



## **PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR THE WIRED WORLD\ MOVIE STUDIOS, CORPORATIONS, AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES SEEKING WIDER AUDIENCES ARE TURNING TO THE WEB - AND ARE TRANSFORMING AN INDUSTRY.**

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By Chris Reidy, Globe Staff

Plotting tonight's Webcast of the movie premiere party of "Mission: Impossible-2," publicist Michael Spataro sits in his Boston office, waiting to get an OK from star Tom Cruise. "Nothing happens without his approval," says Spataro, a senior vice president for Miller/Shandwick Technologies, a public relations firm that's gone high-tech and Hollywood. In the old days, a Hollywood press agent might use blarney and an unlimited bar tab to plug a new movie. Today, movie studios are using Webcasts on the Internet. It's not just studios that are turning to online promotions. Big corporations and government agencies are also experimenting with communicating through Webcasts and online chat sessions.

As Spataro's boss, president Tony Sapienza, sees it, the Web is transforming the public relations industry. Just one example of this trend is the five-hour "Mission: Impossible-2" Webcast that Miller/Shandwick is helping to produce and promote on behalf of client Eastman Kodak Co. (A Kodak camera plays a key role in the movie's denouement, hence Kodak's keen interest in the success of "M:i-2," as Tinsel Town cognoscenti refer to Cruise's latest film.) It's possible that the Kodak event, which can be viewed at [www.Kodak.com](http://www.Kodak.com) beginning at 9 p.m., won't even be the Web's biggest promotional event of the day. At 3 p.m., Victoria's Secret plans to Webcast a fashion show from the French Riviera. When the lingerie company tried something similar in early 1999, a million people reportedly overloaded the company's Web site.

Not all Web events aspire to such glamour. Many publicly traded companies are seeking the Web's broader audiences as the Securities and Exchange Commission urges them to disclose to small investors some of the same financial information that was once shared only with Wall Street analysts. Gillette Co. and Staples Inc. are among many companies that recently did their first Webcasts of quarterly earnings reports. Anyone who visited their Web sites at the appointed hours could listen in as executives discussed results with analysts. Meanwhile, online chats with celebrities have become almost standard fare for cable TV stations looking to promote themselves or their programming. To cite one example, the Discovery Channel arranged an online chat session last month with

paralyzed actor Christopher Reeve after it aired a program on spinal cord trauma.

Foreign governments are also getting into the act. In February, Miller/Shandwick produced a video Webcast for the Chinese Ministry of Trade when it launched a Web-based export-and-import initiative. In the pre-Web era, such an announcement might have been made at a Hong Kong news conference attended by a handful of reporters. But thanks to the Internet, the trade ministry's Webcast had a worldwide audience of 2,000 people, Spataro says.

Chinese trade is all well and good. But far more interesting to movie fans may be online promotions from Hollywood. According to Advertising Age, the Webcast Miller/Shandwick will be part of tonight grew out of a product-placement overture made to Kodak by Paramount Pictures, the studio responsible for "Mission: Impossible-2." Most film fans are familiar with product placements. In the middle of a movie, an actor swigs a Coke, lights up a Camel, or drives off in a BMW. Makers of such products pay big bucks to get their brands on the silver screen, all in the belief that a movie cameo can boost a product's sales.

With many rival brands trying to aggressively sell digital cameras to mainstream consumers, the deal between Kodak and Paramount quickly evolved beyond a mere product placement into a broader marketing partnership.

With a suggested retail price of \$899, a Kodak DC290 camera appears in a dozen scenes; indeed, the camera is said to play a role in solving the movie's mystery.

Looking to leverage that product placement, plans call for Cruise to be the poster boy for a series of print ads that seem to do double-duty pitching both the movie and Kodak.

As part of this integrated marketing strategy, tonight's Webcast aims to turn the Kodak cameras on-screen appearance into an online marketing opportunity. Promising to be a virtual backstage pass to a Hollywood premiere party, the Webcast will be modeled after such TV shows as "Entertainment Tonight." Plans call for live shots of celebrities arriving at the theater. Viewers may also see some movie footage, interviews with the movie's stars, and segments on the workings of DC290.

"Think 'Entertainment Tonight' with no-name talent instead of Joan Rivers," says Spataro, who helped assemble a team that includes a Hollywood firm called MovieConnect.com to produce and promote tonight's Webcast.

The Webcast will also feature contests and giveaways. To sign up for a chance to win DC290 cameras, viewers will be asked to disclose their name, address, e-mail address, gender, and age.

In theory, this information could be used in future Kodak marketing efforts, but viewers may click on an "opt-out" button that will delete their names from any

mailing lists.

"Mission: Impossible-2" isn't Miller/Shandwick's first Hollywood venture. Last year, the firm was part of the Internet buzz surrounding the release of "The Insider," a movie about the relationship of a "60 Minutes" producer and a tobacco industry whistle-blower who worked for Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp. Miller/Shandwick wasn't promoting a product placement in that case. Instead, it helped client Brown & Williamson engage in what might be described as online damage control.

Partly to get out its side of the story, Brown & Williamson had Miller/Shandwick produce and promote a Web event around the time of "The Insider's" release. Moviegoers who visited a Web site could ask questions of company executives. There are still technical hurdles to overcome. For one thing, few homes have the high-speed Internet connections needed to enjoy a video Webcast with production values such as Kodak's.

That's why Victoria's Secret is scheduling its fashion show for the middle of the workday, when many consumers can use their employers' computer systems to go online, claims Websense Inc., a company that makes software that allows employers to block workers from visiting inappropriate Web sites on company time.

Such issues aside, it may still be too early to tell whether Web marketing is more cost-effective than traditional marketing.

"Would it have been better to take out an ad in The Wall Street Journal? We don't know that yet," Spataro says.