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Reebok, Nelly Lace up Deal

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NEW YORK -- Reebok has signed a long-term deal with hip-hop star Nelly that will include a signature collection of athletic footwear, apparel and accessories. The launch of the collection will be timed for the 2005 holiday season in select boutiques and athletic specialty retailers with an expanded distribution in 2006. Financial terms were not released.

Nelly will also be featured in Canton, Mass.-based Reebok's "I Am What I Am" global ad campaign, via MCGarrybowen, New York. The three-time Grammy Award winner joins rappers Jay-Z and 50 Cent with signature Reebok lines.

"Reebok's partnership with Nelly elevates the fusion of sports and music to a whole new level," Dennis Baldwin, Reebok's CMO, said in a statement. The musician, born Cornell Haynes Jr. in St. Louis, added, "I've always been into sneakers and throughout my career I've always wanted to have a signature pair of sneakers that truly reflect my personal style."

A recent report on the athletic shoe category shows that products endorsed by rap stars are selling better on the whole than shoes endorsed by sports stars.

-- Barry Janoff