



The Karen Leung Foundation: When Social Media Doesn't Work

Introduction

Founded in June 2013 to honor the memory of Karen Leung and her wish to save lives in Hong Kong by reducing the impact of gynecological cancer, The Karen Leung Foundation (梁愷田基金會) is a registered charity that promotes prevention, early detection, and optimal treatment of gynecological cancer in Hong Kong.

Karen was 34 years old, engaged to be married, with a promising career, when she was diagnosed with metastatic cervical cancer. She fought courageously but passed away less than a year later in October 2012. In the days before she died, Karen expressed her wish to raise awareness among Hong Kong women and girls about gynecological cancers to ensure that others have the information needed to prevent cancer and gain access to the best treatment options available.¹

The Karen Leung Foundation (KLF) envisions a world where women have every opportunity to live healthy, fulfilling lives free from gynecological cancer. To accomplish Karen's wish, the Foundation collaborates with the local and international medical community, as well as other NGOs committed to improving women's health.

Education—Information Is Power and Can Save Lives

KLF provides corporate and community talks designed to educate women about maintaining their gynecological health, preventing cancer through screening and vaccination and how to detect early signs and symptoms to increase the chance that treatment will be effective.

¹ <http://karenleungfoundation.org/>

Katherine Sze Nga Ho and Jason King Hang Lam prepared this case under the supervision of Dr. Michael Chau.



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Prevention—Cervical Cancer Is Highly Preventable

In partnership with the Chinese University of Hong Kong, local schools, and industry, KLF undertakes a community-based HPV education and vaccination program aimed at increasing the uptake of HPV vaccination. The HPV vaccine prevents the most dangerous strains of human papillomavirus, which causes 99% of cervical cancer cases, and is a public health innovation for this generation of girls and young women.

Care and Treatment—High-quality Care for Patients

KLF funds the Karen Leung Foundation Bed at the Haven of Hope Sister Annie Skau Holistic Care Centre to ensure that more women with late-stage gynecological cancer have access to high-quality end-of-life care.

The major source of capital lies in the annual Sohn Conference, which has an unrelated theme with the Foundation. The Conference can be considered as the most essential event to KLF, and is promoted on various social media platforms.

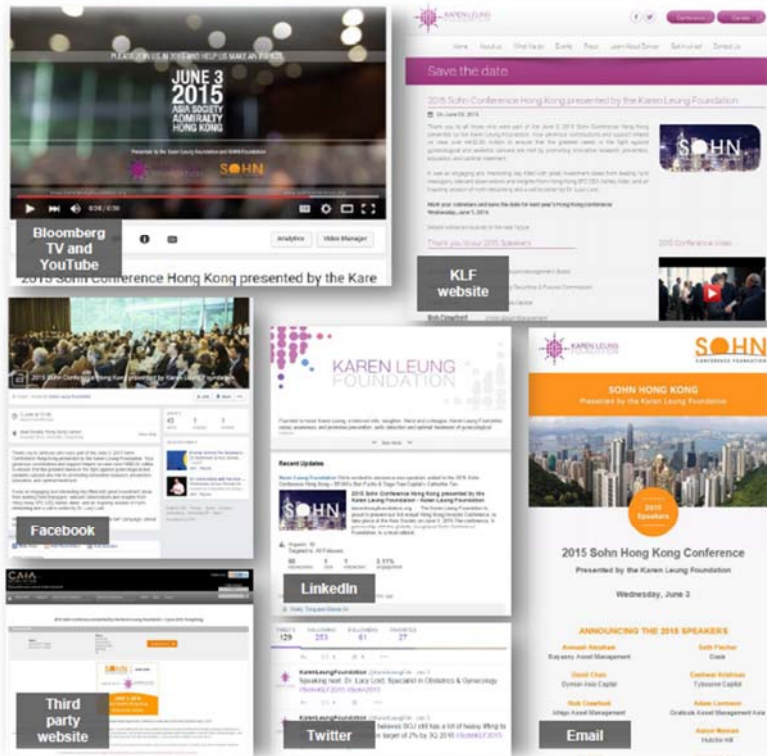
KLF Fund-raising Events

The 2015 Sohn Hong Kong–Karen Leung Foundation Conference, the major fund-raising event in partnership with the globally recognized Sohn Conference Foundation, was a large Asia event providing a forum for successful professional investors to present a market view or investment idea, allowing attendees to glean valuable insights from leaders in the field. It was a huge success with over HK\$2.85 million raised. At the conference, KLF launched its new “Sponsor a Girl” campaign, which aimed to spearhead its school-based HPV vaccination program in Hong Kong. It called for donation of HK\$1,000 to sponsor a girl, HK\$15,000 to sponsor a class, and HK\$120,000 to sponsor a school to provide free vaccines to middle- to low-income families who may not be able to afford the vaccine.

How KLF Reaches Its Targets

The Foundation promoted the Conference and programs through social media, including Facebook and LinkedIn pages, YouTube videos, Twitter, email, and announcement on websites.

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KLF is currently an English-based organization, and hence, contents are all in English. Promotional content includes mainly messages in paragraphs and photos or the web page of the event.

Limited Effectiveness of Social Media

The Conference was publicized on different platforms. Both conventional ways of communication like email and new ways like social networking sites were employed to promote the Conference. Ms. Susanna Lee, Executive Director of KLF, said,

Amongst the sites, Twitter page of the Foundation was indeed created especially for the Conference. The closer the Conference is, the more updates there will be on the related social networking sites. On the day of the Conference, there will be timely updates stating which speaker is presenting ideas on Twitter.

However, it happens that the pages of the Foundation on social networking sites earned limited reputation since their establishment.



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Facebook pages	Twitter	LinkedIn
1,314 likes	86 followers 31 likes	25 followers

(Data presented up to end of March 2016)

KLF sent a mass invitation email to approach past participants, as well as potential targets, apart from publications on social networking sites. The response rate from the email turned out to be significantly higher than that from other channels. Susanna said, Most of the participants are email recipients. The Conference was investment and finance focused. Target audience are mainly bankers and seniors in economic and financial firms. Very few of the participants are individuals from social networking sites.

Given the limited resources, when it comes to events organized by the Foundation only, the promotional effects of social media are limited. Susanna said, Our resources are limited. We cannot have a team to specialize in digital marketing. But the outsourcing price is too high, forcing us to produce the materials by ourselves, the only two staff members at KLF.

After the introduction of the “Sponsor a Girl” program in the Sohn Conference, KLF continued to promote the program on its social networking sites, like Facebook. Unfortunately, Susanna indicated that the promotional effects were unsatisfactory. Very few people would donate due to the advertisement on the social networking sites. The motivation for people to donate such a large amount of money is low. In “Sponsor a Girl,” every donation costs at least \$1000 (for the two vaccines for a girl), which is a large amount compared to other campaigns in Hong Kong requiring donations of a few dollars a day.

Possible Explanations

The effectiveness of social networking sites is doubted as somehow its usefulness is limited. The target market cannot be reached, and high donations reduce the usefulness of social media on fund-raising. The number of followers in social networking sites seems to be correlated to the effectiveness of promotions on those



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sites. With a small group of followers, the response rate and the sharing rate of KLF's posts remain low, which implies a low attention from the general public. Compared with campaigns or programs organized by other nonprofit organizations, there are no celebrities or goodwill ambassadors involved in the promotions, which contributed to the low publicity.

Target Mismatch

The target audience of the Conference is composed of investment banks and some finance professionals, which are of a higher social rank. They can rarely be reached by social networking sites. The target groups seldom browse social networking sites and invest in events promoted on those places. Though there are frequent updates on social networking sites when the event is fast approaching, Susanna admitted that the posts, however, attract attention limited to past participants. More often, these parties are approached directly through conventional contact methods, like email. In most of the fund-raising cases on a business scale, social media is yet to become commonplace.

The language of content plays another important role in attracting the attention of the target audience. The target of the programs on the Facebook page is mostly Hong Kong people. However, the local language, Chinese, is not used in the promotions. People thus tend to focus on other things, instead of spending a minute to understand and decode the messages in the posts. When paragraphs in a foreign language are included in promotions on social networking sites, the incentive for local people to look at it will be low. Susanna explained,

English is the official language of our organization. So, when it comes to social media in Hong Kong, we find it difficult to appeal to Hong Kong users. Things that the Chinese and English-reading target audience would like to see are different. Bounded by the fact that we do not have enough resources for Chinese translation, all contents have to be in English.

Choosing a suitable channel to promote events is one thing to be aware of. According to Susanna, KLF used different social networking sites to publicize the Conference. However, most of them received a low response. Twitter was one of the cases. She said,

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Compared to Facebook, the usage of Twitter in Hong Kong is quite low. People surf Facebook instead of Twitter in their leisure time. So, the problem is that Twitter is not common in Hong Kong, but common in foreign countries.

This implies that using Twitter might be useful in attracting foreign visitors to the Conference, but for KLF's own local events. The target group cannot be strategically reached through the social networking sites.

Limited Persuasiveness and Effectiveness

Asking a person to donate a thousand dollars to help an unknown girl is not easy. To KLF, social media is an indirect tool to raise awareness by media coverage and produce waves of reminders. Susanna stated,

Frankly speaking, the Foundation does not rely much on social media or expect much from it. The benefits of social media to us are limited. We would rather treat social networking sites as a bridge to maintain relationship between the Foundation and participants, or a facilitator.

Celebrity effects cannot be overlooked. With an outstanding goodwill ambassador to promote the event, it will be much easier for an organization to gain reputation. Given the limited resources and reputation of the Foundation, having a high-profile celebrity for its events is difficult to achieve. Publicity of its event is thus limited to the coverage of its promotions, and the



Source: http://www.vdolady.com/uploads/allimg/150325/1_150325103848_2.png



Source: <http://marketingno1.com/dm/image/gem.jpg>

effects are limited as a result. A good example was the promotions of the vaccine manufacturers employing famous celebrities, Charlene Choi, Ekin Cheng, and G. E. M. Tang, to be ambassadors. The promotions were successfully captured in people's minds because of the massive media coverage together with the reputation and image



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of the celebrities. Susanna also mentioned a counter example for KLF to learn a lesson from.

In 2015, another charitable organization had a fund-raising walkathon, of which a very high-profile celebrity was the goodwill ambassador. But somehow there were little promotions seen for the walkathon. This was quite a special case. For KLF, if we can find such a high-profile celebrity, we will have as many promotions as possible to take the largest advantage from the celebrity.

Resources

Having scarce and insufficient resources is a major challenge faced by KLF. Demand for digital marketing is high, but the supply of service remains at a low rate, which contributes to the high service charge. Without sufficient human and financial resources, the quality and quantity of promotional materials will be limited. The high price makes producing high-quality multimedia materials and having effective strategies difficult. Susanna said,

Digital marketing needs time to build up. It is not something that can be assigned to a part-time to do. It needs consistent build-up. The process is not simple and needs someone with a heart and passion to complete it. Unfortunately, KLF cannot afford to have a specialized digital marketing team. We have no resources and expertise to make the things better. The only two staff in KLF and the few volunteers are all the people that we can rely on. The resources are really limited and hence we need to utilize them wisely.

However, even if one has found a high-profile celebrity to be the goodwill ambassador of the event, if media coverage and promotions about the event are insufficient, the celebrity effects cannot be fully utilized. Inadequate promotions in turn limit the scope of target that can be reached and result in an unsatisfactory response rate. A vicious cycle is then formed. After all, this will be a problem of resource utilization.

The Way Forward

Expanding the Target Group

Expand the fund-raising pool to the general public by introducing packages with different price levels for donors to subscribe to. Frequent users of social networking sites are generally around 15–34 years old. This group of people may not have a high



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purchasing power or may not be willing to donate a significant amount of money at once to help the unknowns. With a lower price level, they will have lower resistance to subscribe to the campaign. The source of funds can be enlarged, and KLF can be promoted in a wider scope.

Cooperating with Tertiary Institutions

High price in digital marketing and translation has been a concern of KLF. Given the limited budget and resources, the staff are bound to produce everything by themselves. Other than in-house production, outsourcing to students can be a way out. Various programs can be developed between nongovernmental organizations and tertiary institutions to achieve a win-win situation. Organizations can take advantage of the user experience from the new blood who are frequent users of social media, and have a better-quality production at an economical price. Meanwhile, students can develop their potentials and be provided an opportunity to gain hands-on experience on the developing trend. Perhaps this employment relationship can be extended from a part-time freelance to a placement upon graduation in the long run, if the organization happens to expand its scale.

Using Strategic Promotions

On social media it is better to make content concise. Social media users tend to have a short attention span. They would not go through every post as uncountable posts are updated every day. They do not have time to go through details of websites or advertisements on social media platforms. Being able to capture the audience's attention would be essential for a promotion to be effective and successful. To attract audience attention, present only the necessary information in an interesting and creative manner. Stay focused on the content. Keep the content within one page, and make sure it can be read within two to three minutes.

Summary

Without the reputation of the Sohn Conference and its organization, the Conference might not be a huge success in raising funds. KLF will continue to face different difficulties and challenges in the future. If the Foundation can master the art of social media, its fund-raising tasks will be much easier.



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KLF is exploring business opportunities from social networking sites and partnering with other nonprofit organizations with related objectives to organize different campaigns. Gradually engaging into the social media world, KLF is learning to fit into the Hong Kong culture. It is believed that the Foundation is going on the right track.