Public Relations in Action: Fundraising + Cancer

by

Erica Stevens

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Jim Ruebel

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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Abstract

This rationale explains the process of fundraising for cancer research and a departmental scholarship through a campus-wide event and online fundraising, both attained through effective public relations. I cover the following topics: the four basic components of competent public relations, the ideas and research behind the fundraising methods, the public relations tactics used to attain fundraising goals, the educational value of this thesis project, and the fundraising results.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Liz Wanless, Michael Nauman, and the Sports Administration Association for their support and help in creating a scholarship and planning an event to honor my friend who passed away from cancer. I would like to thank Dr. Jim Ruebel for his guidance throughout the thesis process. Lastly, I would like to thank everyone who donated to the American Cancer Society in my friend’s honor and participated in the Kick for Cancer Kickball Tournament.
Public Relations + Honors Thesis

According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the definition of public relations is “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.” (“What is Public Relations?”) The tactics for executing strategic communication range from media relations to marketing, to advertising, and beyond. Simply slapping the label of “public relations” on these tactics is inaccurate. For communications tactics to fall under the “public relations” umbrella, the tactics must have a purpose - they must be designed and planned.

Through my 15 undergraduate courses in public relations, personal research, and personal missteps, I have discovered a few of the “best practices” of public relations. Four of the most basic components of competent public relations that I have learned include:

1. **Understanding newsworthiness:** It is important to understand what stories are and are not newsworthy. This is particularly important when implementing media relations tactics. There are four widely accepted characteristics of “newsworthiness.” These characteristics are timeliness, impact, proximity, and prominence. A story or news release must be timely; stories and news releases should not be multiple weeks old. Stories and news releases must be relevant to media audiences or involve the media’s target audiences. This means that stories must have influence on people’s lives. It is also best that stories and news releases have local angles (e.g., an event that happened locally or the involvement of someone from the readers’ geographical area), and that the stories involve prominent people or places.

2. **Building relationships:** Building relationships is especially important in public relations. Public relations practitioners must build relationships with the media, external audiences, internal audiences, and more. Relationships can be built via in-person meetings, e-mail exchanges, social media posts and conversations, phone calls, and other networking tactics. (For example: A journalist with whom a public relations practitioner has a relationship is more likely to publish the practitioner’s news release.)

3. **Writing well:** At Ball State’s 2012 Schranz Lecture, Fleishman-Hillard co-founder John Graham emphasized the importance of good writing skills in the communications field. In public relations, the ability to write well is crucial. Though many public relations practitioners have published (and continue to publish) a plethora of PR writing tips, all agree that strong writing skills are essential
to effective public relations. In many situations, strong writing skills equate to a solid grasp of Associated Press (AP) Style, which is used by the vast majority of American journalists. AP Style encourages writers to write simply and concisely. This practice is often carried over to public relations writing.

4. Researching: The primary goal of public relations is to communicate strategically, therefore it is important to understand to whom you are communicating. Traditional public relations research includes combing through scholarly publications, facilitating focus groups, developing surveys and polls, monitoring media trends, and conducting in-depth interviews. Non-traditional research includes researching social media trends and analyzing social media conversations. Research should be the first step in all public relations work because it allows public relations practitioners to develop campaign and tactic foundations.

Honors Thesis + Fundraising

For my honors thesis, I wanted to incorporate the public relations tactics of media relations, social media marketing, and word of mouth marketing (WOMM) into a fundraising campaign. I wanted to apply the aforementioned "public relations basics" in the implementation of these tactics.

Initially, my honors thesis topic was intended as the creation of a scholarship for graduating seniors whom were unable to graduate on time due to financial hindrances. My honors thesis topic changed in September. A close friend of mine and Ball State alumna, Rachel Louden, passed away after a four-year battle with cancer. Rachel's death was sudden, shocking, and tragic. Because of Rachel's death, the focus of my honors thesis changed. I swapped my initial scholarship idea with one that entailed a scholarship within the sports administration department. Rachel was a sports administration graduate and a sports fanatic. She was active in her department and on campus. After speaking and teaming up with the Sports Administration Association (SAA), we collectively decided to create an annual $350 scholarship in Rachel's honor for sports administration students whom were actively involved in the department. I decided to raise additional money for the American Cancer Society (ACS) in Rachel's honor.
The first step in my fundraising campaign was research. Before I changed my honors thesis topic, I researched different methods to fundraise money for a $1,000 scholarship. My goal was to raise $1,000 in a short time span, so I needed to find methods to raise a large amount of money quickly. Through my research, I discovered crowdfunding. According to Techopedia, crowdfunding is defined as “a method of raising capital in small amounts from a large group of people using the Internet and social media.” (Janssen) The most successful crowdfunding is usually conducted via crowdfunding websites, such as Razoo, Crowdrise, and Kickstarter. These websites allow fundraisers to share unique links to friends, and they allow people unknown to the fundraisers to donate by featuring certain causes in search results or on featured pages. Crowdfunding has also been successful through the creation of custom websites that provide a way for visitors to donate (e.g. PayPal or Google Checkout). Since both methods are fee-based, the fundraising payment services usually keep between two and four percent of total donations.

The second fundraising method I researched was the charity event. For my initial scholarship idea, I approached wealthy Muncie residents for my charity event. After speaking with a wealthy Muncie resident, I devised a plan of hosting a wine and cheese tasting. I decided to plan this event because it would appeal to my intended audience of middle-aged to elderly Muncie residents whom were able to donate substantial monetary amounts to charity.

My honors thesis topic changed in the midst of planning my wine and cheese tasting event. Because I switched from fundraising for a scholarship for college graduates to fundraising for cancer research and a scholarship in memory of a Ball State alumna, I wanted to involve Ball State students. I had to backtrack and form a new fundraising idea. My audience changed from middle-aged to elderly, wealthy Muncie residents to Ball State students with much less money to give to charity.
Because Rachel was a sports enthusiast and sports administration major, I decided to host a sports-related event. I reached out to the SAA for help and ideas. Our initial idea was to host a Wiffle ball tournament because Rachel had been a varsity softball player in high school. I surveyed several of my classmates and asked if they would be interested in participating in a Wiffle ball tournament. The majority of them said they would not be interested. The most-suggested sports tournament was a kickball event. After speaking with the SAA, we decided to host a kickball tournament titled "Kick for Cancer Kickball Tournament."

The other part of my fundraising efforts were rooted in raising money for cancer research. I decided to look at the ACS website to see if the organization had tips for fundraising for cancer research. I discovered the ACS Mosaic Page section (http://main.acsevents.org/site/TR?pg=tgreeting&fr_id=9910). The Mosaic pages allow fundraisers to create unique pages in honor of loved ones affected by cancer. This was the easiest method to fundraise for the ACS, so I created a Mosaic page in Rachel's honor.

**Fundraising + Public Relations**

Public relations was the only method I used to fundraise for the sports administration scholarship and the ACS. Throughout my campaign, I successfully implemented the public relations tactics of social media marketing, media relations, and WOMM.

I promoted both Rachel's ACS Mosaic page and the Kick for Cancer event via social media. I publicized the ACS donation page through the social media of Twitter and Facebook, where I also posted a colorful flyer which I had created for the kickball tournament. I then created a Facebook event for the Kick for Cancer Kickball Tournament and invited my Facebook friends. I posted both the ACS and Kick for Cancer links frequently, tagging the Ball State Daily news in several of the posts in the hope that they would share the posts.

I implemented my media relations tactics by developing a relationship with Ana Ortiz, a reporter for the Ball State Daily News, to whom I initially reached out to help with my

*Stevens 4*
original fundraiser. After I changed my fundraising idea, Ana was still interested in helping me raise money. She wrote a story about the Kick for Cancer Kickball Tournament, which appeared on The Daily (Ball State’s news website) several days before the tournament.

The final public relations tactic I implemented was WOMM. I spoke to Ball State’s Student Athlete Advisory Committee about my kickball tournament to generate interest, and ultimately to get student teams to sign up for the event. I then reached out to Greek Life and other student leaders via e-mail to generate interest in the event. Finally, I created and handed out flyers to students in the library and the Atrium, encouraging them to attend the kickball tournament.

**Learning + Development**

My honors thesis yielded learning and development on both an educational and personal level. Educationally, I was able to put my public relations knowledge to use. I saw the benefits of understanding the four public relations basics and applied them throughout my fundraising campaign.

I identified the newsworthiness of my event through research and message development. Through research, I discovered that youth cancer was a relevant topic in the journalism department after one of my classmates announced she was being treated for ovarian cancer. After her announcement, *Ball Bearings* began work on a story about youth cancer for its final issue of the semester. I knew that in order for my event to gain the coverage it needed, I had to create a broader overarching message. Though Rachel’s death was very personal to me, I had to design the message of my fundraising efforts around a topic that went beyond the experiences of one person. The message I created was to generate cancer awareness and support for all youth (especially women) battling cancer.

Building relationships benefitted me greatly during my fundraising campaigns. I developed new relationships with Ball State staff, students, and media contacts. The first step I took after changing my honors thesis was to contact staff in the sports administration...
department, asking them for help in fundraising for the ACS and creating some type of memorial for Rachel. Sports administration instructor Liz Wanless responded and became my primary contact for the SAA. The SAA worked with me to develop a scholarship that would serve as a permanent memorial to Rachel within the sports administration department. Sports administration student and SAA member Michael Nauman helped me plan the kickball tournament, taking care of reservation details and developing rules. Without the help of the SAA, the scholarship and kickball tournament would not have been possible. From my relationships with the SAA members, I learned that when people are passionate about a cause, they have the ability to inspire passion and compassion in others. I saw the value in networking and its ability to turn one relationship into many.

Through traditional and social media, I was able to form new types of relationships. My relationship with Ana allowed me to attain coverage in the Ball State Daily News. My relationships developed through social media were temporary, but they led to donations on Rachel's ACS Mosaic page. The relationships I developed on social media not only helped increase donations to the ACS, but they helped spread awareness about youth cancer to social media users beyond my immediate social circle. Learning how to develop and cultivate relationships through social media is especially important in the current public relations environment. Companies and organizations rely heavily on these relationships to increase brand equity and brand awareness. I was able to practice this on a smaller scale while promoting my fundraisers.

I saw the value of strong writing skills as I developed my messages on Rachel's ACS Mosaic page. The Mosaic pages have a section where fundraisers can explain their causes. Initially, I wrote about Rachel and advocated fundraising in her honor. After reviewing what I had written, I rewrote the entire Mosaic page text. I briefly introduced Rachel, but I tied her life to the thousands of other young women affected by cancer. My message developed into a call to action as I explained that donations to the ACS were more than numbers, but proof of a support system to others suffering from cancer. I called these supporters
"personal cheerleaders," providing hope and strength to other young women battling cancer. Through my rewrite, I learned that strong writing skills extend beyond mastering certain writing styles. Possessing strong writing skills also involves knowing your audience and being able to form messages that effectively reach them.

Lastly, I learned how conducting background research benefits campaigns. Through my research, I was able to discover what type of sporting event would be most appealing to students. I also found the best method to raise money for the ACS. By conducting background research, I saved myself the hassle of having to backtrack and rethink my fundraising strategy.

On a personal level, this fundraising project taught me about myself and how I deal with grief. The death of my friend was a life-changing moment. Up until that point, I had never lost anyone with whom I was particularly close. I had to learn how to deal with Rachel's death. I used my honors thesis as a way to cope with her death. I was unable to be with Rachel in the weeks leading up to her death, but I wanted to show that she was an important person in my life. I knew I could not actually show Rachel that she was important to me, so I attempted to show myself and her family that Rachel had made an impression upon my life. I discovered that the best way for me to deal with my grief was through giving. I found strength and healing by devoting my time to a cause that served a purpose beyond self-gratification.

**The Results**

After weeks of planning and campaigning, the Kick for Cancer Kickball Tournament finally came together. Though I had consistently promoted the event via social media, and after speaking to groups on campus and securing media coverage, only two teams showed up. Initially, I was disappointed because our goal was to recruit 10 teams. Six teams indicated they would show up, but only two of those teams followed through. During the event, I saw how much fun the two teams had as they played against each other. The
members of SAA who were present enjoyed themselves as well. Though we were unable to reach our participation goal, we were able to accomplish our qualitative goal of bringing people together to support cancer research and awareness.

Fundraising for the ACS went very well. My goal is to raise $500 by December 25, 2012. I have currently raised $380, leaving only $120 left to fundraise. I am still promoting Rachel’s ACS page through social media in the hope that more people will donate. I would like to send the donor list to Rachel’s family as a holiday gift and to show them that Rachel was important to a lot of people. If I have not raised $500 by December 25, 2012, I will change the monetary goal of the Mosaic page and end the donation process.

Overall, I was able to apply what I have learned about public relations to my fundraising campaign, while coping with a difficult situation. My thesis fulfilled a need beyond graduation requirements - it taught me that I’m both skilled in public relations and that giving is the best way for me to cope with challenging situations.
KICK FOR CANCER
KICKBALL TOURNAMENT

WHEN:  SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9
TIME:  1 TO 6 PM, GAMES START AT 2
WHERE:  FIELD AND SPORTS BUILDING
WHY:  TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THE AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY & A SCHOLARSHIP IN HONOR OF AN ALUMNA WHO RECENTLY DIED FROM CANCER

ENJOY OUR LIVE DJ AND CUSTOM TROPHIES!

TEAMS COMPRISED OF 7 TO 10 PEOPLE SHOULD SUBMIT THEIR TEAM ROSTER AND $35 TEAM REGISTRATION FEE TO HP 261 BY FRIDAY, DEC. 7. REGISTRATION ON THE DAY OF THE EVENT IS $40 PER TEAM. CO-ED AND SINGLE-SEX TEAMS ACCEPTED.
Hey guys, don't forget that registration for Kick for Cancer Kickball Tournament starts at 1 p.m. today and games start at 2! Come out and support cancer research, and honor a truly incredible alumna who recently lost her battle with cancer.

Erica Stevens

Come out and play kickball at 1 p.m. as you help us raise money for cancer research!

@bsudailynews @dn_campus
1. All of the Kick for Cancer Kickball Tournament participants pose at the end of the tournament.

2. A kickball player kicks the ball.

3. The winning team poses with their trophy.

4. Another kickball player kicks the ball, resulting in a foul ball.
'Kick for Cancer' remembers memory of alumni, raises awareness
Anna Ortiz, Assistant Features Editor
Thursday, December 06, 2012 11:24 AM

When most juniors were setting up internships and fretting about the future, one junior faced a very different challenge: survival.

As a junior at Ball State in 2008, Rachel Louden was diagnosed with cancer. In September 2012, the sports administration alumna died after her four-year battle with cancer.

On Sunday, students will come together to remember Louden through something she loved: sports.

Kick For Cancer, from 1 to 6 p.m. in the Field and Sports Building, is a kickball tournament aimed to raise money to create a scholarship in Louden's name and to donate to the American Cancer Society.

"This event is to honor Rachel, who was the epitome of a Cardinal," Erica Stevens, a senior public relations major, said. "She was someone who fellow Ball State students could look up to and get inspiration from."

Stevens used her senior thesis project in part to cope with Louden's death.

"I'm doing something for Rachel," Stevens said. "I wasn't able to be there as she got sicker, so this is my way of serving her and showing her that she was an important part of my life."

Michael Nauman, a sports administration major, also planned the event. Nauman, the vice president of the Ball State Sports Administration Association, felt impacted by her life, though he didn't know Louden, he said.

Teams of seven to 10 members need to pay $35 for registration before Friday or $40 at the event.

Stevens and Nauman said they hope for a minimum of 10 teams to be a part of the kickball tournament, which would provide enough to create the student sports administration $350 scholarship that will be in honor of Louden.

The donations that are received past the 10-team mark will go to the American Cancer Society to support cancer research.

Kick For Cancer serves multiple purposes. Stevens said while Kick For Cancer is a fun event to blow off steam before Finals Week, it also aims to spread awareness. Nauman said he feels many remain in the dark about cancer.

For Stevens, she said it was Louden's death that brought the subject to light.

"Rachel's death really freaked me out," Stevens said. "If she could get cancer, anyone could. I could. Her death pulled the rug out from my feet."

Stevens met Louden from campus Christian ministry work, and the two became friends, Stevens said. When Louden was first diagnosed, she eliminated all distractions in life and put her focus on God.
Doctors saw the once aggressive cancer recede in a “miraculous recovery.” After a year and a half, the cancer came back.

Stevens said she saw Louden never let herself be a victim. She exemplified her faith by showing the “unconditional love that Christ showed people, even when she had every right to be selfish,” Stevens said.

Stevens found out during a Bible study training session, where the minister opened with uplifting verses and then informed the group of Louden’s death the night prior.

“It was like time froze; no one could believe it. People were crying,” Stevens said. “It was a huge shock because no one expected this 25-year-old, vivacious, sassy, beautiful young woman to just die like that.”

Stevens began to question what cancer really is and how it affects people’s lives. Talking to peers and classmates, Stevens said she feels people aren’t aware of cancer among college students.

“I don’t think people realize — especially in college — that it affects people our age,” Stevens said. “It’s scary, it’s there, but we have the opportunity to support fellow peers in that struggle.”

Stevens said she believes awareness of cancer among the college-aged group is lacking, because cancer doesn’t affect young adults as much as it does older people. The I’m Too Young For This! Foundation says every eight minutes, a young adult is diagnosed with cancer.

“When someone young dies of a disease, it’s unexpected,” Stevens said. “It shows how short life is. We are not immune; as 20-somethings, we are very, very mortal.”

Stevens said people from Louden’s sorority, Kappa Delta, other sports administration majors and students who knew her are being very supportive. Stevens said she believes Kick For Cancer is a way to support people going through the same battle as Louden did.

“Our peers are facing these issues every day,” Stevens said. “This is a way to help people get the help they need through donating to the American Cancer Society, to give them hope, which I feel is a strong cure.”

Nauman said it’s been a difficult to work on the five-hour event as the two planners.

“I know it’s going to be gratifying when it comes together,” Nauman said. “It’s going to be successful; I just wish more people could’ve been a part of this.”

Elizabeth Wanless, a sports administration instructor, said she is proud of the students who built the event and would like to see a future for the event and scholarship.

“It’s definitely something that can be a pre-finals tradition, to get your energy out and support a cause,” Wanless said. “It would be amazing if this could continue.”

WHAT: Kick for Cancer, kickball tournament
WHEN: 1-6 p.m. Sunday
REGISTRATION: $35 by Friday, $40 at event
Rachel Louden: Giving Hope to Young Women

The Ultimate Medicine: Hope

"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence."
- Helen Keller

Rachel lived her life in the name of love, humor, and serving God. Her laugh was alluring, her smile dazzling, and her optimism truly inspiring.

Throughout her illness, Rachel never took on the role of "victim." She served, she loved, she gave, she helped, she listened, she laughed, and she smiled. She prayed and believed. She was optimistic and full of hope. Because of this, Rachel lived longer than expected. She touched so many lives with her beauty, inside and out.

For Rachel and others who have fought against cancer, hope, optimism and prayer were the strongest of medicines.

In honor of our beautiful friend, we want to provide the same hope and optimism to other young women fighting for their lives. Whether you donate a dollar, ten dollars or more, your contributions are far more than monetary donations - they're proof that these young women have pastoral shepherds. They're part of that dynamic medicine: Hope.

By December 7, 2012, we want to raise $500 in honor of Rachel and all of the young battling cancer. Once our goal is met, Rachel's family will receive the list of donors and your messages of encouragement, just in time for the holidays.

Thank you for your support.

Rachel's Obituary

Rachel Lane Louden, 35, of Indianapolis fell asleep Saturday evening, September 22, 2012 at her parents' home after a long illness. She is now awaiting the return of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Rachel was born April 28, 1987 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, the oldest of two children of Robert and Denise Louden. Rachel attended elementary schools in Grand Rapids, MI and Bloomington, IL before moving to Indianapolis in 1999 where she attended Eastwood Middle School. She graduated from North Central High School in 2005 where she lettered in softball.

During her summers she played travel softball, worked at David's Bridal and The Fox and Hound. From Bogart's, she got excited every year by buying new school supplies. She loved playing and watching sports, especially loved the Cincinnati Reds; she went to the games every summer with her dad and watched them on TV the rest of the time. She loved to hang out with the guys and watch the Colts games. She especially loved her Kappa Delta Sorority and all of her K&D sisters. She had a funny and quick sense of humor and delighted in a good laugh; the sound of her and her brother laughing together was the music of our lives. She was very determined young lady and we told her if she could take her stubbornness and turn it into perseverance, she could rule the world. She wanted things to be done in the right way and made us celebrate holidays and birthdays in a big way when we wanted to do them. She colored when she was sad and sang when she was happy. She loved to wear Taras, colorful clothes and big earrings. She was courageous; she went to Austin, Texas with the Way Disciple program knowing that cancer had returned. Her faith and her strong will kept her alive much longer than expected. Her perseverance was inspiring to all those around her.

Rachel loved God, His Word, her family and the believers. She loved school and learning, and got excited every year buying new school supplies. She loved playing and watching sports and especially loved the Cincinnati Reds; she went to the games every summer with her dad and watched them on TV the rest of the time. She loved to hang out with the guys and watch the Colts games. She especially loved her Kappa Delta Sorority and all of her K&D sisters. She had a funny and quick sense of humor and delighted in a good laugh; the sound of her and her brother laughing together was the music of our lives. She was a very determined young lady and we told her if she could take her stubbornness and turn it into perseverance, she could rule the world. She wanted things to be done in the right way and made us celebrate holidays and birthdays in a big way when we wanted to do them. She colored when she was sad and sang when she was happy. She loved to wear Taras, colorful clothes and big earrings. She was courageous; she went to Austin, Texas with the Way Disciple program knowing that cancer had returned. Her faith and her strong will kept her alive much longer than expected. Her perseverance was inspiring to all those around her.

The Ball State and Muncie Household Fellowships have set up an American Cancer Society Donation page in honor of Rachel Louden. Feel free to donate and get us closer to our $1,500 goal! Also, message me with any stories you would like featured on the page. God Bless!

I am choosing to honor Rachel Louden, an incredible friend and young woman who passed away after a four year battle against cancer. Rachel was one of the strongest women I have ever known. She was a woman that lived...