

Online Audience Engagement - GYAC Virtual Happy ½ Hour - 1C

RESEARCH: The year 2020 was looking bright for the Gifford Youth Achievement Center (GYAC), a non-profit founded in 1998 and focused on enhancing the lives of youth in grades Kindergarten through 12th through academic after school programs and summer camps. Due to unforeseen circumstances presented by COVID-19, GYAC canceled multiple end-of-season engagements. Among them were an open house and an annual Friendraiser that raise awareness and funds for the Center's programs. Cancellation expenses were not insurmountable, however, the loss in terms of awareness and dollars raised were immense. Based on **primary, informal research**, GYAC's open house typically brings in 20-25 attendees and the Friendraiser another 160. Sidelining meant decreased community awareness, after school and summer camp registration, donor and volunteer recruitment and funding. So, when the creators of GivingTuesday, a global generosity movement, announced GivingTuesdayNow, a new initiative in direct response to COVID-19, we were all ears. The announcement came April 2 with an invitation to join a webinar to learn more April 7. In the meantime, Governor Ron DeSantis issued a statewide safer-at-home order went into effect April 3. During the webinar, we learned that GivingTuesdayNow would be on May 5, 2020, less than a month away and coincidentally on Cinco de Mayo. We wanted to participate, but how? With the closures of retail, restaurants and schools and nearly all public gatherings called off, Americans were seeking entertainment and connection online. Social media usage surged. Aware of the recent closures and increased social media usage, the marketing coordinator suggested meeting people where they were and using the day to spread joy amidst the chaos. **Secondary research** from NapoleonCat showed that Facebook users in the US increased by three million from January to April 2020. Most users (54%) were women, aligned with GYAC's 75% female followers. A 2019 Pew Research study, found that nearly 75% of high-income earners use Facebook. According to Apptopia, by mid-March daily app sessions for Zoom had more than tripled since the first of the year. **PLANNING:** With this information and **four weeks' notice**, GYAC set forth a **goal** to increase awareness around their efforts to serve students and families and increase donations to sustain their ability to serve, despite the challenges of COVID-19. The following **objectives** were established. Between **April 27 and May 12**, the campaign needed to: **1)** reach 25% of GYAC's email contacts through email marketing; **2)** garner \$1K in donations, compared to the \$150 raised during the previous GivingTuesday initiative; **3)** successfully broadcast messages of generosity and positivity while soliciting and recognizing incoming donations; and **4)** premiere GYAC's newest promotional video that was scheduled to debut at a canceled event. The **strategy** was to leverage the surge in Facebook and Zoom usage to develop and execute an online audience engagement campaign for GivingTuesdayNow, utilizing a powerful combination of **communication channels**: email marketing, social media and virtual meeting space. The **tactics** GYAC implemented included the execution of: **1)** branded graphics, **2)** a dedicated donation page, **3)** targeted emails, **4)** social media posts, **5)** a Facebook event page, **6)** a livestreamed webinar, and **7)** a post-event radio interview. GYAC's **target audience** consisted of existing email contacts (board members, staff, teachers, donors, volunteers, parents and advocates) and Facebook followers. **Demographics and psychographics** ranged from retired, wealthy men and women over the age of 55 who have expressed an interest in giving back to the community through GYAC's programs to lower income, oftentimes, minority and/or single-parent households, who need food assistance or a safe, structured environment for their child(ren) after school. Lower-income program participants live nearby, while wealthier donors, volunteers and advocates may live in Indian River County full or part time. Due to COVID-19, many of GYAC's volunteers and donors remained at home in Indian River County. **IMPLEMENTATION:** In less than 30 days, GYAC developed a unique approach and comprehensive plan based on current trends, to connect with GYAC's stakeholders and the community at large. The following is a **timeline**. April 9, marketing pitched a Cinco de Mayo themed virtual happy hour. Planning a traditional Cinco de Mayo activity (happy hour) in a

formerly untraditional manner (virtually) was a foreign idea to GYAC's leadership, but they were intrigued and willing to explore the idea. April 13, graphics, messaging, a timeline and event outline were presented and well received. April 17, the organization's participation in GivingTuesdayNow was promoted to email subscribers in a bi-monthly COVID-19 email update. During the week of April 20, the marketing coordinator finalized the event outline and created three short videos using photos and footage from recent activities, while the director of philanthropy deployed a **dedicated donation page** and encouraged board participation. April 21, six staff members and the non-profit's board chair were invited to participate by showcasing stories related to their respective areas. A paid Zoom account was required to schedule a meeting with more than one host. Since staff was working from home, a paid Zoom account was determined to be beneficial beyond GivingTuesdayNow and a Zoom license was purchased. GYAC made a conscious decision on April 27 to pay a \$20 one-time fee to convert the virtual event into a webinar. Not only could GYAC invite contacts to the Zoom meeting by email, but with the upgrade, we could also reach a larger audience by livestreaming the webinar using Facebook. Additionally, hosting the webinar on Facebook Live meant GYAC could later boost the recorded Virtual Happy ½ Hour. Broadcasting the webinar eliminated the requirement for viewers to use Zoom. Knowing not everyone uses Facebook, we provided both options via email. Beginning April 29, the **first of two emails** was delivered to approximately 1.4K contacts. **Branded graphics** showcasing a Cinco de Mayo theme accompanied all communication, including the **webinar** itself. **Social media posts** were scheduled daily on **Facebook, Twitter and Instagram**, leading up to May 5. April 30, a branded virtual background was created for Zoom, and GYAC held its first practice. Additional two-hour practice sessions were held May 1, 4 and 5. A final invitation to join GYAC's #GivingTuesdayNow Cinco de Mayo Virtual Happy ½ Hour was emailed on May 5 to GYAC's subscribers, the **Facebook event page** was shared and final behind-the-scenes preparations were made, including troubleshooting why Google Chrome no longer supported Zoom's livestream to Facebook with five hours remaining. May 5, the virtual event was hosted on Zoom and livestreamed to Facebook. As teased during the webinar, GYAC's newest promotional video premiered on Facebook following the event. May 6, GYAC announced an initial campaign update via social media and email. GYAC made a final push on May 12, by plugging the campaign during a post-event **radio interview** on a local news station and making a final call for donations on social media. All communication and graphics featured similar **messaging**: "tune in to GYAC's Cinco de Mayo #GivingTuesdayNow Virtual Happy ½ Hour on May 5 on Facebook Live to fill your hearts (not glasses) with joy as GYAC shares stories about why we have so much to be thankful for." **Digital communication** directed viewers to gyac.net/GivingTuesday. Throughout the two-week campaign and leading up to the Virtual Happy ½ Hour, GYAC communicated through Constant Contact, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

EVALUATION: 1) Objective exceeded by 25%- The average campaign-specific open rate through Constant Contact was 33.25%; **2) Objective exceeded by \$7k/700%-** As of May 12, donations passed \$8K, blowing the \$150 raised previously out of the water; **3) Objective met-** The webinar was successfully broadcast to Facebook Live. As of May 12, the event was viewed 2.8K times and garnered 317 clicks and 128 reactions. Using personal testimony and short videos, six panelists presented a well-rounded view of GYAC's efforts to serve students, families, and the community during the pandemic. The Director of Philanthropy provided periodic, real-time updates of incoming donations and repeatedly directed viewers to GYAC's donation page; and **4) Objective met-** GYAC's video premiered May 5 and has reached 2.5K views. **BUDGET:** Six employees contributed ten regularly scheduled hours (0.5% of their annual hours) to the campaign and 1% of the marketing coordinator's annual hours were required for planning and promotion. Ancillary costs totaled \$60. Boosting GYAC's promotional video and Virtual Happy ½ Hour cost \$40, and the Zoom webinar upgrade cost \$20. With donations exceeding \$8K and increased exposure, GYAC's Virtual Happy 1/2 Hour was determined to be a worthwhile investment.