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Insider

DOCTOR E-MAIL

By Judy Warner

With *You've Got Mail* now at theaters everywhere and Calvin Klein Cosmetics

launching what is believed to be the first ad campaign to promote e-mail

addresses along with its CK One fragrance, the man who calls himself

Dr. E-Mail is asking marketers: "Are you ready to listen?"

Listen, that is, to what customers are saying in e-mail.

V.A. Shiva, the 35-year-old president and chief executive officer of General Interactive, Cambridge, Mass., is making his mark in intelligent messaging: the process of sorting through, understanding, classifying and responding to the thousands of daily e-mail messages being received each day from customers by wired companies.

Licensed users of General Interactive's proprietary software platform, called EchoMail, include Nike, Allstate Insurance, Walt Disney, Lycos and Calvin Klein Cosmetics Company. Wieden & Kennedy of Portland, Ore., first introduced General Interactive to Nike, and most recently in December to Calvin Klein, when the New York-based fashion designer took its first stab at "modern" communication by tapping

into the Internet, not with a conventional Web site but by building a character-driven story through e-mail messages designed to reintroduce the CK One fragrance.

Featuring three characters—Tia, Robert and Anna—with e-mail addresses, the idea is to develop a storyline that engages consumers and thereby gain consumer profiles not available through traditional media. The consumers' e-mail responses are read, stored, classified, routed, logged and responded to by EchoMail. "We're always looking for new ways to advertise [and] the Internet was a natural answer," CK One representative Diana Lin says.

The Indian-born Shiva holds degrees from MIT in electrical engineering and theoretical mechanics, and professes more than a passing interest in the graphic arts. He worked for Hewlett-Packard and Lotus before starting his

own company, Millennium Cybernetics, a technical and creative services company that primarily built ad-supported Web sites. Last May, in an effort to reduce costs and combine the creative and technical components, Millennium was bought out by General Interactive, another company started by Shiva.

The only marketers not ready to listen are those who could be held accountable for what EchoMail has to say. "What happens is an interesting contradiction," Shiva observes. "What [marketers] are saying is, 'I really want to know what my customers are thinking.' Now that you actually do know you have to tell your boss, and maybe the folks in research and development.

"That kind of data in an enterprise is extremely political. ... You know, if you're running ads and no one is responding, that's a problem for someone." ■

For more information on General Interactive, visit their web site at www.interactive.com or email info@interactive.com

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