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WHERE CONCEPTS COME TO MARKET

Characters Do Matter



Tom Wilson II, who creates Ziggy panels and strips, has just started a company called Character Matters devoted to developing characters for product branding identity purposes. Character Matters' mission is to help brand existing products with the aid of customized characters developed for the client exclusively for this purpose, as well as create characters for brand new products.

Based on the success of relationships like Snoopy's spokescharacter role with MetLife (which United Media says has helped MetLife increase brand awareness from 20 percent in the '80s to 40 percent in the '90s), Wilson became motivated to launch Cleveland, OH-based Character Matters with the help of his Ziggy long-term business partner Sue Dreher (www.charactermatters.net).

"Look at what AFLAC and Geico have done with their characters. And who ever heard of these insurance agencies before they came up with those little guys? A picture may be worth a 1,000 words, but the right character is worth 100,000," Wilson says.

Wilson has been overwhelmed by the enthusiastic response from clients so far, but can't release a clientele list yet. In addition to Character Matters' focus on character branding, the firm also is developing a stable of internal properties for licensing purposes. One of the first properties for that division will be Ivy Supersonic (pictured above), the hat designer to the stars. "Ivy Supersonic," he explains, "is a natural role model and has enormous appeal for girls of all ages. She's the girlfriend that every girl and young woman wishes lived next door. She's the hip and world-wise 'Cathy' for a new millennium as well as a new generation. The best part is she is a real person, not a lab-created design!"

