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 Changing the world, one client at a time.

The Case to Create Awareness

TEAM VINAY

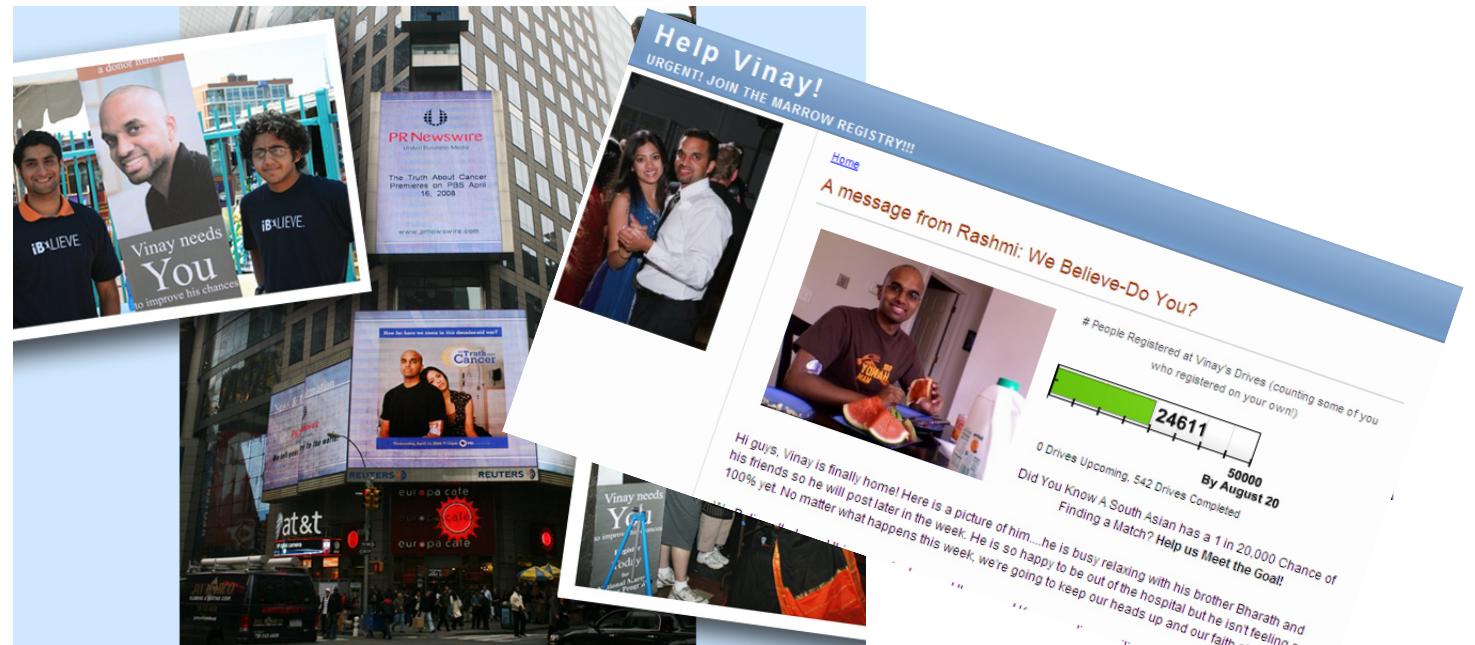
Challenge: An urgent need to find a marrow donor match to save Vinay Chakravarthy, a 28-year-old South Asian-American physician with life-threatening leukemia engaged Utopia Communications in an unprecedented campaign. Utopia was charged with localized media relations support in cities across the U.S. to help grassroots volunteers hold successful community registration drives to boost the number of South Asians on the National Marrow Donor Registry. South Asians have historically had one of the lowest chances of finding a match with a committed donor of any racial group. Statistics indicated that out of 6.6 million registered donors on the national marrow donor registry, only 92,000 were of South Asian origin putting Vinay’s chances of finding a donor match at one in 20,000, compared to one in 15 for a Caucasian. Attempts at national publicity were not, however, helping local campaign turnout, prompting one family member to retain Utopia to provide local media relations support to help Team Vinay volunteers hold successful community registration drives in 20 states. We had three days to promote the first South Asian marrow donor mega drive in California. We had eight weeks to help Vinay.

Gameplan: Success hinged on a two-tiered focus: recruitment and retention. The team targeted healthy individuals of South Asian origin, between the ages of 18-60, willing to donate to anyone who needed a transplant with an objective to increase the number of committed South Asian marrow donors on the national registry.”

Our team conducted background research, interviewed directors from the National Marrow Donor Registration Program and Asian-focused marrow donor associations and also contacted three former South Asian marrow donors to media train and offer for interviews. Utopia quickly developed public service announcement scripts to issue to local radio stations in a donor drive area. Utopia also added a more robust media section to the website so visual media could access. The team reviewed Team Vinay’s video PSAs and determined that the audio tracks could be utilized if edited and created two audio PSAs from existing videos which were posted on the web.

In the upcoming weeks, more than 100 press releases, media alerts, radio PSA scripts and media pitches were customized to local donor drive areas across the Nation. A boilerplate release was also drafted to promote drives at college campuses in August. Interview guidelines were developed and distributed to volunteer drive leaders and family spokespersons, and media training was conducted. In addition, the team obtained permission from a hospital for a news crew to film a marrow donation procedure, arranged interviews for family members, donor heroes and marrow association directors to talk with print, radio and television reporters for more in-depth stories.

Results: Utopia generated print, radio, television coverage coast to coast. Unknown supporters joined “Team Vinay” and their grassroots effort resulted in one of the most successful, privately organized marrow donor drives in history. After holding 425 registration drives in 20 states, Team Vinay added more than 24,000 South Asians to the national marrow donor registry, increasing the community’s representation on the registry by nearly 25 percent in eight weeks. Results were significant enough that the National Marrow Donor Program added a South Asian section to their website and awarded Team Vinay the NMDP Leadership Award for minority recruitment. Vinay found a 9/10 match with a donor whose commitment was so strong he moved up his stem cell donation process to fit the recommendation of Vinay’s doctor. Vinay went to transplant on August 24, 2007 and was home in a month. By the time Vinay went to transplant, three other South Asians waiting for bone marrow transplants found matches of their own with people who registered at Team Vinay donor drives.



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