

Face to face to face

The #nomakeupselfie campaign is a true viral success story, raising £9m for Cancer Research UK in a matter of days. But it all came as something of a surprise to those inside the charity.

Lucy Fisher reports



CANCER RESEARCH UK

When large swathes of the UK population took to social media this year, to post bare-faced photos of themselves on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, daring their friends to do the same, and asking them to donate £3 to Cancer Research UK, few people were more surprised than Natasha Hill.

As brand and strategic marketing director for the charity, she'd overseen a rebrand for the organisation that looked to raise its profile. But the runaway success of the '#nomakeupselfie' campaign earlier this year – which generated more than £9m in donations – was entirely unexpected.

"We're not exactly sure who started it," says Hill. "Aaron Eccles, our senior social media manager, was doing his out-of-hours social monitoring and a couple of people were asking if we were behind it. He was saying, 'No, it's not us, but we love it'.

"He came in early the next day and asked a girl in the office to take her make-up off in order to take a photo and post it. We don't normally ask for funding on social channels, so it was quite an unusual move for us. But he made a smart decision; within two hours we'd raised more than a million pounds."

Rapid response

Hill puts a large part of the success of the campaign down to its accessibility, as well as the fact that people felt compelled – challenged, even – to take part as their friends nominated them. And, as the quick-thinking Eccles points out, this was very much a mobile campaign.

"A huge learning was that people wanted it all done, within a mobile device, quickly and easily," he says. "It's hard to reach an audience organically these days. But the share rate with this campaign was so high – the biggest surprise was how much of the UK was involved."

"The amount we were asking people to donate was also very low," adds Hill – explaining that high-volume requests for small donations was a strategy the charity had already earmarked as a potential future tactic.

And, despite the fact that the campaign saw a flood of new mobile phone numbers pour into the charity's contact database, Hill believes it's important to treat those new assets with care. "We're at the beginning of our journey with mobile customer relationship management," she says. "All we've done so far is a Gift Aid ask, while sending a big thank you. The reality is they've only given us £3 and it doesn't mean they adore the charity. It's a pretty thin relationship at the moment."

After the shock of the campaign wore off, thoughts within Cancer Research UK turned to figuring out ways to replicate its success. Eccles says that, despite "countless" meetings, it is in many ways impossible to plan for events that spread virally across social media. "We just have to be agile. It's important not to have huge layers of sign-off around social channels," he says.

In trying to pin down the impetus that drove the idea, Eccles suggests that: "This was all about responding to an audience desire. There had been criticism on Twitter around the trend of 'selfies' – and people decided they wanted a selfie to mean something."

Natasha
Hill



Aaron
Eccles



Jenny
Lindsay





► Afterwards, those same people also wanted information about what kind of impact their donations would have. "This is a valuable new community and we can involve them," says Eccles. "They may be new to our charity – we got 200,000 new Facebook fans and many thousands of new Twitter followers as a result. But we can educate them about what we do and about where the money is being spent."

A sense of empowerment

The selfie campaign might not have started life within the walls of Cancer Research UK, but it certainly adhered to the upbeat and positive tone with which the charity presents itself, embodied in the strapline: 'Let's beat cancer sooner'.

The 2012 rebrand that Hill oversaw was centred on four personality statements: brave, smart, engaging and optimistic. "Optimistic was a new one and I had to think about it," Hill admits. "But I realised we had so much positive stuff to say about progress. The more we focus on people who are desperately ill, the more hopeless people may feel."

Qualitative focus groups had been carried out prior to the repositioning, during which people

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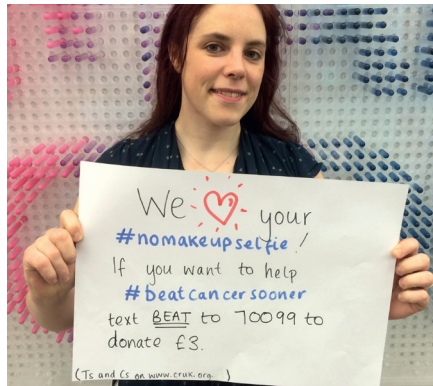
were asked to describe what they knew of the charity's work and how it made them feel. "They were using negative language," says Hill. "We found we were fuelling a sense of hopelessness. People have their own sad stories; they want a partner to help make it better. They want us to remove the bleakness."

Yet qualitative research would not have been sufficient to convince the charity's board of the merits of a more optimistic positioning for a cancer charity, so this was followed by larger-scale online, quantitative studies.

And one agency Hill credits with doing some great ongoing work for the charity is BrainJuicer. "It has an emotional level of understanding about our brand which goes beyond standard brand metrics," she says.

Tom Ewing, content director at BrainJuicer, says that an awareness of emotional triggers is crucial for the not-for-profit sector – which often has to deal with difficult or uncomfortable issues. But the challenge, he says, is turning these emotions into donations. Empowerment is the key, he believes. "If you make things feel easy, they feel good. That's why the extra envelope in a direct mail pack pays for itself and then some."

Social media and camera phones empowered



people to donate to Cancer Research UK; and the donations, in turn, empower the charity to do more in its fight against cancer.

The after glow

But the #nomakeupselfie success has affected other parts of the organisation in different ways. Aaron Eccles explains how the success of the campaign has underscored the importance of social media monitoring to the charity. "There might be an argument to extend our out-of-hours service," he says. "We've already beefed up our approach. The team feels encouraged now to react if they spot a trend. If we'd waited we might not have seen the same outcome."

Meanwhile, Jenny Lindsay, Cancer Research UK's head of consumer insight, predicts that the charity will use social channels for insight-gathering much more frequently now than it had done previously. Lindsay is a believer in a more "holistic" approach to insight generation, and has worked with colleagues to introduce a system known as Audience 360, which is accessible via the Cancer Research UK intranet. It is designed to optimise the efficiency of the various insight teams at CRUK – including consumer insight, data insight and digital

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► analysis – and to create a centralised portal for teams looking to commission research, to help identify the most appropriate team or professional.

Lindsay admits that when she first joined the charity a couple of years ago, she was surprised at the organisation's complexity, noting that there was duplication of work with some projects, because of the structure. "People were sending requests to the wrong team," she says. "Now as a group we can reflect on whether research or analysis is needed, and then come back, having decided whether it should be a collective effort or, it would benefit from a specific team's support."

When making requests, staff are asked to answer three simple questions: What is the business challenge? What do you want to know? And what will you do as a result?



"Face-to-face, we also ask how much income this could generate in order to prioritise projects, but also to estimate our ROI as teams," Lindsay explains. "It's about joining it all up and it's really helpful when you see the synergies and the affirmation, triangulating the research."

Hill believes that a clear insight framework helps in a context in which there is a continual need for speed and agility. "The increase in pace is notable in both our private and our professional lives," she says. "There are so many new platforms. You need an ongoing understanding of the here and now, as well as what's coming next. The power of the consumer has never been felt more strongly in our organisation." ■

For more information on Cancer Research UK, see cruk.org

Q&A

Jessica Owens, social media research manager at insight agency FACE, on what brands can learn from the success of #nomakeupselfie

CRUK didn't start the #nomakeupselfie campaign, but jumped on the back of it. Should other brands do something similar?

Yes. Instead of brainstorming ideas within a corporate brand team, keep an eye out for what your audience is already talking about. There were weak signals prior to the selfie campaign that a smart planner could have picked up on. For instance, celebrities were driving this 'real beauty' mood, with Scarlett Johansson posing without make-up for Vanity Fair in February.

Does viral content tend to follow the same format?

Viral content tends to take one of two different formats. Firstly, there are 'grower' memes, which are compelling ideas that start with relatively unknown people. These travel through smaller social media communities, and are slower rising but longer lasting. Then there are 'spike' memes, which achieve a very high velocity very

quickly, led by celebrities or media. This campaign was certainly a grower.

How do you explain the popularity of the campaign?

There are some consistent factors that make a concept especially shareable and help it to go viral. These include a low barrier to entry (anyone can take a selfie); visually distinctive content; the evocation of high-arousal emotions; celebrity and media endorsement; and the ability to mutate and take on new forms. Studies have shown, too, that putting 'Please RT' in a message increases shareability. The emotions in the context of this campaign were a tension between anxiety around the concept of cancer, and the risk to one's vanity through being seen without make-up, combined with a potential self-esteem boost from 'doing good'.

What did CRUK do to help the campaign spread?

The charity promoted the campaign on its Twitter and Facebook channels, while boosting the prominence of the call-to-action around donating. It also generated media coverage as fundraising milestones were reached.

Saying thank you and posting fun images, such as of staff holding handwritten 'thank you' signs, also helped and was in keeping with the low-key visual nature of the campaign.

What new data points will CRUK have to mine?

Beyond mobile phone numbers from SMS donations, CRUK could also potentially identify Twitter and Instagram participants, and analyse which participants gained the most retweets, have the most followers, or were the earliest adopters. It could then reach out to those people as influencers. The charity may also be able to use Twitter and Facebook ad targeting to reach people who've mentioned the hashtag.

What insight can brands gain?

Brands could consider creating campaign ideas with their audiences through crowdsourcing and co-creation. The best ideas are often outside the four walls of your company. It's especially valuable for campaigns aiming to reach younger audiences – the platform natives who are creating new norms of social interaction on these channels.