



Guru Program Grows Image, Market Success For World's First Internet Payment System

Situation

A new e-commerce transaction company was seven weeks from official launch of its breakthrough Internet system at a major conference in New York, but lacked branding, positioning, marketing messages, target lists, objectives, strategies or tactics, media relationships, channel relations or plan of any sort because a Bay Area firm had failed to deliver on its promises. Tom Gable and team jumped into the fray and within two days completed competitive research and identification of important target audiences, from academia, to venture capitalists, to government agencies, and outlined the critical elements needed for a successful launch.

The Plan

In one week, the Gable team presented its comprehensive strategic plan and recommended position as the first safe, easy solution for conducting electronic commerce on the Internet. The goal was to build an image of credibility for the company, its management and its technology and a level of confidence and trust among its many target audiences to promote sales and a future high valuation of the company when it raised money and went public. Elements included: creating a positioning platform, developing media materials and target lists (mail, fax, and email), scheduling speeches and interviews, planning the official launch day and launch week, contacting analysts and research companies, educating academic leaders and media experts and developing a hot list of the most influential members of the Internet culture.

An exclusive interview was arranged with The New York Times, to appear the day the October conference started. Simultaneously, The Gable Group (the name of the firm at the time) distributed the launch news release via PR Newswire and by e-mail, fax and overnight delivery to important targets all over the world.

With the launch completed, The Gable Group implemented its ongoing, multilevel program to ensure consistent, continuous coverage and relationship-building among all target audiences. Interviews were arranged at conferences in New York, Boston, Toronto, London, Los Angeles and San Francisco. The agency used its existing relationships with major media to get in the door with First Virtual -- an unknown company, with unknown people, operating in a new and largely unknown industry.

The Results

Within two months, First Virtual received major coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, and major daily newspapers. By the third and fourth months of operation, all magazine targets had been hit. By month five, the media were calling for interviews based on ongoing success stories. The number of merchants started growing. Daily hits to its retail site went from zero to more than 200,000 a day. The CEO was named one of the top 50 people in Cyberspace by *Newsweek* and one of just five people featured in a special *Business Week* issue on the evolution of the Internet into an engine of commerce, a theme the agency began pitching six months before the story ran.

FV founders became popular speakers at events throughout the world. FV was positioned as safe and user-friendly. Volume started growing at 16 percent per week by month seven. FV was included in major research reports by Dataquest and Forrester. By month eight, the company was referred to in most media as the premier Internet payment company, achieving our positioning goals ahead of schedule and helping FV exceed its expectations for numbers of merchants and buying volume. The wide spread attention, recognition and high degree of credibility were also considered factors in First Virtual's ability to raise significant amounts of capital from important strategic partners to finance its growth and go public ahead of schedule. TGG supported the IPO and subsequent investor relations programs. FV changed its name to Message Media when it acquired another payment system and was acquired by DoubleClick shortly thereafter. The PR and IR program earned numerous public relations and investor relations awards.

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