

United Way and MTV: Inspiring Young People to Community Service

CASE STUDY

OBJECTIVES

- Inspire young people to use their spring breaks for community service and join United Way and MTV to help rebuild Gulf Coast communities;
- Empower young people to make an ongoing impact in their community through service.

BACKGROUND

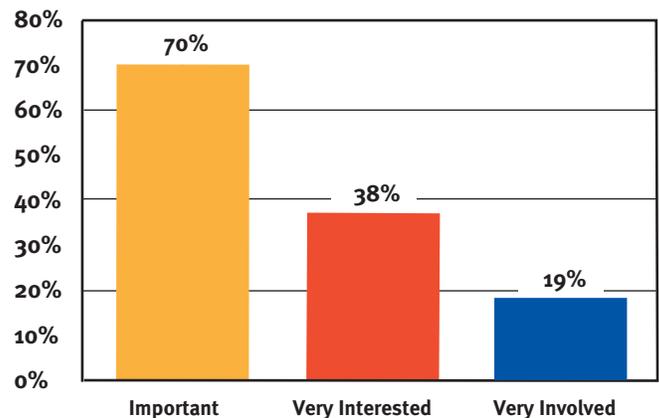
MTV’s 2006 “Just Cause” survey found 70% of young people agreed it is important to help the community. However, despite the belief in helping the community, interest in service was found to far exceed actual engagement—38% noted they were “very” interested but only 19% said they were “very” involved in community service. The study also found that youth need flexible, fun volunteerism, and that the most powerful incentive to volunteer is an opportunity to have fun with their friends.

In 2005 Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma devastated the Gulf Coast, and citizens nationwide rose up to provide comfort, resources and volunteer power to help rebuild the region. American youth—angered and disappointed in the lack of response and failure of systems—wanted to help, but were unsure how to get involved.

United Way of America and MTV created a program to raise awareness about the needs of the Gulf Coast and to inspire young people to help. United Way engaged corporate partners to fund the creation of an “alternative spring break” program and invited 18-24 year olds nationwide to participate. The program promoted community service programs and resources during spring break and beyond through online and on-air (PSA’s, news and programming) as well as through earned media.

Activation Gap: Community Service Interest and Involvement

Source: “Just Cause” MTV Networks



ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK BY THE NUMBERS

3,000
APPLICATIONS

400
PARTICIPANTS

16,000
HOURS OF SERVICE

\$500,000
EQUIVALENT VALUE
of volunteer service
toward FEMA debt

ROLE OF MEDIA AND CORPORATE PARTNERS

In the fall/winter of 2005 and 2006, United Way and MTV conducted a nationwide call to action asking young people to dedicate their Spring Break vacation time to the power of collective good. Recognizing the opportunity to harness this generation’s activist potential—and understanding that the opportunity must be engaging and perceived as “fun”—United Way of America and MTV co-created “Storm Corps,” an Alternative Spring Break program.

More than 2,000 young people responded to the call to action by applying to participate, and nearly 100 were chosen to make the inaugural program happen in Southern Mississippi and Alabama. Year two found Gulf Coast communities still in dire need of volunteer support, so the ASB program was expanded to four weeks. Over 1,000 young people applied for 400 ASB volunteer slots available in Southwest Louisiana, the land-fall of Hurricane Rita—the strongest hurricane ever to hit the United States.



- **MTV created and aired PSAs**, and dedicated online resources at mtv.com to promote the program. They also jump-started the spring 2007 program with special programming around the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina (*True Life: I'm Returning to the Gulf*). MTV hosted the ASB application and other content on its pro-social website—*think*. Promotional support of the site helped make it one of the top four results for “alternative spring break” Google searches. In 2006 and 2007, MTV also promoted the stories of ASB volunteers on *The Amazing Break* as part of its spring break programming. Produced by MTV News, this program featured United Way’s ASB program and other stories of young people doing good work around the world.
- **UWA launched online promotions** to support the program including social networking sites (FaceBook and MySpace); blogs, video logs and content sites (YouTube), “friend-raising” software to help participants raise funds to support their participation, and photo-sharing sites (Flickr) to help tell the story. These assets helped generate and maintain interest in the program among friends, family, communities and the media. United Way’s online hub and thematic programming which aired on MTV helped create buzz among young people across the country, reminding them about the ongoing needs in the Gulf Coast and the opportunities to get involved in rebuilding efforts.
- **UWA leveraged corporate partners** to help create a meaningful service program that started before leaving home, and for many, lasted long after returning home. Lead sponsors in 2006, FedEx and The Home Depot, were able to activate their deep commitment to disaster response with support of a program to aid long-term recovery. FedEx was joined in lead sponsor by GameStop/EB Games in 2007, with Nike providing in-kind support. FedEx renewed its lead sponsor commitment for 2008, and was joined by Deloitte. Partners have committed over \$1.2M in direct support of ASB and UWA campus-based programs to inspire and engage young people in community service.



In 2007, UWA also formed a partnership to promote ASB and other vacation volunteerism activities with online travel service CheapTickets.com. The partners created a micro website off of CheapTickets’ highly-trafficked site to garner attention and awareness of vacation volunteer opportunities like ASB. CheapTickets also conducted a satellite media tour in Southwest Louisiana that reached media outlets nationwide and resulted in more than 8 million media impressions.

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

Young people were inspired to action, with over 2,000 applications received for 100 slots during the month-long promotion in 2005. The program experienced a 400% increase in participation from 2005 and 2006, and approximately 16,000 hours of volunteer service was logged, which contributed nearly \$500,000 toward Louisiana’s post-hurricane FEMA debt, based on volunteer hours served.

United Way has also seen some early and encouraging success as ASB participants continue to grow their leadership skills through ongoing service. 44% of participants from the inaugural program in 2005 returned to the 2006 program in leadership roles. 27% of the 2006 participants have applied for leadership roles in the 2008 program. UWA has promoted opportunities for internships nationally and locally, as well as with ASB sites in 2008.

Participants have given voice to the experience by telling their stories and inspiring others to action through traditional and social media ([YouTube](#)). They’ve also continued to organize service projects and reunions through Facebook and MySpace.

In an effort to continue engaging these young leaders in the United Way movement, United Way of America created summer internships and opportunities with local United Way organizations. Additionally, United Way encouraged ASB volunteers to continue their service efforts when they left the Gulf Coast by providing them the tools, resources and empowerment to create service clubs on their college campuses and engagement in ongoing volunteerism in their home communities.

Regarding branding and awareness success for the cause, United Way saw Web traffic increases in March of 20% in 2006 and 8% in 2007—the highest-traffic months during the year.

The program generated 65 million earned media impressions from news outlets including CNN, Headline News Network, *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, NPR and *USA Today*, among others. Between increased Web traffic to engage-

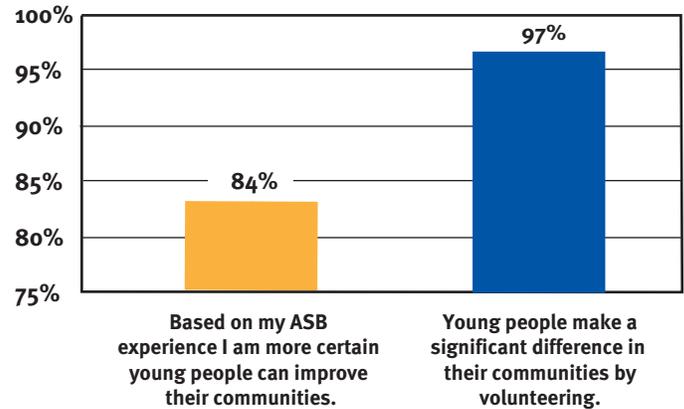
ment of national corporate partners to sponsor and add value to the program, United Way has created a meaningful platform to engage youth audiences and MTV has demonstrated a genuine connection to today's pro-social young activists.

However, the measures that matter most to United Way, its corporate partners and ASB participants around the country are the rebuilding successes achieved. Between the 2006 and 2007 programs, nearly 400 volunteers logged thousands of hours of service, but the human impact achieved was greater than anticipated. The ASB program not only renovated destroyed communities, but engaged student leaders to support the community and the impacted individuals in the community. When asked "Did this experience change your beliefs about the role that young people can play in improving communities?," more than 84% responded affirmatively.

United Way continues to find ways to grow ASB and other civic engagement programs in order to provide impactful content and activities for today's activist youth.

Empowering Young People

Source: UWA Research Services



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