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Life And Marketing Lessons From LIVESTRONG CEO Doug Ulman



Every day too many people hear the three worst words in the English language: "you have cancer." That was one of the many insights that emerged in my talk with [Doug Ulman](#) on the stage last night at BlogWorld as we talked about the fight against cancer, his personal battle as a three time cancer survivor and how social tools have helped [LIVESTRONG](#) to become one of the most social media savvy organizations in the world of healthcare and perhaps in any industry. With nearly a million followers on Twitter, Doug himself was recently described in a Fast Company piece as the "[most savvy healthcare leader in social media](#)" - a description he shrugs off because it has never been a goal for him to achieve that sort of niche notoriety.

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The discussion we had, though, was telling of not only his personal philosophy but an enlightened way of thinking about openness and authenticity within an organization that more and more businesses will be looking to for inspiration. Some people know LIVESTRONG from the association with its founder Lance Armstrong. Others know it from the ever present yellow wristbands that many at the event were wearing to remember people in their own lives who had fought against cancer. As we opened the session, I asked people to stand if they were a survivor of cancer, or had a loved one who had fought cancer or if they had someone who had lost the fight against cancer. By the end of it, everyone was standing.

After our session, several people came to me and shared that this was one of those topics that went beyond social media and at a conference like BlogWorld where it is easy to focus just on very tactical things like building an audience for your blog or how to rank higher on Google or how to earn more money from writing ... the bigger picture can be forgotten. Doug's story, for me and many others, helped to bring back that perspective to the event. You can watch our full talk on UStream below - but here are a few highlights that I will take away as advice for how to better use social media to spread an idea, and more importantly, how to be a better person.



1. **Be Compassionate.** It has become easy not to really care about anything. You can follow advice blindly, do what you are supposed to do and forget about the all important quality of compassion. Yet this compassion is

such an important piece of how we connect with one another. It means that you are not only listening to someone, but you actually care about their experience and what they are sharing with you. For Doug, this compassion is a necessity, because some of the people he interacts with may very well be going through the worst experience of their lives. The real question is, how compassionate are you on a daily basis with things that may seem much more ordinary? Compassion stands out. It makes you memorable, and it makes your conversations more meaningful.

2. **Try Out Your Dumb Ideas.** There was a marketing idea that Nike shares with LIVESTRONG which nearly everyone who heard it hated. It was half baked, relied on a behaviour from people that there was no reasonable basis to expect would happen, and seemed even to visionary leaders like Phil Knight, the founder of Nike, to be a complete waste of time. That idea was to create 5000 yellow bracelets with the words "LIVESTRONG" and the Nike swoosh on them and sell them for \$1 each. Then, elite athletes started wearing these bracelets, others wanted them, and the idea went viral. Now the LIVESTRONG yellow bracelet is as recognizable as any iconic cause related symbol all across the world. If LIVESTRONG had killed that idea based on feedback, they would have missed a game changing opportunity. Sometimes you need to let dumb ideas be tried, because they just might work.
3. **Channel Instead Of Shutting Down.** Every day around the world someone wants to create something to help promote the mission of LIVESTRONG. With a brand to manage, though, the challenge is how to take all of this well meaning energy and make sure that it is being used in an efficient way without damaging the core things that the brand stands for. Doug and his team spend a lot of time identifying people around the world as LIVESTRONG leaders and giving them the tools to work in their local communities to promote the mission of LIVESTRONG, while staying connected to the core organization. This focus on channeling all the energy towards a common goal rather than shutting people out pays off with happy, engaged and motivated leaders and advocates around the world.
4. **Use Social Media To Focus On The Real World.** Social media can feel like a very virtual and intangible world where people give each other digital high-fives and just do things like chatting, poking, friending and following. One of the biggest things you can see if you look at the content and experiences on LIVESTRONG is that social media is a key way that their organization helps people to connect with one another IN REAL LIFE. They organize events and biking tours, they host runs and local fundraisers. All of this activity can be coordinated online through social media, and content that is generated may live on social media - but the end goal is to get people to connect in real life and get to know one another and build the community.

If you do want to see the full video of our session, you can [check out the live video on UStream](#) or watch it below. Also, from the stage we announced the second year of the #beatcancer program - an online effort to raise money for cancer research to be donated to multiple organizations (including LIVESTRONG). To participate, just include the hashtag #beatcancer in a tweet and 5 cents will be donated by one of our corporate partners to cancer research. Last year this effort set a Guinness Book of World Records mark with over 200,000 tweets in 24 hours - and this we want to top that mark. Please participate and add your voice to the global fight against cancer by tweeting #beatcancer!



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