

The Nonuser Celebrity Endorser

Topic: Deceptive Advertising

Characters: Annie, Copywriter for Laird & Laird Advertising
Lance Willard, Well-known and popular Hollywood movie star
Victor, President of Laird & Laird Advertising

Annie, copywriter for Laird & Laird (L&L) Advertising, has just been assigned the Bud's Best (BB) bacon account. She is tickled pink, because she knows that Bud's Best has just signed a one-year contract to use Lance Willard as a celebrity endorser. Lance is a well known, well loved, young, handsome, and vibrant Hollywood movie star who specializes in action drama roles. Victor, President of L&L, tells Annie that she will be writing commercials using Lance in the role of giving product testimonials. Victor explains to Annie that this endorsement is a testimonial given by a celebrity rather than an average consumer. He tells her that Lance has signed an affidavit swearing that he is a bona fide user of the product, as is legally required. The TV commercials featuring Lance, explains Victor, should feature Lance testifying as to the quality, value, and tastiness of the bacon. Victor suggests that this will take some good acting on Lance's part, since he has just recently become a vegetarian. Annie wonders whether a testimonial by Lance might not be dishonest, but she says nothing to Victor since she doesn't want to blow her opportunity to meet Lance in person. She figures she can get all of the details later from Lance.

Lance turns out to be as charming in person as he is on the silver screen. After some small talk, Annie decides to query Lance about his experience with Bud's Best. Lance explains that he has had personal experience with the product, as is legally required for a testimonial. He tells her that he has done many celebrity endorsements in the past and knows that the American Advertising Federation's "Advertising Principles of American Business" state that "advertising containing testimonials shall be limited to those of competent witnesses who are reflecting a real and honest opinion or experience" and that as long as the endorser's comments are based on verifiable personal use, the message cannot be challenged as deceptive. In fact, he says, it has been his favorite brand of bacon ever since he was a small child, and bacon and eggs were his favorite and most frequently consumed breakfast until about a month ago when he became a vegetarian for health reasons. Lance tells Annie that a recent checkup by his physician revealed that his cholesterol level was 200--in the danger zone. His doctor had warned Lance to cut down on high cholesterol foods, such as bacon and eggs. Lance decided to go even further and abstain from meat since so many meats are high in cholesterol.

Annie asks Lance diplomatically whether he feels comfortable testifying about how much he likes Bud's Best bacon when he no longer uses the product. Lance replies that his conscience is clean. He has discussed the legalities with Victor, who told him that technically it was okay for him to discuss his past enjoyment of the product. After all, Lance reminds Annie, the selling points he would discuss in the commercials would be the bacon's quality, value, and good taste. Lance explains that in his view, as far as bacon goes, Bud's Best is second to none along these criteria. He tells Annie that nothing regarding the bacon's healthiness, or lack thereof, will be mentioned. As long as people are going to eat bacon, Lance asserts, they might as well eat Bud's Best.

Annie thinks that Lance might have a point, but she isn't sure. She doesn't want to rock the boat at this point with either Lance or Victor, for she really wants to work with Lance on the shoot. She thinks she'd better just give it some more thought and prayer for the time being.

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