Relay For Life at Texas Tech: 2013

By: Trevor Bell, Lab Manager @BellTrevor
Photos: Katie Cornblath, Content Producer @xoxokatierose
OVERVIEW

Every year, the American Cancer Society, in association with Texas Tech University, hosts their Relay For Life at Texas Tech event where participants walk to provide support for all those affected by cancer. The event provides an opportunity for people to honor cancer survivors, remember loved ones lost and raise awareness about what can be done to reduce the risk of cancer as well as raise money to fund cancer research and other programs.

The 2013 Relay For Life took place at Memorial Circle at 7 p.m. on Saturday, April 13, to 7 a.m. on Sunday, April 14. In order to assist in ACS’s efforts, the Outpost Social Media Lab @ TTU helped monitor social media content and engage with participants before, during and after the event. Staffed by a team of undergraduate and graduate student volunteers, the Outpost was able to help participants share their support and experiences through social media – primarily Twitter and Facebook. To do this, all participants were encouraged to tweet their photos and comments about the event through the use of the hashtag #TechFightsBack. Over the course of the event, 1,485 social media posts incorporated either the #TechFightsBack hashtag or mentioned @ TTURelayForLife or @purpleman – the event mascot’s official Twitter handle.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The Outpost monitored social media feeds while looking for content – both user-generated and content generated by volunteers – using HootSuite and Radian6. A HootFeed was then created which tracked the mentions of the #TechFightsBack hashtag.

After monitoring, content was then added to two Storify feeds. One feed focused on the overall event, and included photos, social media posts and event details. The other feed was focused on why people participated at Relay For Life. After monitoring and posting, student volunteers were asked to engage with participants by replying and retweeting posts through the Relay For Life of Texas Tech University’s Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Kristin Wyllys, a 2013 public relations graduate of the College and former president of Tech PR, who helped volunteer in the Outpost during the event, expressed her delight in being able to learn about and utilize social media software to work with organizations and events on campus.

“Becoming more knowledgeable about social media and having the opportunity to work hands-on with HootSuite and Radian6 in the Outpost during Relay For Life was extremely beneficial and a great learning experience for students in the college. Throughout the event, students worked in a team to create posts for social media contests on Twitter and Facebook, and we also created a Storify which covered the entire event. Working on the Relay
event definitely helped build my social media skill set and prepare me for a future in public relations practice."

In addition to the knowledge gained through working with emerging social media monitoring software, the involvement of The Outpost with Relay For Life allowed students to see firsthand how social media can be used by non-profit organizations to achieve their goals.

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES

In addition to developing and monitoring the hashtag for the event, other social media strategies were employed to help drive engagement and generate content. These strategies included:

**Twitter Drawings**

Beginning at 7:30 p.m and ending at midnight, a random Twitter user at the event who tweeted a post with #TechFightsBack was selected every 30 minutes and won a $10 gift card provided by a College of Media & Communication faculty member as an in-kind donation.

**Tweet-a-thon**

As part of another initiative to drive participants to share their sentiments through Twitter, a tweet-a-thon contest with the hashtag #RFLtweetathon was held. Participants were asked to tweet about anything involving Relay. The winner of this contest – as decided by the individual with the most retweets throughout the event – received a football autographed by Texas Tech Head Football Coach Kliff Kingsbury.

**Facebook Photo Contest**

While Twitter was the primary medium used, Facebook was also vital to the success of online engagement for the event. To capture participants’ involvement through this social platform, a photo contest was held on the Relay for Life at Texas Tech Facebook page. The winner of the contest, which was determined by which photo generated the most likes by midnight, received a Texas Tech hat autographed by Coach Kingsbury.

**Purple Man**

In previous years, organizers of Relay for Life at Texas Tech had established “Purple Man” as a motivator for participants across campus to get excited about and involved with the event. This year, the Outpost created a Twitter profile: @Purplemanttu. The purpose of Purple Man was to promote special events during the actual event. Through tweets and Facebook posts from Relay’s social media accounts, participants were encouraged to interact with, tweet to and take pictures with Purple Man. Purple Man also served to deliver the prizes to the winners of each contest.

The Outpost’s command center, located in room 251 of the College of Media & Communication, allowed student volunteers to monitor and engage with participants of Relay for Life in a collaborative learning environment.

During the event, participants at Relay For Life were encouraged to interact through social media for a chance to win a autographed football, by Texas Tech Head Football Coach Kliff Kingsbury.

Purple Man helped encourage participation and excitement throughout Relay For Life by handing out prizes and challenging participants to competitive events.
SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION

The power that social media possesses for non-profits is immense, especially for such an emotionally-driven event like Relay For Life. While there were 60 teams and 1,117 participants in the event, social media allowed for more people to participate and lend their support through an online platform. In addition, the social media outlets allowed Relay For Life to post information, updates and news about the event, all of which helped drive users to the official website where they could volunteer, make a donation, learn more about ways to mitigate their cancer risks and find additional resources and support.

Today, social media plays – and will continue to play – an important role in events and support outreach for non-profit organizations. Dr. Todd Chambers, Electronic Media & Communication chair and associate professor within the College of Media & Communication, shares this view and understands how essential social media is to help organizations such as the ACS.

“Social media provide unique opportunities for non-profit organizations to leverage brand advocacy and empower one of their most important stakeholder groups – volunteers. As the largest fundraiser for the American Cancer Society, Relay For Life relies on volunteers to plan, coordinate and manage thousands of events all across the world. Being able to connect and share stories of survivors, caregivers and others touched by cancer with social media such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, provides Relay For Life volunteers with opportunities to be brand advocates who can build strong relationships within and outside of the actual event. Simply sharing a photo of a cancer survivor walking that first lap can help build awareness and provide information about Relay For Life.”
About The Outpost Social Media Lab @ TTU

The Outpost is the social media lab at Texas Tech University’s College of Media & Communication. Located in room 251, the lab features a physical command center where students can engage in live social media monitoring and engagement utilizing a variety of tools in a collaborative learning environment. In addition to live monitoring activities, the lab provides support to a number of groups within the college, such as RaiderComm, the student-run public relations firm, as well as courses, such as PR 3315: Online & Digital Public Relations. The lab produces original content providing social media insights including white papers, case studies, special projects, consulting and academic research. Lab volunteers also engage in community outreach programs such as hosting social media training and workshops.

For more information, please contact the faculty lead, Dr. Trent Seltzer, at trent.seltzer@ttu.edu.

Like us on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/OutpostLab

Follow us on Twitter: @TTU_Outpost

Visit us on our website: www.depts.ttu.edu/comc/outpost/