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Drew Olanoff: '#AmericaWants is just dope'

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Drew Olanoff is the Twitter mastermind behind #BlameDrewsCancer, an on-going Twitter campaign born out of his own fight with cancer (Hodgkin's lymphoma) this past year. The campaign allows anyone to vent their frustrations (losing your keys, losing your job, cancer, etc.) on Drew's cancer by tweeting with the hashtag #BlameDrewsCancer.

Thousands have vented, including Lance Armstrong who even blamed his collarbone injury on Drew's cancer. In addition to the Twitter campaign, Drew travels frequently to provide his social media expertise and insights at conferences around the world, and is currently working on a book about his experiences.

Drew, who is now free and clear of cancer, took time to speak with me about USA TODAY's "#AmericaWants" Twitter campaign for charity.

Kindness: Drew, great to speak with you.

Drew: Glad to do it. I think what you guys are doing is just awesome.

Kindness: Thanks! How did you hear about the campaign?

Drew: I saw a tweet for "#AmericaWants. I checked it out. I tweeted for LIVESTRONG. [#AmericaWants] is just dope.

I was also in touch with Brian Dresher (USA TODAY Manager, Social Media and Digital Partnerships), who I met at SXSW. I remember saying at SXSW that big media...wait, I hate using that word...let's say, people who have the power need to do a better job of using that power for good. That's what you guys are doing.

Also, there is a lot of power in these movements for donation by action. We'll give you \$10,000 if you do something -- tweet, retweet, join a Facebook group, whatever. It takes the burden off people, companies, of just donating money for the sake of it.

So, that's why I love this campaign. I wish everyone in the media -- newspapers, TV, online -- would do the same thing.

Kindness: Some question the impact of the #AmericaWants campaign -- what does a full-page, full-color ad really do since there is no actual plan for change. What would you say to these people?

Drew: Bottom line: If there is going to be an impact, then it's up to the charity. You're providing an asset with clear monetary value, and now it's up to the charity to use that value and turn it into action.

A smart foundation will do more than just list a phone number and ask for donations. They need to make their message actionable: here's what we are, this is what we do, and then direct them to their Facebook page or elsewhere where people can actually get involved and engaged.

I love that the onus is on the foundation or charity that wins.

Kindness: You're seeing more and more crowd-sourced marketing campaigns out there where the audience gets to decide the outcome -- #AmericaWants is an example. Is there a problem, as others have argued, with trusting the wisdom of the crowd?

Drew: I like that this is a free-for-all. It lets the foundations leverage all their hard work in getting dedicated supporters. LIVESTRONG's supporters did not come for free. They had to work hard for it. Your campaign [#AmericaWants] lets them put this group to action.

Also, when trying something new (crowdsourcing campaign, etc.), there's only one way to start, and it can't be seen as wrong or right. How can you know? Then you get feedback and suggestions on how to make it better. Don't say there's a problem without giving a solution.

Kindness: Based on your experiences with social media, what advice do you have for the charity that receives the full-page ad?

Drew: Call me. I will spend as much time with you for free. I'm the easiest guy to get in touch with because my number is all over the web: 415-238-8428.

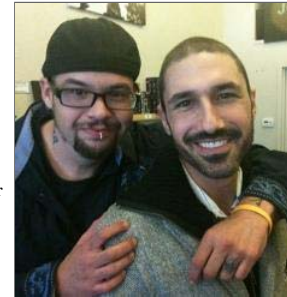
Just be smart. It's a great opportunity where people can talk to you as a next step. Do you have a website form, a Facebook group, a Twitter account, or an iPhone app where you can drive people to sign up and start that conversation?

But please, don't just give a phone number. Show what you represent. Have fun with it. Ask people to give their input on a new logo design you're working on, for example. The possibilities are endless and exciting.

Kindness: For charities that want to incorporate more social media into their outreach and fundraising, what do you recommend?

Drew: Talk to people that are already involved in your organization -- your long-time supporters who have given to you all these years. I'm so used to seeing charities chase the next shiny ball. Don't forget these people...even the ones that still write letters and put a stamp on it.

Ask them what they do, how they want to be reached. Do they want to connect through their mobile phone, SMS, Facebook, Twitter, or MyYearbook?



CAPTION
Photo courtesy of Drew Olanoff

Whatever. Just ask.

Kindness: Any final words?

Drew: Keep it real. Keep those who've supported you from the beginning involved. Also, don't sugarcoat stuff. There's this problem with over-marketing stuff, trying to get more marketable people to represent you. The[#AmericaWants campaign] is your opportunity to do just that.

Want to hear more from Drew? You can join his 15k+ followers on Twitter [@thatdrew](#).

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