

June 12, 2006

Product Placement Deals Make Leap From Film to Books

By [MOTOKO RICH](#)

Near the end of an early galley of "Cathy's Book: If Found Call (650) 266-8233," a young adult novel that will be published in September, the spunky eponymous heroine talks about wearing a "killer coat of Clinique #11 'Black Violet' lipstick." But in the final edition of the book, that reference has been changed to "a killer coat of Lipslicks in 'Daring.' "

As it turns out, Lipslicks is a line of lip gloss made by Cover Girl, which has signed an unusual marketing partnership with Running Press, the unit of Perseus Books Group that is publishing the novel.

Cover Girl, which is owned by the consumer products giant [Procter & Gamble](#), has neither paid the publisher nor the book's authors, Sean Stewart and Jordan Weisman, for the privilege of having their makeup showcased in the novel. But Procter will promote the book on [Beinggirl.com](#), a Web site directed at adolescent girls that has games, advice on handling puberty and, yes, makeup tips.

By now, television and movie viewers have become used to this kind of thing: when they see sneakers or cars on a show or in a film, they generally assume that these appearances have been paid for by the companies that make the brands.

But product placement in books is still relatively rare. The use of even the subtlest of sales pitches, particularly in a book aimed at adolescents, could raise questions about the vulnerability of the readers.

Many popular young adult novels, of course, already spread references to brands throughout their pages in series like "The Gossip Girl" and "The A-List," although there are no actual product placement deals.

But such deals are not unprecedented. Five years ago, Bulgari, the Italian jewelry company, paid Fay Weldon an undisclosed amount to feature the brand prominently in her novel, entitled — what else? — "The Bulgari Connection."

In that instance, Bulgari actually commissioned Ms. Weldon, a well-known British author, to write the novel. But with "Cathy's Book," the authors had already written it when Mr. Weisman's agents at Creative Artists Agency showed the manuscript to Maurice Coffey, a marketing manager at Procter & Gamble.

Mr. Coffey had already been in contact with C.A.A. about other promotional deals. And Mr. Weisman, a co-founder and partner with Mr. Stewart in 42 Entertainment, an interactive marketing company, had also been talking to Mr. Coffey about doing some separate work for Procter.

Mr. Coffey, meanwhile, passed the manuscript on to Bob Arnold, interactive marketing manager for Beinggirl.com and Aimee LaFerriere, the interactive marketing manager for Cover Girl.

The novel, a surprisingly lyrical addition to the teen-lit genre, features Cathy Vickers, a 17-year-old

aspiring artist who is trying to learn why her boyfriend, Victor, has dumped her. Aided by her feisty best friend, Emma, Cathy comes across a series of increasingly troubling clues suggesting that Victor may or may not be dying of a fatal illness, be connected to the Chinatown underworld or be part of a biotechnology conspiracy — not to mention be a possible murderer.

"It was very hard to put down," recalled Mr. Arnold, who said he passed the book around to colleagues who were excited about a potential marketing partnership.

Mr. Weisman said that he and Mr. Stewart were comfortable with the association because they believed it would not fundamentally alter their creative content. "We had already put in these drawings where Cathy was giving makeup tips on how she dresses when she wants to behave like different parts of herself," said Mr. Weisman, who helped conceive the plot and characters for the book, while Mr. Stewart, an award-winning science fiction and fantasy writer, wrote the text. "So, it seemed like there was a natural connection there."

Some of the changes that the authors and illustrators, Cathy Brigg and Shane Small, have made since the partnership was struck include altering a drawing entitled "Artgirl Detective" to "Artist! Detective! UnderCover Girl" and changing a generic reference to "gunmetal grey eyeliner" to "eyecolor in 'Midnight Metal.' "

Mr. Arnold said that Cover Girl had never had a promotional relationship with authors or publishers before. But with "Cathy's Book," he said, "the integration was a no-brainer. We thought we could help out and hopefully become part of the story as well."

Beinggirl.com will begin promoting the book in banner ads on the site in August, Mr. Arnold said, with links to cartoons drawn by Cathy's character. But, he said, the site would strive to "keep the fiction away from reality."

From a marketing perspective, said Michael Watras, chief executive of Straightline International, a New York strategic branding agency, "it's a great concept."

"It doesn't cost the cosmetic company anything," he said. If readers "can get into the character and look up to her in some way, then I think it's a home run."

The authors were perhaps more at ease with the product placement idea because of their own backgrounds in marketing. In fact, the idea for "Cathy's Book" grew out of work the pair did on [Steven Spielberg's](#) movie "Artificial Intelligence: A.I." to create a promotional campaign based on planting hundreds of clues on the Web, on cellphones, on billboards and in newspapers, leading people to put the tips together to form a coherent narrative.

With "Cathy's Book," although Mr. Stewart has written a self-contained textual narrative, Mr. Weisman also created a series of clues that are included in a so-called evidence pack that will come with the book in a sealed plastic envelope filled with photos, post-it notes with phone numbers scrawled on them, pages from a date book, birth and marriage certificates and letters. There will also be a business card for a fictional "online consultant" at Beinggirl.com.

Hints to most of these documents are embedded in the novel, which also contains Web site addresses and phone numbers that readers can access for extra material. The telephone number on the book's cover, for example, leads to an outgoing voicemail message from Cathy.

"What we are selling here to the customer or the reader is an experience that transcends the book itself," said David Steinberger, president and chief executive of Perseus, the publisher. "The relationships with Beimgirl.com and Cover Girl are enriching that experience."

Those relationships will be fully disclosed, Mr. Steinberger said. Right on the copyright page, Cathy, in character, thanks Beimgirl.com and Cover Girl for their work to "help me get the message out."

Mr. Stewart said the authors did not include any branded mentions they felt were inconsistent with the existing narrative. "I had strong feelings about the kinds of things I was willing to have in the book and the kinds of things I absolutely was not willing to have in the book," he said.

At one point, recalled Mr. Weisman, Mr. Arnold of Beimgirl.com sent the authors some advertisements for feminine hygiene products and "said 'What do you think about Cathy annotating an existing ad for Tampax or Always?' " The authors drew the line at that. "We said while that might be very funny, we think that would be very far over the edge," Mr. Weisman said.

But some booksellers are concerned that the precedent is an unwelcome one. "I'm not crazy about it," said Carol Chittenden, owner of Eight Cousins, a bookstore in Falmouth, Mass., and the children's book buyer for BookStream, a book wholesaler in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. "Once you're under contract to include certain kinds of things, then that narrows the editorial possibilities greatly and has a huge influence over the nature of the writing and the nature of the story."

Mr. Steinberger of Perseus said that so far, the response to the book had been based on the quality of the writing and the novelty of the Web and phone clues. He said the book had already been sold in five foreign countries and that plans for an initial print run of 30,000 had been increased to more than 100,000 copies based on bookseller response. "There's a risk in putting so much emphasis on the Cover Girl relationship that it comes across as a crass commercial project," he said. "But it's not."

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