

V VIDEO NEWS & NOTES



Pellington (left) and Klein

'BUZZ' Awhile

*First MTV taught viewers how to read "Words."
Now the music network wants action.*

By Jim Farber

SIXTEEN MONTHS AGO, MARK Pellington scribbled down an idea for a new MTV promotional spot titled "Words" — which was composed of nothing but. On a black background, Pellington arranged white words in ominous succession, accompanying them with music that seemed to come from the beyond. "These are words that could be saying something," blurbed the television screen. "They want to. But they're not. They're just sitting there." Pause. "LIKE YOU."

It was an amazing stunt, even if the MTV logo did appear at the last moment to sound the all-clear. Earlier MTV promotional spots may have attacked the audience for being scatterbrained (Barbara Kanowitz's blathering ads, for example, which culminated in the line "Finally a network for the way you think"). But this was the first time MTV had consciously addressed what may be the modern audi-

ence's deepest problem: passivity. "I want people to react," Pellington says of his work. "Don't just let things happen — react to them."

Striving toward that end, Pellington and his MTV partner, Jon Klein, have created a television series called *BUZZ*. According to Klein, the purpose of the program is "to give people a kick in the ass." Or as the pilot for the series puts it, to offer people "the whole world, dished up in digestible pieces." *BUZZ*, which is produced in England, is slated to debut in the United States on April 22nd at 9:00 p.m. EST.

Because *BUZZ* has no host, no format and often apparently no structure, it can seem like an MTV promotional spot that will not end. "I've always wanted to do a nonlinear, collage-type show," explains Pellington. "To be thematically based but never stating the theme, with just voices or visuals grouped under a larger umbrella. We've taken the initial concept of MTV and condensed it."

Pellington and Klein have also made it global. Speakers from Australia, Brazil

and Ghana appear on the first *BUZZ*, offering their two cents' worth about culture, the media, the future. There are also features on artists like La Fura Dels Baus, a Spanish theater group whose members are known to eat raw intestines onstage. In the debut episode, Jon Bon Jovi compares life to a submarine sandwich, and Terence Trent D'Arby talks politics.

Neither do so for very long. *BUZZ* is even more manic than the usual MTV fare. "Slowing down our show is not going to slow down the world," says Pellington. "What Jon Klein and I are doing is reflecting the world around us. I think somebody comes away from our show having bits of information about a lot of things with a lot of different viewpoints."

Shortage of viewpoints is not the problem. *BUZZ* is dense with disembodied voices and fractured images — the video equivalent of a house mix. Pellington says the pace is intentional, to hold the attention of those viewers used to treating their remote controls as if they were gearshifts on a race car. "I accept that people change channels," he says. "People like variety. In the best sense they're trying to get information or sounds from a lot of different sources."

But can they really absorb information without a broader context? "Your eyes and your brain are reacting at the same time," claims Pellington. "I'm trying to connect the two." Pellington and Klein want a visceral, almost primal response. "I want to eliminate the middle man between the television screen and the viewer," says Pellington. "[On TV] there's always someone standing there between you and what's really happening, explaining things. I just want to suck people in."

But in the process, Pellington and Klein leave themselves open to charges of encouraging what they mean to attack. In the first *BUZZ*, for example, Dennis Hopper leeringly mouths the words "Just make sure you aren't caught watching." But what follows is so overwhelming the response may have to be passive.

And in a way, it is precisely this irony that gives Pellington's and Klein's work poignancy. Their promotional spots have always been creative, witty and earnestly provocative; within a medium like MTV, however, a medium built entirely on provocation, these shocks can always be absorbed. And yet their work maintains an innocent resolve, muffled screams from deep within the video machine — an image that pleases Pellington. "Jon and I have this analogy of *BUZZ* as this baby which comes out screaming and whimpering and keeps you up at night," he says, smiling. "But eventually it begins to walk and it grows up. Like anything new, it needs time to develop."

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