out how they knew he was in the neighborhood."

Mr. Kraft said that after the campaign, the men's underwear business grew "exponentially," and even the women's line subsequently saw a bump in sales. All with a media plan that was only "around a million," he said.

As for the difference between the two campaigns, "Marky Mark was universally liked, Justin isn't," Mr. Kraft said. "There is an argument where the more risk you take, the more attention you get. One of the things I remember Calvin saying to me years back was there's no such thing as bad publicity. But I do think there are bad associations. I think people wanted to be like Marky Mark. I don't think everyone wants to be like Justin Bieber."

In this article:

Advertising

Agencies

Creativity

Creativity News

Rewind

AD AGE | LOOKBOOK

Weekly Feature
Best Places To Work
Have Happy Employees

[Learn more](#)

Buy for less.
Explore for free.

[EXPLORE NOW](#)

gettyimages
iStock

AD AGE | REPORTS

Sponsored White Paper
Debunking the Seven
Myths of Cinema
Advertising

2015 is a banner year for moviegoing and cinema advertising. North American box office sales are well on the way to topping the \$10.9 billion record set in 2013. Even so, some analysts question whether the silver screen can continue to deliver a golden opportunity for marketers who want to advertise at the movies. Here are seven top myths about moviegoing and why savvy marketers know to ignore them. Brought to you by NCM -- America's Movie Network.

[Learn more](#)