

LEADERSHIP

How To Manage A Successful Social Media Campaign On A Challenging Cause



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Forbes Nonprofit Council

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Social media is one of the most cost-effective and influential tools to reach and engage large crowds with a variety of messages. Social organizations are realizing more and more the strengths

and benefits of social media in engaging with the public on disturbing and challenging social issues.

My nonprofit, like many others in our sector, deals with a challenging cause -- prevention, identification and treatment of child maltreatment. Child maltreatment is a tough “sell.” People don’t like to talk about it or to be associated with it. In comparison to other children-focused charities, like disability charities and ones for chronic diseases, we have a unique media challenge, but we are gaining support.

A donor once told me that every time he talks about his engagement with our charity, he gets “the stare.” Other people wonder why he chooses to support us. Could it be because he has a past of child abuse or neglect?

According to research conducted by the University of Haifa, one in five minors in Israel suffers maltreatment by an adult during their childhood. The MeHalev Initiative, headed by the organization I serve as director, The Haruv Institute, and in partnership with other organizations and government ministries, decided to lead a long-term media campaign to raise awareness for child maltreatment, placing high importance on public discourse and reaching policymakers’ agendas.

MeHalev’s #one_in_five social media campaign consists of five waves, each including a specific goal, translated to a clear message and carried out by a short video, accompanied by articles and interviews in traditional media. The three-year campaign results indicate a target audience of approximately four million people who we have reached. So, what lessons did we learn on using social media to campaign a challenging cause?

You must plan and have a clear strategy.

Develop an annual work plan that includes peak times but also calmer periods that allow you to learn and adjust. The instant

feedback from social media analytics helps us to constantly fine-tune our messages and audiences and make the necessary adjustments.

Planning is also about strategizing. Be sure your social media campaign strategy aligns with all your other marketing and communications efforts. Choose the social media channel that is of the greatest importance for your brand and fits your goal -- whether it's brand awareness, fundraising, sales, community building or positioning yourself as a thought leader in your sector. For our campaign, we chose Facebook to build our community and raise awareness for our cause.

Try to keep it simple.

A social media campaign is a very effective tool in engaging and increasing public awareness of social matters, but you must have a clear message that can be translated to an image or video to increase your visibility.

Our campaign had three consecutive messages: 1) one in five minors in Israel suffers maltreatment by an adult during their childhood; 2) child maltreatment can happen everywhere, at any time and in any socioeconomic status; 3) know a child suffering from maltreatment? Report it!

We found that focusing on these three clear messages allowed us to be more effective in the execution of our strategy and reach a large audience.

Know your audience.

It is not easy to send messages to the general public about child abuse and neglect, especially in a heterogeneous society like we have here in Israel. It's important to invest in segmenting your audience and understanding who is more responsive on which social media channels. Remember, it is not effective to send

identical messages to all audiences -- invest in a message that suits your target audience.

Try creating audience personas by stepping into the shoes of your target audience and understanding their needs and expectations. It will allow you to think more clearly about what to offer them. Personally, I like using the “empathy map” framework here.

Go beyond social media.

It is not enough to operate only on social networks; you should create additional channels of communication to complement your campaign. Invest in articles and interviews in traditional media, and create original content for your website and blogs.

And don't forget, the same content does not automatically fit all media channels. Stick to your campaign messages, but deliver them in a way that fits the channel. Website blogs are longer than Facebook posts, and traditional media looks for the original angle in each story.

Do not preach or frighten.

We ran our media campaign because we wanted to raise awareness and reach more people to join our cause. We learned that knowing something isn't enough to cause change -- you need to make people feel something.

We found it works best when we turn to people's conscience and desire to do good. We chose to use images and messaging that reflect security and hope and encourage action. And we tried to be clear about what we wanted the users to know or act on.

Social networks are good platforms for social advocacy, as they enable nonprofits with limited resources to reach large audiences. But remember, you can't fire and forget. You need to learn and plan, have a strategy and know how to assess and measure your

success. In time, you will learn which messages get your followers to act and engage with your cause by their actions to like, share and comment.

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