

FAST COMPANY



FAST COMPANY.COM

Where ideas and people meet

Meet Livestrong CEO Doug Ulman, the Most Savvy Health Care Leader in Social Media

BY CHUCK SALTER Today



This afternoon, the [Blogworld](#) crowd in Vegas hears from the master of social media in health care, Doug Ulman, the CEO of Livestrong. While [reporting](#) on the cancer foundation for the November issue of *Fast Company* (on newsstands Oct. 26), I saw firsthand how important the medium is to the organization and how adept Ulman and his staff are at using it. Does your office have large screen that displays the latest staff tweets and mentions of your organization? That's the future. Livestrong is already there.

The [foundation](#) has built the largest Twitter audience of any health-care organization. The American Cancer Society dwarfs it in fundraising, but CEO John Seffrin told me that Livestrong is leading the way in social media. It's no surprise that [Lance Armstrong](#) ranks in Twitter's top 30 with more than 2.6 million followers. But Ulman? He has almost a million followers, which puts him in the top 270 and makes him one of the highest ranking CEOs.

On Twitter, Ulman offers a daily account of what he and Livestrong are doing and what's happening in cancer, maintaining a [running conversation](#) with supporters: "On a call discussing a documentary project on global tobacco control - huge opportunity."

He gives glimpses into his own experience as a cancer survivor: "Nothing better than reading biopsy results that say 'benign.'"

He offers ways to interact: "We r grateful that you gave time, money & energy to the cause. Now you decide where the funding goes! Vote now. <http://bit.ly/votels>"

And: "How did @Livestrong start a movement? Ask a question for @LivestrongCEO & I'll pick 3 to ask on stage at Blogworld #BWE10"

"Social media has changed the not-for-profit world forever," Ulman told me. "It used to be how big your [mailing and email] database is. Now it doesn't matter. I'd rather have 10,000 people who are passionate than 3 million who aren't engaged."

Twitter allows Livestrong to stay connected to its community, which is important given that the foundation is unusually hands-off with supporters. It doesn't have local chapters. It lets survivors and supporters organize local events and decide what Livestrong do in their city or town. When a Hollywood exec told Ulman he wanted to host a Livestrong fundraiser, Ulman mentioned it on Twitter: Within a day, a few dozen supporters in L.A. had volunteered to help out.

"Unlike people who say they want to try new stuff but never actually do anything, Doug will do it that day," says [Chris Sacca](#), a former Google executive and angel investor in Twitter. He and Ulman cooked up a virtual Livestrong wristband for Twitter profiles and launched it almost immediately, expanding Livestrong's visibility throughout Twitter.

When Ulman met to discuss Livestrong's global advocacy work with [Kevin Sheekey](#), the former deputy mayor of New York City and now the philanthropic advisor to Michael Bloomberg, Sheekey asked, almost casually, "How many followers do you have?"

Ulman told him. Sheekey thought he was kidding. Then Sheekey looked it up. "He isn't Lance Armstrong. He isn't a celebrity. Nearly a million people follow what he says because he runs Livestrong," says Sheekey.

After Livestrong ran a story on the mayor in its quarterly magazine, Sheekey asked Ulman to retweet the story. Turns out, [Bloomberg](#) has less than 31,000 Twitter followers.

"Mike Bloomberg, the mayor of #%S@ New York, is coming to Doug Ulman to retweet," says Sheekey. "If that isn't an example of where their organization is, I don't know what is."

Related Stories:

[CGI: Livestrong Panel Tackles Third-World Cancer, Pushes Fund-Strong Strategy](#)
[What a Doping Scandal Could Mean for Lance Armstrong, Livestrong, and Its Cancer Crusade](#)

Topics:

[Leadership](#),
[Innovation](#),
[Technology](#),
[Management](#),
[Design](#),
[Ethnomics](#),
[Livestrong](#),
[editors picks](#),
[leadership](#),
[Influence Project](#),
[social media](#),
[twitter](#), [Lance Armstrong](#),
[bloomberg](#), [Doug Ulman](#), [Lance Armstrong Foundation](#),
[Twitter Inc.](#),
[Kevin Sheekey](#),
[Government and Politics](#)