

Susan G. Komen's Digital Media Influence

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Susan G. Komen Organization Information

Susan G. Komen (“Komen” or “the Organization”), formerly known as The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation is a nonprofit organization founded in 1982 by Nancy Goodman Brinker who lost her sister, Susan Goodman Komen, to breast cancer. Komen was only 33 when she died. To fulfill a promise to her dying sister, Nancy began a foundation that would for over 37 years continue to provide cumulative knowledge and awareness of the dreadful disease. The Organization is dedicated to “Save lives by meeting the most critical needs in our communities and investing in breakthrough research to prevent and cure breast cancer” (Susan G. Komen, 2018). Komen is the largest funded breast cancer organization in the United States. Since its inception, Komen has raised some \$2 billion in funds for breast cancer education, research, support programs, and advocacy.

Headquartered in Dallas, TX, with about 300 employees, and some 5,000 “survivors and activists in more than 120 cities and communities across the globe and more than 100 Komen events in the United States and internationally, Susan G. Komen® is the most progressive grassroots organization fighting breast cancer today” (Susan G. Komen, 2018). Komen’s impact in the mission to end breast cancer has led to a decrease in breast cancer mortality in the U.S. by 39% from 1989 – 2015, and support for over 3 million survivors through research and community programs. Further information on Komen can be found on their web and social media sites at www.komen.org, www.facebook.com/SusanGKomen, www.twitter.com/SusanGKomen, www.instagram.com/susangkomen, www.pinterest.com/susangkomen, and www.youtube.com/user/KomenfortheCure.

Komen's Social Media Influence

As the most progressive grassroots organization fighting breast cancer, Komen has utilized social media to raise funds in support of education, research, and health care initiatives. In 1983, Komen hosted a 5k run, later called the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure®, to raise funds for breast cancer research. According to Komen, what began with 1 annual race and 800 people, is now 140 annual races with nearly 850,000 people and a global impact. Komen was able to accomplish those numbers, in part, thanks to social media and its ability to reach and rally supporters faster than traditional fundraising methods. This is because, “The social web and mobile technologies have accelerated the rate at which relationships develop, information is shared and influence takes hold” (Bennioff, 2012). The race “is the world’s largest and most successful education and fundraising event for breast cancer ever created” (Susan G. Komen, 2018) with race locations nationwide. In 2008, Komen trademarked a pink ribbon that resembles

a runner in motion, which was meant to reflect the importance of their signature Race for the Cure event.

With information about the race published on their website, Komen uses social media sites to spread the word, attract runners/walkers, and gain supporters. Social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest are used to share stories and pictures, rally supporters, and provide links to register for 5k races nationwide. Runners/walkers and supporters can create personal fundraising pages (pledge pages) via the Komen website, link to their social media sites, and share with family and friends to help raise funds in support of Komen's mission. Supporters can also build teams to participate in the race, and rally community and organizational support.

Komen also uses e-mails to keep registered runners/walkers and supporters abreast of general information and fundraising events such as the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure®, and Susan G. Komen 3-Day™ (a three-day, 60-mile walk). YouTube is used to stream videos, advertising, and fundraising campaigns, while LinkedIn establishes Komen's affiliation with various sponsors, organizations and supporters.

Analysis on Komen's Use of Digital and Social Media

Komen's digital and social media use created a positive impact in the mission to prevent and cure breast cancer. Komen's use of digital and social media to spread their message rallied supporters and facilitated some \$2 billion in funding to date. As a result, Komen's efforts have led to a decrease in breast cancer mortality in the U.S. by 39% from 1989 – 2015, and support for over 3 million survivors through research and community programs (Susan G. Komen, 2018). Komen continues the fight against breast cancer by rallying supporters and enabling fundraising through the use of social media.

In 2012, Komen received huge backlash for its decision to discontinue Planned Parenthood—in support of a Republican anti-abortion agenda. Jarrett Stephan (2012) of Human Events periodical said, “The decision to cut off funding upset the president of Planned Parenthood, Cecile Richards, who said in a statement, ‘We are alarmed and saddened that the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation appears to have succumbed to political pressure.’” Ironically, widespread social media criticism created negative attention, damaged the organization's reputation, and resulted in a significant decrease in donations, funding, and corporate sponsors. Supporters boycotted Komen and turned to other breast cancer groups like Avon. According to Wallis (2012) “Komen quickly reversed course and restored the grant,” but it was too late to restore loss support.

In an effort to acknowledge the mistake, “Ms. Brinker announced that she would step down as chief executive to become chairwoman of the Komen Board Executive Committee, focusing on fund-raising and on expanding Komen's international presence” (Wallis, 2012). However, the organization's ranking has dropped significantly since the controversy.

One thing Komen could have done to acknowledge the mistake and regain supporters would be to eliminate board members who supported the decision to discontinue Planned

Parenthood. However, the lesson for Komen is simple, do not allow its mission to become entangled with politics.

Summary

Despite its Planned Parenthood controversy, Komen maintains its position as the largest funded breast cancer organization in the United States. Komen continues to provide support for over 3 million survivors through research and community programs. Using social media platforms, Komen continues to spread awareness of the deadly disease reaching international supporters through its Race for the Cure events. Komen has invested over \$2 billion to fulfill their promise, “playing a critical role in virtually every major advancement in breast cancer” (Susan G. Komen, 2018). However, there is still so much work to be done to prevent and cure breast cancer.

References

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