

LIVESTRONG

FOUNDATION

LIVESTRONG Foundation
Crisis Communications Summary

SITUATION ANALYSIS:

The week of October 15, 2012, cancer survivor and philanthropist Lance Armstrong resigned as chairman of the LIVESTRONG Foundation, the top-rated non-profit he created to provide free patient support services to people throughout the U.S. affected by cancer. Mr. Armstrong's resignation was preceded by months of intensely negative media attention around his cycling career, which included the Foundation on a regular basis. The scrutiny culminated when the United States Anti-Doping Agency made public all the evidence it had gathered against him in early October. In an effort to inoculate the Foundation against further fall-out, Armstrong stepped away from the organization.

His resignation, however, occurred during a week devoted to the Foundation's highly visible 15th anniversary celebration, which included a star-studded gala, a 4,300-person bike ride through the city of Austin with its annual Team LIVESTRONG Challenge, and a host of press arriving to cover the festivities.

The Foundation's small but expert communications team quickly constructed a crisis communications and rapid response strategy around its founder's resignation. In the days and weeks that followed, it built and executed a highly disciplined plan to help the organization move beyond the controversy and chart a strong, independent course forward.

RESEARCH:

In November 2012, the Foundation retained a firm to conduct public opinion research to inform its strategic communications plan.

The research revealed that the Foundation's highest communications priority had to be advancing clarity about its mission – and what impact the Foundation makes. The findings led to the development of two immediate primary goals:

- The first was to clarify that the LIVESTRONG Foundation was about people and families struggling with cancer, not about a celebrity athlete.
- The second was the prioritization of three prime targets to send that message to: women, caregivers and people under the age of 40.

The research also led the two-person communications team toward a longer-term strategy. Moving forward, a sharp sustained focus on clarity will have broad, possibly even radical, implications for the Foundation's image, positioning, voice, communications strategy and continued success.

PLANNING:

Taking a quiet, heads-down approach during and after the crisis was not an option, given the wide-spread media attention and the public nature of the anniversary week events. The communications team formed a plan to address questions with dignity and candor. The heart of the rapid response plan that week was open and transparent communication with donors, stakeholders and the media about Lance's resignation and what it meant for the Foundation's future. But with every interview, press availability, new release and blog, the Foundation team planned to use the crisis to its advantage by drawing attention to the free support services the non-profit provides to cancer patients, survivors and their families. The message was simple: WE CAN HELP.

EXECUTION:

The Foundation issued a statement on Oct. 17 announcing Armstrong's decision to step down as chairman of the board of directors and the naming of Vice Chairman Jeff Garvey as Armstrong's immediate replacement. To achieve comprehensive communication of this key development, the Foundation provided CEO Doug Ulman and VP of Communications & External Affairs Katherine McLane to national and international television, radio and print media throughout the week. Through incredible message discipline, both executives used every opportunity to pivot questions back to the Foundation's status as one of the top non-profits in the U.S. and draw attention to its free services for patients. This discipline pervaded all of the Foundation's outward-facing platforms throughout the week, whether via social media, **LIVESTRONG.org** or its on-the-ground presence at open-press events.

The Foundation's response to all interview and information requests included a succinct and focused 'About the **LIVESTRONG** Foundation' document containing information about its services, number of people served, funds raised, advocacy milestones, financial status, and a preview of the Foundation's future plans and priorities. Its contents were echoed via every channel available to the Foundation.

In a bold move, the Foundation seized the spotlight to reach out to all of its stakeholders with a campaign to solicit their support. The resulting funds raised broke short-term development records and gave the Foundation a tangible form of support to point to.

While dealing with the crisis at hand, the Foundation also immediately began a rebranding effort that included:

- An official name change from the Lance Armstrong Foundation to the **LIVESTRONG** Foundation
- Updates to all public facing materials including the website, printed collateral as necessary and the boilerplate
- Upgrades to marketing materials advertising the Foundation's free patient support services featuring actual patients, caregivers and survivors
- A refreshing of the **LIVESTRONG** Foundation's mark
- Deploying an external affairs team to serve as a nation-wide speakers' bureau throughout 2013

Moving forward, the Foundation's communications strategy is a proactive approach to highlighting the needs of cancer patients and survivors. The Foundation will shine a multi-platform light on its mission and advance understanding of why it is such a critical and unique resource for patients.

Today, the Foundation is charting a strong, independent course. In accordance with its research findings, rather than relying on a celebrity to gain attention, the Foundation is lifting up the stories of ordinary Americans whose courage in the face of cancer and all of its related challenges is a beacon to patients throughout the nation.

EVALUATION:

The week of Lance Armstrong's resignation and the Foundation's 15th anniversary celebration:

- The Team **LIVESTRONG** Challenge drew more than 4,300 participants, compared to 2,698 people who participated in 2011.
- *15: An Evening with LIVESTRONG* raised \$2.5 million in funds, making it the largest fundraising night in Austin history.
- Online donations between Oct. 17-19 were nearly \$240,000, double what donations were for Oct. 10-12, with the average donation increasing 13 percent.
- By separating itself from its famous founder, the Foundation was finally able to decline to participate in stories about Lance Armstrong's cycling history after his resignation. After his resignation, the communications team took a strict approach in turning away media inquiries involving Lance's personal life and as a result, the negative spotlight on the Foundation diminished significantly and swiftly.

The effectiveness of the **LIVESTRONG** Foundation's communications and marketing strategy will be measured at key moments throughout the year through polling, supporter focus groups, in-depth interviews and surveys. Bearing in mind its key targets, it will focus on broad-swath outreach to women and Americans under 40, as well as micro-targeting to caregivers. Course adjustments will be made in rapid order to amplify the Foundation's effectiveness throughout an initial 12-month horizon.