

Message Training: Cannondale



When the professional cyclist you sponsor is about to start competing again after a two-year suspension — you need to get your message right.

The Cannondale Bicycle Corporation found itself in a sensitive situation when its pro cycling team

Liquigas signed Ivan Basso for a two year-contract. Ivan Basso, one of the elite cyclists in the world, admitted that he attempted to use blood doping to enhance his performance before the 2006 Tour de France. He was suspended from racing for two years.

While Liquigas and Ivan represented an exciting winning combination for Cannondale, the company knew Ivan could be under fire when he returned to competition in October 2008. They asked us to help them prepare for the relentless questioning of reporters and fans.

In advance of meeting with Ivan and the Cannondale executive team, Beale Communication Planning evaluated the environment in which Ivan would be communicating upon his return to competitive cycling. We identified the issues Cannondale would need to address to restore Ivan's reputation and to reinforce Cannondale's leadership in sponsoring an elite cycling team. A message strategy was drafted to reflect the strengths of both Ivan and Cannondale: Ivan's commitment to compete with integrity and the value of the Cannondale brand in its support of Team Liquigas.

Next we met with Ivan and Cannondale's executive team -- the CEO, global marketing director and director of athletic sponsorships -- to review the message strategy and refine core messages. We then led Ivan through training techniques so he could practice delivering the messages in the context of media interviews.

The result: Ivan was embraced by the international cycling community when he rejoined the competitive racing circuit. With clarity and confidence, Ivan moved beyond contentious questions with a genuine focus on his lifelong passion for cycling. In the Japan Cup, his first race after suspension, Ivan placed third and received overwhelmingly positive support from fans and the media.

"I appreciated your flexibility to work within a framework that was extremely tight in terms of timeline while still maintaining a premium level of quality in terms of work. You were able to swiftly navigate a complex (and somewhat controversial) situation and prepare a messaging protocol and strategy that was honest and impactful with digestible sound bites for controlled interpretation."

Scott Struve
Global Marketing Director
Cannondale Bicycle Corporation

"Therese worked with us on Ivan Basso's return to pro cycling with Cannondale's Team Liquigas. Her approach resulted in clear messages that met our business goals and reflected the spirit of the Cannondale brand. Therese helped Ivan learn the principles of delivering a clear and concise message to the media."

Matt Mannelly
Chief Executive Officer
Cannondale Bicycle Corporation



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