

BUSINESS

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Arkansas firm gets screen time in blockbuster

Bottled water featured in 'War of the Worlds'

BY STANLEY DUNLAP

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Being next to Tom Cruise as he battles aliens might not be considered an enviable posi-

tion to most people, but for an Arkansas company, it's just what they wanted.

Mountain Valley Spring Co. of Hot Springs, Ark., had its bottled water make it into several scenes in the Tom Cruise movie "War of the Worlds." For a company with 325 employ-

ees, getting exposure in the blockbuster movie is a big moment, said Mountain Valley CEO, Breck Speed.

"It's a nice feeling," he said. "It's a big deal to be in a popular movie and have Mountain Valley featured in it."

Product placement is sometimes done as a barter arrangement, where companies offer

their products in exchange for air time, while other times it's paid for. For "War of the Worlds," Mountain Valley used Los Angeles product placement agency Legacy Entertainment Services.

The use of product placement has become common

See **PRODUCT, C2**

MOUNTAIN VALLEY SPRING CO.

Employees: 325

2004 Sales: \$65 million

Headquarters: Hot Springs, Ark.

CEO: Breck Speed

President: Philip Tappan

On the Web:

mountainvalleyspring.com

Shipped in 36 states.

Continued from page C1

PRODUCT

since the movie "E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial" created a sharp increase in sales for Reese's Pieces in 1982, said Ralph Berry, president of Thompson and Berry, a public relations firm that recently helped place a Ful (pronounced *fuel*) backpack into Memphis-filmed "Hustle & Flow."

"It can be tremendously effective because movies and television are the icons of popular culture," Berry said.

For Mountain Valley, having its product used in a prominent spot isn't anything new. Elvis

used Mountain Valley at Grace-land and on tour, Bill Clinton drank the water in the White House, and the water made another Tom Cruise movie, "A Few Good Men."

However, while Mountain Valley Spring has a long history — it's the nation's oldest bottled water company, founded in 1871 — it's relatively unknown these days in the crowded bottled water industry, Speed said.

"It's a highly competitive industry," he said. "We've been sitting there quietly, and now what we're trying to do is raise the awareness."

In 2004 Mountain Valley accounted for \$65 million in sales in a \$9 billion industry, with mega companies such as Dasani

(Coca-Cola) and Aquafina (Pepsi) dominating.

Mountain Valley doesn't try to compete with the mega companies, which mass produce bottled water from many different places. Mountain Valley's only water source is a spring in Arkansas, and its main competition comes from premium imported water such as France's Evian. Product placement helps re-establish their name as a premium brand, said Jim Karrh, chief marketing officer.

"Showing up with entertainers and political campaigns gives us the right kind of exposure for a premium brand," he said.

The spot in "War of the Worlds" cost the company

\$10,000, much less than a traditional national advertisement, Karrh said.

"It's big for our company because we don't have the resources for a national campaign," he said. "This is a way to get our name back out there."

While watching "War of the Worlds" for the first time, Karrh said he thought he noticed each time the Mountain Valley product made a scene. But he missed one.

"Breck (Speed) told me I missed a time where cases of Mountain Valley were stacked up, but I probably didn't notice it because people were getting vaporized," Karrh said.

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