Putting the “Fun” in Fundraising: The Effectiveness of a 24-Hour Online Giving Event

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**Abstract**

March 19, 2015 marked Spring Hill College’s first National Give Day. This 24-hour online giving event encouraged students, alumni, families, and faculty members to show their support of Spring Hill College through monetary donations. Money raised for this event went toward the Spring Hill College fund, which provides student support and scholarship, faculty development and campus maintence. The goal of this project was to raise $15,000 with the participation of 100 donors, which included 25 young alumni donors. The focus was specifically to engage younger alumni, meaning zero to 10 years out of school.

Dr. Samantha Church and Caroline Smith of the Advancement Office provided guidance and supervision, which was beneficial in obtaining the necessary tools to promote the College’s image and solicit a receptive audience. Social media, specifically Facebook, was used promote the event. To raise enthusiasm for the event, challenges, promotional videos and nostalgic images were created.

Both the monetary and participation goals were exceeded. The monetary goal was more than quadrupled, with $66,143.08 raised. The participation goal was more than doubled with 248 monetary gifts. This event generated the most gifts within a 24-hour period in the history of Spring Hill College. Due to the enormous success, participation and positive response from donors, the Office of Advancement plans to continue Give Day next year and in years to come.

**Introduction/Overview**

A Give Day is a new fundraising approach that colleges, universities and non-profits are implementing nationwide. The event is a 24-hour online campaign that encourages alumni, family and friends of the college or organization to express their support through online donations. Through the use of social media, a non-profit is able to not only generate revenue, but also encourage donor participation and enthusiasm. Although donations are key to a successful Give Day, non-profits tend to focus more attention toward donor participation. The success of Spring Hill’s first National Give Day shows that donors believe in Spring Hill College and its continued success.

**Project description**

Under the supervision and guidance of the Spring Hill College Office of Advancement and the Communication Arts Department, Spring Hill College’s first National Give Day was created, promoted and produced. The online event was held March 19, 2015, beginning at midnight and ending at 11:59 p.m. the same day. This date was selected specifically because it is the feast day of St. Joseph, whom Spring Hill College has adopted as its patron saint. The donations raised on March 19 support the Spring Hill College Fund. This general fund provides student support, scholarship, faculty development, programming and campus maintence. In hopes of receiving as many donations and participants as possible, the event was promoted through pictures, videos, emails, and chapter challenges on Facebook and BadgerNet platforms. The BadgerNet web page informs alumni about any official business or events of the College. The frequency and diffusion of posts not only created nostalgia but also excitement about the school and the day itself. Halligan (2010) reveals social media creates a virtual relationship, allowing alumni to maintain a bond with the college, which can translate into donations and other gifts in the future (p. 31).Although no donation from alumni, family and friends of the College was turned away, the specific target audience was recent alumni ranging from zero to 10 years out of college. To encourage and ensure participation, a friendly competition between the major 13 alumni chapters across the country was created. Through short video clips, students from those respective cities called out their hometown chapters. They challenged them to make a gift to show the country which city had the most Badger pride.

**Rationale**

The Spring Hill Office of Advancement staff expressed a need for more active alumni participation. Although the College has programs like phone-a-thon to raise money for the school, the Office of Advancement staff feels it is lacking in ways to get alumni engaged and excited to give. According to Caroline Smith, Director of Engagement of Spring Hill College, To an advancement team, the reason an alumnus is not giving is not always known making it more of a challenge to determine what will inspire them to give.” Through secondary research, it was discovered that both Columbia University and Princeton University have used the excitement of a Give Day to successfully rally their alumni. According to the Columbia Magazine, the University raised $6.8 million its first year (“First Giving Day,” 2012-2013). Likewise, Princeton raised $1.2 million its first year, according to Princeton’s Athletic Department, which implemented a Give Day in 2014 (“Princeton’s First-Ever,” 2014). Furthermore, Columbia received benefits beyond donations, such as a forty percent increase in first-time donors to the University (“First ‘Give Day,” 2012-2013). While Spring Hill is a smaller institution, the “Giving Day” technique was equally beneficial considering there were 55 first-time donors who gave a total of $4,355. Spring Hill is currently ranked 18 amongst private colleges in the South and has been ranked in the Top 20 private colleges in the South for the past 10 years (Regional Universities South Rankings, 2015). Thus, alumni participation is crucial to maintaining the college’s ranking as one of the top private colleges in the South.

**Target Audience**

After secondary research, the project planners targeted mostly Millennials and young alumni, which are classified as zero to 10 years out of college. McDearmon and Shirley (2009) support this by explaining that young alumni zero to 15 years out of college tend to give less than older alumni (p. 84). According to the Office of Advancement, Spring Hill College’s young graduates are lacking adequate participation. Dr. Samantha Church, Associate Vice President of Advancement of Spring Hill College, states, “ The giving rate among young alumni is consistently the lowest of an institutions constituents. The reasons for this vary—student loans, graduate or professional school attendance or little or no discretionary income, but this group can also be the most affiliated with the institution. When implemented successfully, a Give Day can combine that affiliation with giving in a way that is non-threatening to those who feel that have little to give.” As stated earlier, participation from donors is crucial for the success of the institution. Although the social media promotional campaign encouraged participation from family, friends and older alumni, younger alumni were specifically targeted due to their large population on Facebook. According to the most recent statistics from Pew Research Center, 71% of online adults use Facebook and only 23% of online adults use Twitter (Social Networking Fact Sheet, 2014). Through Facebook analytics, it was discovered that the target audience was successfully reached, with the majority of likes and reach belonging to those who range from 18-34 years old (See Appendix A). Those age ranges coincide with the age ranges of young alumni, thus establishing that this target audience was proven effective.

**Project goals, objectives, strategies and tactics**

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| **Goals:** To establish an outlasting fundraising event for the Spring Hill College Office of Advancement, through raising money for the Spring Hill College general fund and increase Spring Hill alumni giving participation. | | |
| **Objectives** | **Strategies** | **Tactics** |
| 1. Minimum of 100 donors on March 19, 2015 2. Minimum of 25 new young alumni donors 3. Minimum of $15,000 in gifts | 1. Created enthusiasm toward giving  2. Created nostalgia  3. Created Give Day awareness  4. Made alumni take action and give | 1. Created informative pieces—emails, press release, etc. 2. Contacted the 13 alumni chapter presidents via email 3. Created a Facebook event 4. Posted sentimental images and videos for alumni to reminisce their time at Spring Hill 5. Created a brand/image 6. Created videos and updates on students calling out their city’s chapter 7. Created chapter competition 8. Made BadgerNet direct, easy and accessible for donors |

**Goal**

The goal of the first Spring Hill College National Give Day was to establish an outlasting fundraising event for the Spring Hill College Office of Advancement, through raising money for the Spring Hill College Fund and increasing alumni giving participation. The long-term goal of creating an annual fundraising event was successfully achieved since the Office of Advancement plans to repeat this event next year and in subsequent years (See Appendix B). The short-term goal of creating a one-day online event was also proven successful through the donations and participation of 248 donors.

**Objectives**

The objectives included ensuring that a minimum of 100 donors gave on March 19 and gaining a minimum of 25 new young alumni donors. Furthermore, because young alumni participation was lacking in the college, the project planners believed obtaining 25 new young alumni within the 100 donors would prove young alumni were receptive to this style of giving. This objective was exceeded with a total of 248 donors and 50 young alumni donors.Without securing a matching monetary gift before the day of the event, the final objective was to raise a minimum of $15,000 within the 24-hour period. Although there was no match scheduled, the objective was quadrupled raising $66,143.08.

**Strategies**

Creating awareness was an important strategy because Give Days are a relatively new concept and potential donors should be informed and comfortable with the idea of donating online once a year. The Giving Day Playbook explains the importance of social sharing and the benefit of encouraging donors to help promote the event via social media (Giving Day Playbook, 2013). Donor awareness was measured through social media analytics. Specifically, the amount of likes, tags and shares Give Day posts and videos received compared to previous social media posts by the Spring Hill College National Alumni Association’s Facebook account. Since active in 2009, the Spring Hill College National Alumni Association’s Facebook page has gained 2,450 likes. Over the course of the six years the page has been active, it has received around 408 likes per year. Within the 18 days that the Spring Hill College National Give Day Facebook page was created and launched, it received 288 likes on its page (See Appendix C). Thus, the increased level of interest is apparent considering that the page brought in 288 viewers in an 18-day time frame, gaining nearly half of new followers that the Spring Hill College National Alumni Association’s page receives each year.

The next strategy, enthusiasm for donating, was essential to help make this day successful because excitement generates increased participation. The gains in enthusiasm were measured through social media analytics. For example, the most successful video was the first video posted, explaining what a Give Day was and why potential donors should donate (See Appendix D). By strategically selecting nostalgic areas around campus and using various students to promote the campaign, the video caught the attention of several active Facebook alumni, family and friends of the College. The video reached 3,928 viewers with 191 Facebook users actively liking, sharing, and commenting on the post. Of the 191 total, there were 127 likes, 41 comments and 21 shares (See Appendix E). According to Wandel, technology is a second nature for Millenials (2013). Thus, the project planners believe that social media had a strong influence over reaching the target audience to ensure the $66,143.08 raised, the 248 participants.

Another strategy was to create excitement by producing nostalgia in relation to the Spring Hill experience. Through the Facebook posts, the project planners wanted Spring Hill alumni, family and friends to reminisce on the beauty and gifts that the college gave to both the community and its students. More specifically, pictures of St. Joseph Chapel were utilized in order to evoke emotion from all who have ties to the College (See Appendix F). The picture of St. Joseph Chapel reached 1,659 viewers and received 106 likes, comments and shares. Specifically, there were 79 likes, 14 comments and 14 shares. It is important for donors to feel as if they were continually a part of the school, regardless of graduation year or ties to the college. According to Schachter (2010), the more an organization interacts with potential donors, the more they come to understand the significance of their contribution. Once they are interested, they are more likely to engage financially with the institution or organization (p. 64). Thus, donors were challenged to reflect on their time at Spring Hill so that they would want to give students the same opportunities that they have received from the college. Johnson (2004) states that the experiences alumni had in college correlates with participation and involvement. In order to reach all types of donors, the videos and pictures used attempted to include features that would tie all to the college. For example, videos focused on several aspects of one’s college career. This included touching on academics, extra curricular activities and religion.

The final strategy was prompting people to take action and donate. As stated above, creating awareness and enthusiasm for the Spring Hill College National Give Day was important, but ensuring that donors went online and participated was crucial. Over the course of a 24-hour period, the goal was to receive donations from a minimum of 100 donors. However this goal was reached bringing in a total of 248 donors. The success of Spring Hill’s first National Give Day was measured through social media analytics as well as analyzing data from Raiser’s Edge, the database the College uses to segment, analyze, and report on different alumni activity. BadgerNet was also used to determine what percentage of young alumni donated. Through Raiser’s Edge, it was determined that 20% of donors were young alumni.

**Tactics**

The strategy of creating awareness for the Spring Hill College National Give Day allowed donors to know where their money was going and why it was important to give on March 19. Tactics included creating a press release (See Appendix G), a Facebook page (See Appendix C), numerous social media posts and updates on BadgerNet. The tactics to guarantee awareness of these different strategies included creating a logo (See Appendix H), which created a style and theme for the event, creating short videos (See Appendix D), updating BadgerNet and sending emails from the Office of Advancement to alumni, family and friends of the College. Any videos, updates or general information was promoted through likes, shares and tags in order to reach the broadest audience.

The second strategy, creating excitement, was necessary to engage alumni on the day and to reinforce their love of Spring Hill, which resulted in donations.

One tactic was requesting alumni chapter presidents’ participation by encouraging them to like, share and promote any Give Day posts on Facebook (See Appendix L). This was done through emails and personal phone calls. Chapter presidents were also encouraged to engage their chapter in participating in the Give Day chapter challenge. It was interesting to see that the most receptive chapter presidents, such as Mobile, also had the most involved cities. The project planners believe this was achieved through a snowball affect. The Mobile chapter president sent out personal emails to her chapter members to encourage participation, which resulted with Mobile being the chapter with the most contributions.

Tactics for implementing the strategy of nostalgia included Facebook posts, pictures and videos. Such pictures included monumental landmarks of the campus, like St. Joseph Chapel. Another tactic to maintain nostalgia and excitement was featuring students in videos, which we also encouraged the alumni chapter presidents to like, share and promote. Benson and Morgan (2013) explain the importance of nostalgia by stating that hearing and seeing current students’ experiences and the current state of the institution directly correlates with evoking meaningful emotion from alumni (p.4). Our secondary research supported the tactics implemented in event. For example, one social media user commented on her hometown chapter challenge video expressing her love for Spring Hill and excitement to donate (See Appendix I).

Finally, to ensure actual donations, the tactic was to keep the webpage and information about giving direct and precise. For example, each post from Facebook or by email included a direct link to the donation site on BadgerNet. This site included information about Give Day and how to make a contribution. Halligan (2010) says that a Facebook page is a way to generate attention toward a college or organization’s webpage (p. 33). With Spring Hill’s Give Day, Facebook posts helped forward activity toward the giving page on BadgerNet. Through Facebook analytics, it was discovered that 23 total clicks guided users to the donation page.

**Necessary Permissions**

Participants in videos, pictures and stories that were announced on Facebook or BadgerNet signed release forms (See Appendix J). Permission was given from the Office of Advancement to the project planners to create, edit and manage the BadgerNet Give Day page and Facebook event page through the Spring Hill College National Alumni Association account. Dr. Samantha Church and Caroline Smith approved and gave permission for posts, graphics and videos published to these media outlets.

**Project implementation**

The Facebook page was created on March 2, 2015 and has remained accessible since that date. With plans of continuing Give Day, the office should maintain the Facebook page and its presence due to the number of followers. As of March 19, the page had received 261 likes, which led it to reach over 11,000 people during the week of March 19. Since March 19, the Spring Hill College National Give Day Facebook has received 27 new likes for a total of 288 likes. Different types of posts were created and executed to reach the broadest audience possible. Such posts touched multiple demographics from different cities and countries (See Appendix K) to different age ranges. After every post was made, a link was attached to bring any potential donor directly to the giving site.

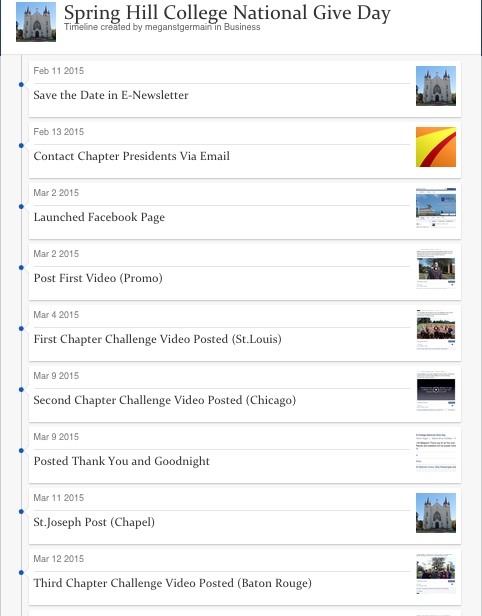
Chapter challenges were created through the use of video posts on Facebook and the influence of the Spring Hill College alumni chapter presidents. The coordination of students was strategically done through the use of students who have a strong presence on campus and within the Spring Hill community. The video posts also were intentionally posted in a specific order. The order was selected based upon which chapters have the strongest presence within the Spring Hill alumni association. In hopes of utilizing the snowball effect, the video posts challenged viewers to share the video and tag three friends in their post. This technique helped to spread each video to its specific city’s Facebook users. Below states the reach of each individual chapter challenge video:

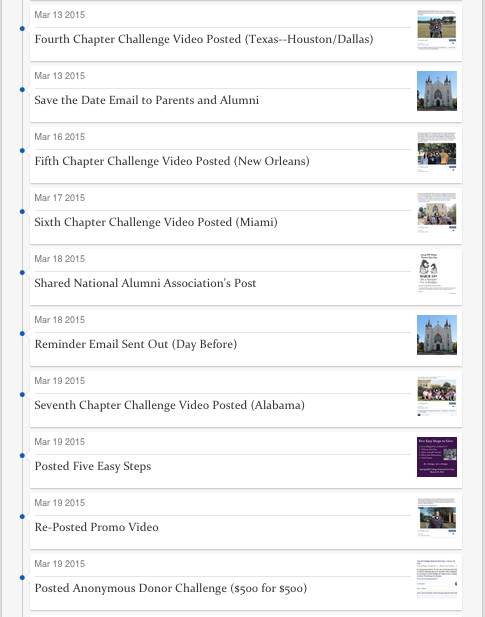
Informational pieces, press releases and reminders were created and sent through multiple mediums. A press release was created for chapter presidents to send via email to their chapters and used for the BadgerNet page to explain the project to potential donors (See Appendix G). Also, a story was written by a member of the Springhillian staff to promote the significance of giving back on Give Day. Multiple reminders were sent through emails to keep donors engaged and aware. Finally, a reminder was posted on the College’s website 24-hours before March 19 and the 24-hours of Give Day. A detailed email explaining Give Day and asking for participation was sent to the chapter presidents (See Appendix L). Another detailed email explaining Give Day was sent to all associated with the College to ensure every potential donor was reached and aware of March 19 (See Appendix M). This email was sent specifically to target any potential donor not active on social media. A separate email was sent to all associated with the College on March 19, explaining how to give in five easy steps (See Appendix N). Finally, an email was sent to explain the anonymous donor challenge, which explained that for every $500 donated there would be a $500 match up to $5,000 (Appendix O). After this email was sent, there was a significant increase in participation. The email was sent out at 3:51 p.m. After that time, there were 103 monetary gifts for $48,141.58. Again, at the end of each email, a link was attached that directed potential donors to the donation page.

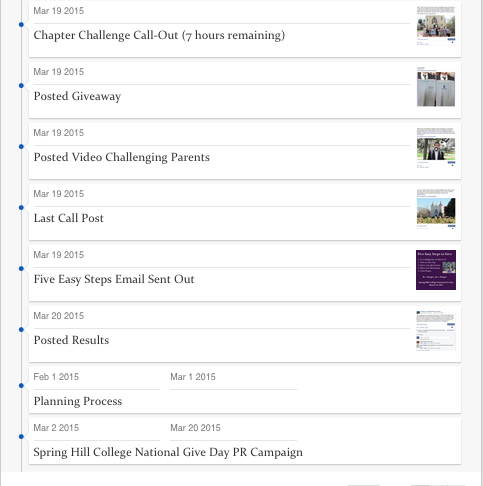
BadgerNet was used as a platform to inform donors, as well as bring them directly to the donation site. The project planners specifically chose to use BadgerNet as opposed to any other giving site because the College’s alumni and friends of the College are experienced with online giving through BadgerNet. In order to stress participation rather than monetary value, we encouraged alumni to give a minimum of $10 as their gift. The event stressed that it is not what you give, but that you give. Prospects were made aware that 2015 marks 185 years of Spring Hill College. With such an important anniversary, it was pertinent to use that number as a gift amount. The pre-made options of giving were as follows: $8.50, $10, 18.50, $185, $1,850, $18,500. There was also an option for a donor to enter his or her desired amount. Furthermore, if a donor worked for a company that matched gifts, he or she could apply for his or her gift to be matched.

**Timeline**

Due to setbacks with Spring Hill’s graphic department, our timeline was not strictly followed. The old timeline became a tentative model to ensure that all aspects for the project were completed. However, the setbacks worked as an advantage. With the Facebook page active for such a short amount of time, Give Day was able to keep interest and maintain momentum up until March 19. In addition to what was planned throughout the months of January, February and March, the project planners responded to any participant’s questions, comments or concerns on Facebook and BadgerNet. The project planners strived to be as interactive as possible with potential donors on all of these pages. For example, if a Facebook user would share a Give Day post, the Give Day Facebook page would like his or her share or comment on his or her share to show appreciation. Official timeline is as follows:





 Fortunately, since it was an online event, there were no expenses. Although there was no budget, the Office of Advancement provided a prize for a giveaway on March 19. To create the short video challenges, a Nikon D3300 camera was borrowed from a Communication Arts student. The partnership with Office of Advancement at Spring Hill College gave approval and guidance in order to establish this event. Student volunteers were used to create short videos to promote Give Day. To ensure best practice, all demographics from various cities and grade levels were used.

Megan’s responsibilities:

* Created and maintained the web presence for the event through graphic design, video production and photography
* Created awareness promotional videos and flyers
* Worked with Graphic Design team to create a Give Day logo, cover photo and web banner
* Promoted the event to outside sources to secure prizes for chapter competitions
* Reached out to student volunteers

Erinn’s responsibilities:

* Reached out to alumni chapter presidents across the country to coordinate their participation.
* Got key members of the Spring Hill campus community to participate – especially, faculty and staff who are alumni
* Wrote thank you letters
* Researched donors to underwrite gifts/prizes/matches for the day

**Promotional Campaign**

This fundraising campaign took place on Facebook and BadgerNet, as well as through emails. Facebook was utilized to generate excitement and promote the event up until March 19. Originally, Twitter was also meant to be a platform for the event. However, because this was the first year of the event, it was in the best interest to perfect one social media outlet (Facebook) rather than do a mediocre job managing multiple media accounts (Facebook and Twitter). Although both are extremely active social media platforms, Facebook’s latest statistics state that 890 million users are active daily (Facebook, 2014). Thus, an event on Facebook was created in order to gain as much activity as possible. According to social media intern Abby Massengale, the alumni Facebook page receives significantly more traffic and activity than the Twitter page. Furthermore, Facebook was the best platform for the first year because statics could be monitored and analyzed through Facebook analytics, which Twitter lacks. Thus, through the analytics the project planners were able to see what strategies and tactics worked best. For example, it was clear that both excitement and awareness were created from the chapter challenge videos. Although the project planners used pictures as well as videos, the Facebook audience was more receptive to videos (See Appendix P). BadgerNet was used as an information source, as well as the platform where the donations were taken place.

**Assessment of Success**

After the event, all statistical information was drawn from Raiser’s Edge and BadgerNet. Raiser’s Edge is the program system the Office of Advancement uses to gather and store information about donors of the college. The BadgerNet web page informs alumni about any official business or events sponsored by the College. Different demographics of donors were studied and analyzed to evaluate that the goals were not only met, but also exceeded. The goal of creating an outlasting event was successful because the Office of Advancement plans to make Give Day an annual event. The objective of raising $15,000 was far surpassed because the total monetary gifts amount was $66,143.08. The objective of obtaining 100 donors with 25 young alumni donors was also surpassed by obtaining 288 donors with 50 young alumni donors. Thus, because of the achieved goals and objectives, it was determined how effective the strategies and tactics were. The strategy of creating awareness was successful due not only to the 248 donations, but also because of 11,000 Facebook users reached throughout the week of March 19 (See Appendix Q). The next strategy of creating excitement and producing nostalgia was successful and measured through the Facebook users responses. The final strategy, prompting people to take action and donate, was successful because 248 donors gave over $66,000. Furthermore, the strategies were successful due to the tactics implemented throughout the planning and promotional process.

**Legal and Ethical Issues**

For the purpose of being fair and balanced throughout the promotional campaign, there was a conscious use of all demographics, including race, religion, grade level and region in all videos produced. Furthermore, due to privacy and sensitivity that is associated with finances, the names and information associated with each donor remained confidential within the Office of Advancement and Give Day personnel.

**Difficulties and Solutions**

Generally, the planning and implementation went smoothly. However, there were a few complications that arose. For instance, it was difficult to set a monetary goal, not only because this was the first Give Day, but also because a matching gift was discussed. Within the planning process, several potential matching gift donors were suggested but never solidified. This caused the monetary goal to be lowered, due to a lack of sponsorship. However, on March 19 around 2p.m., an anonymous donor provided a matching gift of $500 for every $500 brought in, up to $5,000. This generated a huge boost in participation.

There was a slight delay in the Facebook page launch due to specific Spring Hill graphic design protocol. In January, a Graphic Design student was asked to assist in creating the logo and necessary images for the promotional campaign. Unfortunately, due to other obligations, the student did not complete the requested assistance. This was quickly resolved by the Give Day team taking on this additional responsibility and remained in communication with Spring Hill College’s Graphic Designer until products were perfected.

There was a lack of coordination between the Give Day event and previous campaigns within the school, such as phone-a-thon. Although both fundraisers raise money for the same fund, the two campaigns were in competition with each other. The phone-a-thon staff solicited alumni for money on the night of March 19, while the Give Day staff promoted their event throughout the night, which included the same calling hours as phone-a-thon. This complication confused donors and it was suggested by donors that next year, phone-a-thon should either not call on Give Day or promote Give Day during phone-a-thon calling hours, which are 6-9 p.m.

The final complication was Twitter. As addressed previously, the project planners had the intention to use Twitter as a second social media platform. However, during the planning process, it became apparent that Twitter was not the best social media outlet to utilize. In future years, when people have a full understanding of what a Give Day is, Twitter could be effective. But because this was the first year that Spring Hill used the Give Day technique, it would have been inefficient to use a social media platform that only allows 140 characters. Also, the Office of Advancement’s Twitter page lacks the amount of activity that the Facebook page receives. Thus, the Facebook page was perfected so in future years the Office of Advancement could implement Twitter into the Give Day campaign. For example, because of the limitation on characters, the project planners suggest using Twitter to send out short updates of statistics throughout the day of the event.

**Reflection**

We took on the Give Day fundraising event for the school because we both wanted to not only showcase our talents and knowledge we have gained from our communication studies, but also to create an event that would outlast us at Spring Hill. In addition, we both have a relationship with the Office of Advancement. Megan has held three internships there and Erinn worked for phone-a-thon for four years. These relationships and passion for fundraising led us to seek an opportunity with the Office of Advancement.

When we first began planning Give Day, it became apparent that this event was more than a project; it was also an opportunity to create a national fundraising campaign for Spring Hill College. Setting a monetary goal was the most challenging aspect of the planning process. Although we did secondary research, it was difficult to figure out a reasonable goal in relation to Spring Hill’s size. Furthermore, the lack of a matching donor during the planning process caused us to significantly lower our goals and objectives. In fact, before March 19, we were nervous if our goal of $15,000 was attainable. However, throughout the semester we learned what a strong community Spring Hill has, as well as the power of a strong media presence when promoting a fundraising event. We also learned that when planning a fundraiser, stressing participation over a monetary goal is essential. Although large gifts are wonderful, the smaller gifts are more realistic and will add up quickly. Additionally, we learned how to strategically utilize Facebook, not in a sense of socializing, but from a business perspective. We saw how this new form of promotion can effectively create awareness as much as or possibly more than traditional media.

If we were to re-enact Give Day again next year, there are a few things we would do differently. First, we would secure a few donors to partake in matching gifts throughout the day. It was eye opening how quickly donors responded to donating money when they know their gift would be matched. Also, we would like to create a follow up survey to determine what the most effective medium was for donor awareness. Finally, we would like to mail a save-the-date announcement or reminder to potential donors who are more receptive to traditional messaging.

We were astonished by the amount of participation and support of the Spring Hill community. We are honored to have been able to have the opportunity to take on an experience like Give Day. As mentioned earlier, we had no idea if it was plausible to reach our goal of $15,000 let alone quadruple it. Not only are we impressed with the success of Give Day, but we also believe the success can be attributed to the curriculum, internships and other academic experiences we have undergone for the past four years.

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