Be The Match 5k

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract
The purpose of this creative project is to demonstrate the effectiveness of marketing non-profit organizations through promotional events—specifically, athletic events. Throughout the process of organizing a 5k race benefitting Be The Match, the bone marrow registry, I will convey the importance of organization, multichannel marketing, and community support. Each element plays a key role in the success of a promotional event, and it is my intention to clearly relay effective strategies that ensure each is utilized in its full capacity.

This event will occur on June 30, 2012 at Southeastway Park in New Palestine, IN.

Acknowledgments
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I would also like to thank Dr. Joe Misiewicz, Sue Tschuor, and Nancy Carlson for leading by example and inspiring me to find my passion.

I would also like to thank Angela, Chris, Melissa, and everyone who made this event possible.
CHARITABLE BACKGROUND

In order to best understand my creative project choice, I believe it's important to start with why I chose to become involved with Be The Match. Since high school, I have been a frequent blood donor. I've chosen to do this since I was seventeen not because I was blessed with no fear of needles, but because I, like nearly everyone in the United States, have been affected by the evil that is cancer. I've watched my aunt fight and beat breast cancer and my grandfather succumb to colorectal cancer after eighty-three healthy years. When our loved ones are thrown into such a battle, it's easy to feel helpless standing on the sidelines. I decided to fight this helplessness by giving of myself, by giving the blood that saves not only cancer patients, but also victims of car accidents and countless other illnesses. I expressed this view one day when I went into give blood, and it was then that my Indiana Blood Center phlebotomist told me about Be The Match. I thought it sounded like a wonderful idea, but upon leaving, I promptly forgot all about it.

However, Be The Match reappeared in my life a year later after joining the service organization Epsilon Sigma Alpha (ESA). Our President posted in our group Facebook page about a sister in one of Indiana’s traditional chapters. This woman had a family member in need of a bone marrow transplant, and being over the age requirement, sixty, to donate bone marrow, the woman wanted to encourage all of us at the collegiate level to consider registering as a bone marrow donor through Be The Match. This time, I didn’t promptly forget about it; I promptly visited the website and
registered to have a donor kit sent to me. I completed all the steps necessary for registration, and now, I'm proud to carry a Be The Match membership card.

This organization has since instilled a great deal of passion in my heart; I believe that whatever I can give of myself to save someone’s life is a sacrifice worth making. This is why I advocate this organization. For those who have lost their fight and for those who have won because of the procedure Be The Match provides, it is my goal to spread awareness and encourage participation with Be The Match.

ATHLETIC BACKGROUND

With my passion for Be The Match in mind, I knew going into my Senior year that I wanted my creative project to benefit it in some way. Since high school, my family has participated in countless charitable walks and runs, but it wasn’t until I turned twenty that I began actively running on a regular basis. Once I took up the hobby, I realized that I was as passionate about health that I was about giving. I knew that if I found a way to incorporate the two, I would be able to make a great difference. It was then that I looked to the example of the many charitable runs I had been a part of and decided that it was my turn to undertake the responsibility of organizing one of my own.

As a Telecommunications Sales and Promotions student, this idea fit in effortlessly with my career goals. In the summer of 2011, I participated in the planning efforts for the second annual Indy Style Mayor’s Bike Ride as an intern in the WISH-TV promotions department, gaining my first taste of planning athletic promotional events. With supporting staff experience under my belt, I felt ready for my turn at the helm, and
in January of 2012, I began planning the Strength To Be 5k, the subject of this creative project.

PREPARATORY OUTLINING

Before beginning any actual planning, I wanted to create an outline that included each step of the process in a logical order. In order to get an accurate read on everything I needed to include in my planning, I consulted my former internship coordinator at WISH-TV who has planned many promotional events. With her advice in mind, I created this outline as a rough plan of attack:

- Contact Indy Parks and Be The Match
  - Pin down a date that works for both
- Register event on Active.com
- Contact businesses for sponsorship & donations
- Design and order shirts
- Community visits- Get participants and volunteers
  - ESA chapters, church, running forums

LOGISTICAL PLANNING

Before I could get rolling on any actual event details, I knew I had to get Be The Match on board. I contacted a local rep via e-mail. She replied quickly with a phone call, eager and excited to be a part of the event. Not only will the event be a Be The Match fundraiser- it will also be a donor drive! This means that Be The Match will be at the event, registering participants as bone marrow donors. The Be The Match website, marrow.org, encourages $30 for each registrant; this gave birth to my minimum
fundraising goal of $30 per participant. However, it actually takes about $100 to register each donor, so I plan to step up my fundraising efforts to meet this mark!

Next, I had to find a location. I contacted a woman I knew at Indy Parks from my work at WISH-TV, and she gave me the contact information for the park manager of Southeastway Park, my ideal location. Upon contact with him, we agreed to meet at the park in early April. At this meeting, I chose the shelters and paths the event will utilize, signed a contract, and made a payment for renting the facilities. With a secured location, I could move forward into the logistics of the event. One of the most important factors to me was to get the event registered through an online registration service; I chose Active.com. This way, participants can register from anywhere and don’t have to worry about bringing a paper form to the event. This also allows the event to be listed on Active.com- a popular website for established runners and those seeking out a race. I decided on a price of $20. I know this seems low when my fundraising goals are considered, but I wanted to keep the event affordable to encourage attendance. In order to encourage further fundraising, I directed participants to Team Be The Match- a feature on Be The Match’s website where individuals can raise money for the organization. Each participant is encouraged to sign up for their own page- the incentive being a prize given to the top three fundraisers! Be The Match kindly offered a Visa gift card to be given to the top earner, and I hope to gain donations from local businesses for the other two prizes, as well as prizes for the top three male and female finishers.

For a shirt design, I consulted a fellow member of ESA with experience in design. She will design the shirts, then we will order them through a company that our
organization has a good relationship with. I will do this closer to the day of the race so that I can order an amount of shirts that accurately reflects the total of registered participants.

MULTICHANNEL MARKETING

I knew that spreading the word about this event was crucial to it staying alive- it is a first time event planned on my own, so I have to get my numbers up somehow. I decided to utilize multiple channels to market the event in order to reach a maximum amount of people. I’ve already mentioned the first element- Active.com. This gives the event exposure to established runners. The online registration is also easily shared online, and social media is a channel I used quite heavily. I posted links on my personal Facebook and Twitter pages in addition to creating a Facebook event, to which I invited all of my friends. I also e-mailed out the link to friends and family that aren’t the most technologically savvy.

One of the most important areas where this came into play, however, is with gaining event sponsorship. On the next two pages, I’ve provided a copy of the sponsorship letter I sent out in hard copy form. I included envelopes that Be The Match sent me along with each letter, so that businesses can send their contributions directly to Be The Match. I also interacted with several businesses that I have ties to online, encouraging them to be a part of the event through messages and e-mails.
To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Hillary Steinmetz, and I'm a Senior Telecommunications student at Ball State University. As a capstone to my education as an Honors College student, I'm planning a 5k walk/run to take place on June 30, 2012 at Southeastway Park for the bone marrow registry, Be The Match.

Be The Match has taken on the difficult task of finding bone marrow donors for all those in need, and the only way to ensure this is to encourage as many people as possible to register as a potential match. Interested donors register by simply swabbing their cheeks and sending the samples in to be analyzed. While this may seem like a simple process, it takes an average of $100 per kit. Even with this great cost, Be The Match requests only $30 per kit, and that is only if the donor is financially able to make such a gift.

I'm writing you today to encourage you to join me in this fight against leukemia, lymphoma, aplastic anemia, breast cancer, and countless other illnesses that can be fought and beat with this life-saving procedure. On June 30th, 2012 at Southeastway Park, the participants of the Strength To Be 5k will be running to be the match. There are several ways you can join in sponsoring this event, and I have included this list with this letter. Please indicate the sponsorship option of your preference on the sheet and return it and your contributions in the envelope provided.

Your participation is vital to this event’s success. Alone, I'm only a college student with a passion. With your help, we can build a network that saves lives right here in our own city. I'm proud to be a part of this, and I hope you will consider doing so as well.

I appreciate your time, and hope that you find it within your means to become a part of this great cause. Should you have any further questions about Be The Match, you can find their website at www.marrow.org. Should you have any questions about the event, I have included my contact information below. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Hillary Steinmetz
hmsteinmetz@gmail.com
(317) 403-4070
Ways To Give

1) Water Stop/Cheer Section Sponsor
   This option gives you the opportunity to provide support for the event participants. You would assemble a group of individuals to make signs, yell, or other forms of encouragement- it's okay to get creative!

2) Kit sponsor
   With this option, you can choose a number of kits to sponsor. You may do so in increments of $30 as it corresponds to the number of kits you choose.

3) Prize donation
   This option gives your business to provide an item or items that would be given to the top 3 male and female finishers. There will also be awards given to top fundraisers.

4) Monetary donation
   This option allows you to give a simple lump sum of money. There is no limit- even $1 can go far in helping Be The Match!

5) Be The Match
   This option means participating in the event and becoming a registered bone marrow donor.

   ___ I will sponsor a water stop/ cheer section.
   ___ I will sponsor _____ kits for a total of $_____.
   ___ I will provide a prize donation of ___________________________.
   ___ I will provide a monetary donation of $______.
   ___ I plan to participate in this event and register as a bone marrow donor.

Printed name: __________________________ Date: ___________
Business name (if applicable): ___________________________
Address: ___________________________________________
Phone number: __________________ E-mail: _______________
Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________
COMMUNITY INTERACTION

The final important element I utilized is that of spreading the word to the local community. This means face-to-face interaction, which I enacted by presenting my event to ESA chapters and my home church, Trinity Lutheran. The latter required contacting the church office with information about the event, and after they’d reviewed it, we could set up a time for me to talk about the event before church and place information in the church bulletin. Being an officer in my collegiate ESA chapter, I used my report time in our chapter meeting to give information on the event, then spread work electronically to other chapters.

It was important to me to get the word out this way because I believe an event of this nature is not only important to the cause it benefits, but also, to the community it takes place it. The goal of the event is to raise money for Be The Match, yes, but also, to bring members of the city that I love so much together for a common cause.

REFLECTIONS

While this event was a joy to plan, I definitely encountered some unforeseen kinks. The first occurred to me when I booked the venue; I had no clue how to handle the financials for the event. I realized that I couldn’t ask potential sponsors to make their checks out to me; it would look like I was a poor college kid scamming them into giving me money. Upon this realization, I called Be The Match, who set my fears at ease by assuring me that donations could be given to them, and that they could then reimburse me for any costs that I accumulated, such as the cost of the venue rental. I was so relieved to have worked through the speed bump so easily!
Additionally, I endured technical difficulties when I accidentally sent out a faulty registration link to my less-than-tech-savvy family. They were all so confused, and it took quite a good deal of work to make them realize that they simply needed to click the new link. This brought into perspective the importance of multichannel marketing, as each generation can be best reached by different means. I know my peers quite enjoyed being able to register while they browsed the Internet, but through face-to-face appearances, like at my church, I was able to reach those who couldn’t begin to know how the registration process worked.

Finally, undertaking this project made me see just how important it is to be organized. There were weeks when I had to squeeze planning elements into 15-minute chunks of free time. Through constant list making, I was able to plan around my busy schedule and have the event ready to go over two months in advanced. I realized that no matter how much work you do in marketing the event and getting people to register, you won’t have an event for them to attend if you can’t get the logistics worked out! For this reason, the three key elements mentioned previously—organization, multichannel marketing, and community support, ended up working hand-in-hand as a battle plan sent from heaven.

LOOKING FORWARD

While the event has not taken place yet, every day that it gets closer, I get more and more excited. This process has been equal parts rewarding and challenging, and it has taught me new reasons why I wanted to hold such an event so badly. Throughout the planning process, I was training for a half marathon. My passion for fitness has
never been as strong as it was in a time of such strenuous mental and physical activity. This made me realize that it was an honor to give my community the chance to get out and get active for a good cause. I know that when the event approaches, I will continue to encounter unforeseen speed bumps, but I'm eager to work through them. I cannot wait to welcome the participants to the first annual Be The Strength 5k on June 30th, and I hope that the success allows me to hold this event again in the future. This process has taught me that no matter where I choose to work or what I choose to do as my profession, I always have the time and passion to give in support of the cause I believe in.
Works Cited

Hook, Melissa. Personal Interview. 20 April 2012.
