



*Case Study 3*

# TEAM ASTANA & LIVESTRONG GLOBAL CANCER CAMPAIGN

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### *Introduction*

Professional cycling is a very unique sport as it relates to sponsorship. At least 95 percent, and in some cases 100 percent of the team's budget is generated from sponsorship with the majority provided by the title sponsor.

Since 1999 the sport's most valuable marketing asset has been Lance Armstrong. Armstrong is a household name throughout the world, not purely for his record-setting seven Tour de France victories, but rather for his successful battle with cancer which preceded his most recent accomplishments. He is the only cyclist to truly transcend the sport; earning \$multi-million endorsement contracts, starring in Hollywood movies and founding the most well-known athlete foundation, LIVESTRONG - The Lance Armstrong Foundation.

Throughout Armstrong's 1999-2005 career he rode for Sports Director Johan Bruyneel at the United States Postal Service Professional Cycling Team (1999-2004) and Discovery Channel Professional Cycling Team (2005). When he returned to the sport in 2009, he reunited with Bruyneel, who at that time was managing the Astana Cycling Team (2008-2009). Unlike many corporate cycling sponsorships, the Astana team was funded by seven governmental bodies from Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

The loosely stated goals of the sponsorship were to develop the next generation of professional Kazakh cyclists and to foster national pride although no quantifiable target was put against this, neither were any benchmarks measures taken of the starting point. In truth, the sponsorship served the ambitions of a small group of powerful, wealthy politicians who simply enjoyed watching the sport and their own countrymen race at the highest level. While most sponsors would revel in the prospect of Armstrong joining the team and the marketing possibilities this would open up, Astana's views were lacklustre and apathetic.

Armstrong did not receive a salary from the team due to budget limitations and his decision to join Astana was driven by the desire to be reunited with long-time coach, Bruyneel. With no financial commitment from Astana, Armstrong was only obliged to race wearing the Team Astana jersey and bib shorts. Armstrong's bike and helmet were LIVESTRONG branded in support of his foundation's Global Cancer Campaign. This initiative was pursued by Armstrong following his own experiences with the disease and the prediction that cancer would become the leading cause of death by 2010.

A partnership between the Astana team and LIVESTRONG's Global Cancer Campaign was a natural fit - an international team (27 riders, 9 nationalities), tackling a global problem, racing and promoting the message around the world. It is also increasingly common for teams and corporations to have social responsibility as part of their structure. This potential opportunity could have become a problem if the Astana team failed to support a teammate in his worldwide campaign. From Johan Bruyneel Sports Management's (management agency of Team Astana) standpoint, there was a concern that if there was no public support of Armstrong's mission, the team could react badly which would have a negative effect on Johan Bruyneel, riders, the title and sub-sponsors.

### **SPONSORSHIP OBJECTIVES**

- Create goodwill for Team Astana sponsors, riders and Johan Bruyneel as well as LIVESTRONG
- Access Armstrong's image in a Team Astana marketing campaign. With Armstrong not getting paid

by the team, the use of his image was restricted and all assets produced by Armstrong (blogs, video, etc) were his property

- Promote the mission of the Global Cancer Campaign and provide cancer education within the global cycling community
- Raise money for the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

## HOW THE SPONSORSHIP PLAYED OUT

### *Activation strategy*

With the majority of the team's budget funding rider and staff salaries and logistic/travel expenses, the season's marketing budget was a meagre €80,000. Approximately 20 percent of this budget was apportioned for this partnership campaign. It was determined that the best methods to meet the partnership goals were to:

- Place the image of the yellow LIVESTRONG wristband and word on all race and casual clothing to symbolise the team's support of the cancer initiative
- Create a promotional campaign website promoting Team Astana's partnership with LIVESTRONG's Global Cancer Campaign.

### *Website*

The Team Astana campaign was called Ride for LIVESTRONG and appeared online at RideForLIVESTRONG.com. The site had a different look and feel from the official Team Astana website, however it was branded with Team Astana photos, logos and colours, with links back to Astana-CyclingTeam.com and LIVESTRONG.com. As many first-time visitors had no prior understanding of the partnership, there was a brief note on the campaign's homepage from Lance explaining that the entire team was supporting the LIVESTRONG Global Cancer Campaign with a goal not only to win races, but to lead the fight against cancer. There were three ways for people to get involved and join Team Astana in the fight: education, competition and donation.

### *Education*

Based on the philosophy that 'education is knowledge and knowledge is power', each Team Astana rider had a profile page with cycling information as well as quotes from them pertaining to cancer. It was important that each rider communicated the personal importance of this partnership, for example, "*My grandparents died from cancer when I was younger. If there was a cure, then they may have been able to see me race.*" - Steve Morabito, Switzerland.

Every rider's country and each country that Team Astana raced in during the 2009 season, had a cancer profile with a direct link from the rider's profile page. Profiles consisted of annual cancer incidence (numbers and types), cancer deaths and facts related to that specific country.

### *Competition*

Cycling is a unique sport in that riders do not all participate in the same races. It is not possible to predict how many race kilometres a rider will cover during a season. A competition was created to see which rider would log the most race kilometres in the fight against cancer. The contest was free to enter, with members of the public predicting which rider would race furthest each month and over the entire season.

Team sponsors contributed dozens of prizes including signed Team jerseys (Astana), bikes (Trek),



  
**Johan Bruyneel**  
*Sports Management*



LIVESTRONG helmets (Giro) and LIVESTRONG apparel (Nike). The contest was designed to bring an element of fun, while at the same time bringing people back to the website checking for race kilometres and cancer updates.

### *Donations*

On each rider's profile page were two columns labelled 'Riding in Honor' and 'Riding in Memory'. A \$27.50 donation allowed people to choose a rider who raced the entire season "in honor" or "in memory" of a loved one or friend. This was a relatively easy way to congratulate survivors, give hope and courage to those currently fighting cancer and remember those lost to the disease.

The launch of the partnership was on February 4, 2009, World Cancer Day.

### *Marketing*

With \$12,500 spent on website design and creation, there were limited funds remaining to market the partnership. Judicious use of available media and new technology gained coverage of the campaign

- Dedicated Team Astana Ride for LIVESTRONG newsletter sent out to Team Astana email subscriber list
- Lance Armstrong twitter upon launch of website
- Video blog launch by LIVESTRONG CEO on LIVESTRONG's official site
- Press release distribution with quotes from Armstrong and Bruyneel
- Team Astana, Johan Bruyneel and other riders sent twitter messages throughout the year
- Three ROAD Magazine ads (VIK for interviews and team access)
- Inclusion in monthly Team Astana newsletter
- Above-the-fold link on the homepage of Team Astana's website
- Two 15-second mentions on VERSUS, the USA Cycling network (VIK for interviews and team access)
- Monthly newsletter to those who signed up for the competition detailing the monthly winner and cancer info on a country
- Leaderboard (rider km leader, total money raised, number of supporters)
- 2,000 promo cards to be distributed at races
- 5,000 promo cards packaged within team rider card set.

## **THE RESULTS OF THE SPONSORSHIP**

### *Website*

- ✓ Unique visitors - 115,408 with peak months at launch (22,367 - February) and Tour de France (51,689 - July)
- ✓ Page views - 267,746 with peak months at launch (59,943 - February) and Tour de France (120,952 - July)
- ✓ Most viewed rider profile page - Lance Armstrong
- ✓ Most viewed country cancer profile page - USA
- ✓ Visitor representation: 102 countries

### *Top 10 visitor countries*

1. USA
2. France

3. United Kingdom
4. Belgium
5. Netherlands
6. Canada
7. Italy
8. Australia
9. Japan
10. Germany.

#### *Donations*

- ✓ Total money raised - \$35,188.77
- ✓ Total number of donations - 827
- ✓ Non-USA-based donations - 141 (17.04 percent)
- ✓ Country representation: 26

#### *Free Competition*

- ✓ Total entrants: 5,620
- ✓ Non-USA-based contest entrants: 2,039 (36.28 percent)
- ✓ Country representation: 86

#### *Analysis*

When analysing social responsibility partnerships, it is often easy to over emphasise successes. \$35,000 was raised for cancer research and over 115,000 people from 102 countries viewed the campaign. The philosophy, 'making the world a better place for at least one person is meaningful' certainly has value, but there needs to be a deeper analysis on how these partnerships can be improved. In this particular partnership, all the declared objectives were met, however important inadequacies were discovered that limited its success. This section serves to reflect on some of the expected and unexpected issues that may have limited the campaign to reach and educate a larger international audience and raise additional funds for cancer research.

#### *Budget Constraints*

- With the majority of the budget spent on campaign (website) creation, the marketing overall suffered. Large spikes were seen at initial launch and during the Tour de France, however it became increasingly harder to get new visitors to the site. Social media was a strategy employed, however the majority of the time the message was being communicated within the same group. VIK deals were attractive to US media, but had little or no value internationally. In addition, while cancer is a worldwide epidemic, the education and research promotion remains to be heavily USA driven.
- English Only Website - tied heavily to budget limitations, the website was only available in English. With a global mission, having a website in English automatically restricts many visitors from adequately accessing the website and interacting with the content.
- Donations. The majority of donations coming from the USA can be attributed to a number of factors:
  - Marketing was heavily USA driven
  - Cancer research remains a USA driven project

- Donations to LIVESTRONG for USA citizens are 100 percent tax deductible; the same tax principles do not apply elsewhere
- While cancer is a global issue, donations to LIVESTRONG may be viewed as supporting cancer-funded programs in the USA; international donors may have a preference to support programs or charities within their own country
- Donations may have also been limited due to the \$27.50 minimum donation. This number was significant to Armstrong as 27.5 million people died from cancer during his 3.5 year retirement.
- Sponsor Social Responsibility Leadership. Although team sponsors were willing to contribute prizes to the campaign, many decided to create their own partnerships with LIVESTRONG in an attempt to maximum their own value and objectives in leading the global fight. While all programs were successful, their effectiveness has to be questioned as all operated independently
- Social Responsibility Sponsorship Contracts. The common assumption that foundations will promote and contribute to a partnership based on the inherent benefits provided to the foundation can no longer be accepted. Regardless of philanthropic value, a legal contract must be created clearly stating the terms and conditions of the partnership.

*Future consideration should also be given to the following:*

- Social Communities. As a team, it was difficult to have control over what cancer content was being provided. The team had to rely on the partner for accurate, in-depth, and frequent information. Providing a monitored social community would have given people and cancer officials information and resources for compatriots, as well as further educate the global community as a whole
- At-race Promotion. Active engagement at races raises the publicity of the entire campaign. Riders visiting cancer hospitals or hosting cancer patients at bike races are ways to activate the campaign in each country. A campaign for riders to wear a placard on the back of their jerseys during the Tour de France with the name of a person affected by cancer did not come to fruition due to unrelated issues with the title sponsor.

## CONCLUSION

Once viewed solely as entertainment, sports teams, leagues and their sponsors are continuing to become active in philanthropic and social responsibility partnerships. Professional athletes and teams can contribute significantly to the sponsoring organisations financial and non-financial goals. If executed properly, non-profit partnerships can have a long-lasting and sizeable impact on all parties and most importantly, contribute positively to society.

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