

The Bad Pitch Blog

An award-winning public relations resource from Richard Laermer and Kevin Dugan, since January 2006. Read our Wrath.

Oxfam's Social Media Relations Raise Awareness and Funds



Just when you thought we were all Bad, here's Glinda the Good Pitch. Glinda is a badge of honor bestowed on some of the good pitches we get. This one comes from Jeff Greene and the Gold Group on behalf of global relief agency Oxfam. Oxfam brings us an interesting case study on social media relations' ability to raise awareness.

It's raising \$35 million to help East Africa deal with a drought-inflicted crisis. Like many non-profits, Oxfam did not have the budget to launch a traditional multinational awareness campaign.

Instead the Gold Group helped Oxfam capitalize on a unique donation from actress Keira Knightley—a Vera Wang dress she wore to the 2006 Oscars. The strategy was to promote the eBay auction of the famous dress to highlight the Oxfam campaign. Vera Wang also displayed the dress in her Madison Avenue flagship store. Greene answered a few questions from the Bad Pitch Blog about the project



BPB: How did you decide your online targets?

Greene: Gold Group identified major online hubs for entertainment and celebrity gossip and information. Working closely with bloggers and webmasters, we engaged with these online communities. Gold Group also built a landing site for the auction, enabling us to measure traffic.

BPB: What was your social media angle/pitch? Was it different from the offline pitch? What were your target outlets and overall timing with the auction?

Greene: Timing is always of the essence when creating a buzz before the start of a campaign, and so is relevancy. Probably the most important thing is to do your research.

In this particular campaign, the auction was first pitched to Keira Knightley fan sites – she has rabid fans in the UK and the U.S. – and some of these sites are highly search-optimized. We found sites the paparazzi check out for tips, which helped us gain a foothold in traditional media before the release was distributed. We also identified the relief boards and blogs that write about such efforts.

For the offline pitch the story was much more about going out to see the dress physically, the novelty of this gorgeous dress in a store window, while the online pitch was more about building a buzz around the auction and driving traffic to Oxfam's web site.

BPB: Did social input/feedback impact follow-up pitches? I'm assuming the campaign was altered based on feedback or insight from "citizen outlets."

Greene: Absolutely. On the social side, when bloggers came back asking for something we tried to accommodate them as much as possible – more details, extra photos. A conversation thread in one of the fan forums helped influence a messaging point that went out in a follow-up release. These are small examples, but taught us to see social media not just as a "target" but a potential collaborator in the conversation.

BPB: How did you track results and mentions social vs. offline?

Greene: By doing a lot of Google searches! Seriously, it was a challenge. We tracked certain direct phrases that were used in the official release, for example, but wouldn't appear in most social mentions (unless they were quoting the whole release verbatim). For a while, we were able to track the hits differential between our landing page and the eBay auction page, until the Associated Press mentioned the landing page. The Keira fans were really helpful in sending us links as they found them. Offline was much easier to track, using US Newswire tools.

BPB: What were the campaign results? How much money was Oxfam hoping to raise?

Greene: Oxfam has participated in eBay auctions before, so they know that bidding is unpredictable. They were more concerned with traffic and awareness of Oxfam initiatives in East Africa. The eBay auction of Keira Knightley's dress brought in nearly

\$8,000 USD. 79 bidders competed for the gown and 2,500 users watched the final bidding. This set a record for Oxfam according to the UK's *Independent*.

The landing page received more than 30,000 visits and the effort over 150+ traditional media mentions across the U.S.

Here are some elements the Bad Pitch Blog feels helped Oxfam succeed.

- **Live Online & Offline** The balance of online auction and store window helped reach more fans and helped build more buzz.
- **Spread the Word** Oxfam made it easy for fans to spread the word with buttons, banners, pics and movies they could add to their own sites.
- **Fly the Flag** All online content was clearly branded by Oxfam. There were also plenty of hooks into the Oxfam site to engage new visitors beyond the auction.

It's inspiring to see how non-profits can benefit from social media relations. The Oxfam story is one of a growing number of social media relations case studies. *Hat Tip to Shel Holtz*.

Cross-posted to Strategic Public Relations.