

No holds barred in this business

By Susan Hartland

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FROM bidding for a baby's naming rights to ambush marketing at AFL games, it's all good publicity to Kym Ilman.

The founder of the successful Messages on Hold is unashamedly opportunistic about promoting the company.

And Mr Ilman is not afraid to do things which polarise opinion, like bidding \$2500 for the naming rights to a baby, in an auction eBay later withdrew.

"We love doing different things with our ambush marketing. It was a perfect fit for us," he said.

In Toowoomba for a presentation to the Chamber of Commerce, the businessman who has taken Messages on Hold from a home-based Perth business to a \$9 million-a-year

international success story is happy to take any flak which comes with success.

"I get all the spoils and I get all the negativity," he said.

Mr Ilman started Messages on Hold in 1988 after a career that included everything from television to banking to being a midnight-to-dawn radio announcer.

"It started off with me recording the messages at home. Now we have seven fully fledged recording studios," he said. "In the first year we turned over \$50,000 in business. We turned over \$50,000 by 11am on the first day of the financial year this year."

The company, which provides what you hear when you are placed on hold, became known early on for

its unusual marketing.

That included everything from holding cards up behind the goal posts at AFL games to standing near a person being interviewed on television and carrying an umbrella bearing the company's logo.

One of the more unusual messages the company put together was for a Perth restaurant.

"It has this bizarre loud waiter and you'll be sitting on hold and he'll be shouting, 'What do you want, what do you want?', and often staff will pick the call up to find the person is interacting with the message," Mr Ilman said.

He revealed some of the strategies from his book *The Future is Customer Service* at the Chamber of Commerce function.