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Desmond Tutu Center: Applied Public Relations Case Studies

The Desmond Tutu Center (DTC) is a nonprofit organization seeking to grow. Not only does the center desire to spread its mission of creating peaceful discourse about social justice issues from Indianapolis to the rest of the United States, but also seeks to establish a larger presence on social media and gain more followers and participants for its programs, namely college students. In an effort to understand how other organizations have accomplished these goals similar to The DTC's, this summary of case studies has been created. Throughout this report, four separate articles (and seven separate cases) are presented with descriptions of methods and outcomes as well as how these case examples can be applied to The Desmond Tutu Center to help further its objectives.

Nonprofit World Magazine Case

First, an article in Nonprofit World magazine features a case study about an unnamed nonprofit mental health center (Brinckerhoff, 1997). This center's case is used to illustrate the difference between a nonprofit listening to what its audiences need versus what its audiences want. The nonprofit in this case was experiencing drops in donations and participation in its support groups. This case is relevant to The Desmond Tutu Center due to its campaign goals of increasing attendance and participation in programs, which in turn may lead to more donations.

This case study describes how nonprofits can avoid the "marketing disability" of not listening to the ever-changing wants of audiences rather than just their needs. When the members of support groups at this nonprofit's mental health center complained to counselors about

meeting in the basement (wanting a different meeting location), the counselor did not pass on the feedback. This resulted in no change in meeting place, leading to a large drop in attendance.

When other members, who were using Medicaid to attend sessions at the center, began to share their feelings of discomfort about the addition of many new, upper-income members, these complaints too went unreported and unfixed (Brinckerhoff).

The author of this case study argues that the center's lack of adaptability was the main source of its issues. If the counselors and other employees had recognized earlier that their audiences had changing wants, the center's programming could have adapted to meet those wants and not lost participation and donations. The author notes that not adapting to the changing wants of audiences is the nonprofit disability because nonprofits are not run like businesses. Their programming is perceived as set to meet certain needs, so they repeat practices without considering the presence of competition or that the wants of their audiences change over time even if their needs do not (Brinckerhoff).

The key takeaways for The DTC here are the importance of listening to audiences and the need to be adaptable in programming. Currently, this campaign does not have evidence to show why program attendance and awareness is low for The DTC; however, The DTC still needs to look into the feedback it receives from those who have attended programs in order to learn where to focus energies to improve. The DTC also needs to remember that while speakers and discussion panels may work currently, its audience's preferences for how to discuss social justice are likely to change over time. The lessons of this case study will help The DTC stay in a relevant and positive place in its audiences' minds.

The Case of The Trevor Project

The DTC also needs to pay attention to the relevancy of the topics in its programming, especially if the center wants to garner national attention. The next case to be discussed concerns The Trevor Project, an LGBT rights nonprofit that defied expectations and was able to move from a local to a national organization (Fanburg, 2011).

When The Trevor Project hired Charles Robbins as its new executive director, Robbins sparked major changes in the California-based organization. He knew that to go national, The Trevor Project needed funding. To garner donations, Robbins implemented new programming techniques centered on current political debates and topics. The nonprofit's primary projects are suicide prevention and counseling for LGBT youth, but by shifting attention to marriage rights and equality, the center got more attention and was able to garner donations from many audiences who previously were not involved with the organization (Fanburg).

Through the funding from this kind of programming, The Trevor Project was able to open an office in New York and gain awareness on a national level. This led to corporate sponsorships and partnerships, as well as more coverage and donations to help the nonprofit continue to grow (Fanburg).

The key takeaway for The Desmond Tutu Center from this case study is the process described above for how The Trevor Project went national. The DTC currently puts on a lot of programming focusing on international issues, which is at the heart of the organization's cause; however, if The DTC focuses on issues of peace and social justice in the United States, it may garner more attention like The Trevor Project did and therefore receive more funding and donations. More programming about #BlackLivesMatter and issues regarding Islamophobia may be keys to tapping into audiences who have not given The DTC much notice before. If The DTC

had a larger budget, they could reach audiences across the country with their messages and even end up opening new offices. There is a lot of potential for growth, especially with Desmond Tutu's name attached to the organization, but The DTC needs more resources to grow and garner this national awareness. The programming methods of The Trevor Project could provide a template for The DTC to follow in order to become a national nonprofit without losing its core values and principles.

Nonprofit Social Media Cases

Another way to garner more attention, especially among the target audience of college students, is the use of social media. An article from nonprofithub.org showcases four nonprofit campaigns that succeeded on social media in 2013 (Hrabik).

First, the article discusses how Water is Life ended the #FirstWorldProblems trend by applying it to a campaign that showed how people in Third World countries lived. The campaign not only rid social media of the negative hashtag, it also garnered enough donations for one million days of clean water for people in need of it. If The DTC can find relevance to an unwanted hashtag, this method would provide a nice window into gaining social media attention (Hrabik).

Next, the article describes how UNICEF launched an "in-your-face" campaign that was not shy about calling out those who "liked" UNICEF's page but did not donate to it. The campaign garnered a lot of attention and donations because it was bold and honest about the realities of effecting change. There are many possible ways The DTC could tailor this tactic to its own causes and use this tactic to call followers to real action (Hrabik).

This article continues by presenting the case study of charity: water, which raised \$10 thousand in a day by hosting Google Hangout chats with respected thought leaders. Followers

could donate a certain amount to be admitted into the online video chat to ask these leaders their questions (Hrabik). With its access to Desmond Tutu, Dr. Boesak, and other leaders in social justice movements, The DTC could imitate this idea as a fundraising opportunity.

Lastly, this article discusses how the American Red Cross took advantage of National Preparedness Month and the hashtags inherent therein. The Red Cross was able to promote its own messages by attaching itself to this relevant movement that was already trending on social media (Hrabik). If there is a social justice month or something similar, The DTC could piggyback onto it by participating in the hashtag and also sending out its own relevant content. The Red Cross benefitted greatly from this tactic so The DTC could try it as well.

The takeaways from this article are the four general tactics utilized by these four nonprofits in order to create a presence and interaction with audiences through social media. There are four separate windows to these audiences which The DTC could take advantage of as long as there is a relevant space for it to do so. As the author of this article writes, it is impossible to guess what will trend on social media (Hrabik). These cases are examples of nonprofits taking the lead and attaching themselves to established trends. As their audiences show, if the cause is relevant to the trend, there is a good chance for awareness.

The Case of Happy Playgrounds

The last article and case study to be described here falls in the same vein as social media interactions. Happy Playgrounds is a nonprofit that organizes volunteers and donations in order to build playgrounds for children living in the poorer parts of Chicago. The organization's leadership felt the best way to communicate their cause and attract donations and volunteers was to create YouTube videos of the playgrounds being built and used (Dankel, 2011). The Desmond

Tutu Center already has a YouTube account so this case is relevant to help The DTC utilize it to its full potential.

By creating short, interesting videos and promoting them through social media, emails, and newsletters, Happy Playgrounds was able to increase its number of views. The organization also benefitted from partnering with nonprofits similar to itself and creating a kind of trade-off where the organizations promoted each other's videos (Dankel).

The DTC could utilize these kinds of tactics to further its cause through videos. If The DTC were to create shorter videos and promote them through social media, emails, and its newsletter, that would be a start. The second great takeaway from this case study is how Happy Playgrounds partnered with organizations similar to it in order to share its content to a wider, related audience (Hrabik). The DTC could partner with organizations like the Indianapolis's chapter of Amnesty International in order to promote each other's videos and causes. Most nonprofits are in the same boat of having limited funding and resources, so small partnerships such as this could increase visibility for The DTC and its partners while limiting any sort of competition each organization may have with each other.

The cases presented here have shown how various nonprofit organizations have utilized many of the tools and opportunities available to The Desmond Tutu Center to further objectives similar to those of The DTC. By following the models set by these cases, The DTC can grow its program attendance and effectiveness (by listening to its audiences' changing wants); gain a greater presence through social media outlets (by attaching itself to established trends); and attempt to become a national-level nonprofit (by employing Desmond Tutu's name and involving itself in current events to garner participation and donations). Depending on The

DTC's available resources, any combination of these goals could be accomplished by following in the successful footsteps of nonprofit organizations that have already reached them.

References

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