

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/driving-a-successful-social-media-campaign>

Using the case study of Team Sameer – a successful social media campaign to find a bone marrow donor for a man with leukemia – Stanford GSB professor Jennifer Aaker goes into detail on the effective strategies of an email plea sent to just 450 people, which led to nearly 25,000 participants nationwide. Communicating a story through focused, humanistic messaging is an imperative element for social media that drives audiences to take action.



Transcript

I wanted to back up the four wings of this dragonfly model which came from this core story, which I think shed light on what ideas build and have momentum and which ideas don't. The first is focus. Team Sameer did not try and guess everyone in the registry. What they did was they took 20,000 South Asians. They focused on well-connected families, people that were parents, those who could easily relate to the story. I mentioned to you that Robert sent out a well-crafted email telling the story, and what people could do to help, to 450 people. Just 450 people. And that is the email that when extended to other people who were connected to these original 450 people could spread it. The design principles associated with focus is, it has to be humanistic. So these people that are focused on brand or product or competitor, that's where the goal doesn't get as much traction.

But when you have a human-centered goal like, "What would Sameer want? What would be good for Sameer?" that's when goals actually create life. It has to be actionable and testable and clear and happy. The mere thought of achieving that goal would bring you a peaceful kind of happiness is incredibly powerful. There is a lot of research on emotional contagion. So if you're chasing a goal that you believe would make you fundamentally happy, there's actual energy not dissimilar to time and money as a resource. The mere thought of actually achieving that goal that would bring you happiness or meaning is a resource that's oftentimes not unleashed in many campaigns. The second wing is, you have to grab attention. This is designed to get someone's attention. It's essentially a hammer. In the case of Sameer and Vinay, they made it so that people turned and looked because they felt like they might know Vinay.

This is Vinay's wife, and these are Vinay's friends, and you could see, if you are a Stanford social entrepreneur, you could see yourself in these pictures. And Robert gave Sameer a baby at the moment and said here, "Hold the baby. I'm going to take a picture." That's the only not truthful part of this story. But the idea is that you can see yourself in every one of these pictures so it makes you look. And the design principle here is that it has to be personal and makes you feel like it's speaking to you, and unexpected, and visceral—it makes you feel something—and visual—it makes you look. Lance Armstrong owns yellow and Coke owns red and breast cancer owns pink. And these colors aren't just simple branding campaigns that are throwaway; they make people look. And then after people look, then they decide, "Do I want to get engaged?" And that is the third wing. Engagement. Humans are not set up to understand logic.

They are set up to understand stories. In the case of Sameer and Vinay, the stories were told not just on the website, which is less emotional, but through video and through word of mouth. The design principles here are, what are the stories that why you created your idea, why you are here at Stanford, why are you building up the start-up. What are those stories, and those stories as assets is an under-leveraged tool. Authenticity, this idea of empathizing and being authentic, is increasingly important. You're seeing people's distrust for profits. They're distrusting non-profits. They're distrusting corporations and governments right now. What people trust right now are their friends, and that's one reason why social media has taken off so much. So what is an authentic message? And the last wing is enable others to take action.

Here, this idea is, how are you designing campaigns so that others can act? In the case of Sameer, it was social change in a box. It was tools and templates that made it so easy. If you wanted to do something, you could. A good litmus test of whether you nailed this is do other things that you don't expect but are absolutely helpful for you...