Abby Schaller

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Feature Story: Conan O’Brien

Team Coco – The Story of a Comeback Campaign

Who would have thought America could fall in love with a 6’6 scrawny television talk show host with goofy red hair? Yes, I am talking about Conan O’Brien.

O’Brien is a late-night talk show host who made his home at NBC for 17 years. In January 2010, NBC dropped a bomb on O’Brien; NBC wanted to shift back his time slot and basically fire him from the network. O’Brien decided to leave NBC and settled for $40 million. After leaving his NBC home and night show, O’Brien did not sit back and watch his television career disappear.

NBC did not allow O’Brien to create a new show or appear on television for 11 months. O’Brien noticed that the public had been rallying behind him on the Internet and the fans were openly stating on social media sites that NBC was unfair to O’Brien and the television network was being selfish. O’Brien decided to join his fans and take his comedic talents to the social media home front. O’Brien was forced to take a break from television, but he was still able to capture the interest of millions on the Internet.

Realizing Generation Y was quickly becoming his target audience, O’Brien was able to directly reach the technologically savvy target audience of young adults through different social media sites. O’Brien had a fan-generated Facebook page, which thousands of Facebook users joined from across the world and coined his new nickname, Coco, which rapidly gained popularity. The page was titled, “I’m With Coco,” and fans were able to show their support via the Facebook page’s wall. Many Facebook users even changed their display image to a picture of O’Brien. At one point, it seemed the entire Facebook community had come together for this talk show comedian. Over 1,000,000 fans have “liked” this page since January 2010.

O’Brien created a Twitter account, which included very entertaining Twitter posts from the goofy man himself. His Twitter account has over 2,800,000 followers and is one of the most quoted celebrity account. O’Brien made his account very personable, often interacting with his followers. O’Brien launched his website, www.TeamCoco.com. O’Brien and his young fans were now connected through three different sites. Without access to television, O’Brien had to rely on innovative and diverse media tactics, which enabled him to embrace his one of a kind, edgy and funny appeal. A social media campaign was born and it became a viral sensation very quickly.

The campaign included everything from a Foursquare-linked blimp, web films and a web cam showing live antic from his new office to hilarious television promos, the Facebook fan page, his Twitter account, and www.TeamCoco.com. These amusing previews of what was to come from his new show on TBS were attracting more and more online supporters every day, or additional members of ‘Team Coco.’ This showed the powerful support among O’Brien’s younger fan base.

The blimp is definitely not a new marketing idea, but for Conan, it was a unique, clever addition to the campaign. The TBS television network used an enormous orange blimp and the location-based social networking site Foursquare to fly the skies of the East Coast during October, the month before the debut of O’Brien’s new late-night talk show, Conan, on TBS. Fans were able to check-in and unlock a special Conan Badge after spotting the blimp. A website accompanied the giant, bright blimp, which included a live webcam and a map showing the blimp’s location. This part of the campaign was an excellent new media platform that was able to attract significant attention.

This social media campaign generated enough buzz leading up to his November 8th, 2010 debut on TBS that on opening night, his new show called “Conan” exceeded both Leno and Letterman in the television ratings.

Another aspect that came from this campaign was that O’Brien was able to attract young viewers for his new late-night talk show. The median age of viewers for “Conan” on TBS is 33, while Leno’s average viewer is 56. Within two months of “Conan” being on air, he was the most-watched late-night talk show among viewers ages 18-49. His success was due in large part to his flashy, promotional social media campaign. Most late-night talk shows viewing average is in the 50s. It was obvious; Leno or Letterman could not compete with O’Brien’s youth-tailored campaign.

O’Brien did not only experience success with his young viewers, but he had overall success with his new show on his new network. O’Brien’s show is averaging about 1.44 million viewers, while Leno attracts 1.35 million and Letterman has 1.15 million viewers. One of the executives at TBS said O’Brien definitely exceeded the network’s expectations.

The Team Coco Campaign made O’Brien’s comeback to television a great victory. The campaign received a great deal of positive feedback because he got to know his target audience and who he was reaching out to, which is extremely important. Knowing your audience is the first step of a successful campaign and O’Brien definitely accomplished this step. Another reason this campaign was so successful was because O’Brien was authentic and honest, and was able to rebrand himself with a renewed image to which younger adults could relate. Team Coco ran a campaign of epic proportions, and was voted in the Top 10 Most Successful Media Marketing Campaigns of 2010. O’Brien’s success with this social media campaign proves that a campaign can build excitement about a product, service or even a television show, by only using the Internet.

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