

Silent treatment works on media

Client: Motorola
(Schaumburg, IL)

PR Team: In-house, Hill & Knowlton (New York) and KBC Media Relations (Haddonfield, NJ)

Campaign: Silent Brett

Time Frame: September 2000 - September 2001

Budget: Less than \$2,000

Actions speak louder than words – or, in the case of Brett Banfe, in place of them. Last fall, the 19-year-old college student from New Jersey took a year-long vow of silence as an exercise in self-improvement, while hoping to inspire

others to set goals. When Hill & Knowlton heard of his plan through local media coverage, they saw an ideal PR opportunity to promote client Motorola's launch of the Talkabout T900, a two-way messaging device.

Strategy

Banfe had planned to communicate via e-mail during his silence, so when H&K approached him about using Motorola's new device, he quickly agreed, says Karen Ammond, an EVP at KBC Media Relations, who donates her time as Banfe's publicist.

H&K and Motorola's key objectives for the year-long stunt were boosting awareness of the T900 through extensive TV and print cover-



Talkabout... Banfe's lifeline

age of Banfe, and increasing coverage of Motorola's Silent Bill viral e-mail campaign, which features MPEG clips of a character who only communicates via his T900.

Tactics

H&K targeted families and adults who want to use wireless communications to stay connected, placing the most emphasis on 18- to 24-year-olds.

The agency enlisted Banfe's mother as a spokesperson, and conducted a brief media training session with her and Banfe, providing the pair with key messages to deliver during media tours.

To maximize coverage before Banfe went silent, H&K and Motorola staged events to inform the media that the T900 was his communications tool of choice. A later media stunt was Banfe's first college date – complete with T900 communication.

Banfe's story was aggressively pitched to teen magazines, and the PR teams

developed online chat and promotional concepts. A Web site was launched, appropriately dubbed www.not-speaking.com.

"The campaign included participation in the ESPN XGames and MTV Awards, Web banner advertising, promotional events and standard advertising," adds Josephine Posti, Motorola's PR manager.

Results

All of the major network news programs covered Banfe's stunt, as well as morning shows *Good Morning America* and *Today*. Additional TV coverage includes *The Oprah Show*, *Live with Regis*, *The Late Late Show with Craig Kilborn*, *Studio Y* (New York City's Metro network) and *Trackers*.

NPR, Reuters, *USA Today*, *Time for Kids*, *Seventeen* and *CosmoGirl!* also covered Banfe.

Overseas, the story was picked up by French TV-Canal Plus, Russian TV, Belgium TV, the BBC, New Zealand Radio, Australian Radio, South Africa Radio and the AP.

Posti says about 750,000 T900s have been sold since the June debut, exceeding expectations. The ad campaign and celebrity endorsements are considered to have the most impact on sales.

Future

H&K and Motorola will continue to stage media events, culminating in September when Banfe starts speaking again.

Craig McGuire