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Spinning for a Solution

A New York-based nonprofit organization pumps up its grassroots marketing strategy to raise money for rare cancer research

WHO

Founded in 2007 by marketing executive, fitness devotee and cancer survivor Jennifer Goodman Linn and her husband, David Linn, Cycle for Survival is an annual nonprofit event that raises funds for medical research on rare cancers for Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) in New York. The single-day event is an indoor cycling—or spinning—relay in which team members take turns pedaling on a stationary bike for a total of four hours. Each team must raise a minimum of \$1,000 to participate and 100% of the proceeds go directly to Memorial Sloan-Kettering's rare cancer research. The event is currently held at select Equinox fitness clubs in New York and Chicago, and is in the process of expanding.

Jennifer Goodman Linn and her husband, David, celebrate her fifth victory over cancer.

WHAT

Rare cancers account for more than half of all cancer cases, but it is harder to raise money to fund their medical research because they're not as well-known or -understood by the general public as breast cancer, for example. Goodman Linn wanted to do something about that. "We clearly saw that there was a marketing niche that no one had focused on," she says.

Each year since its inception, Cycle for Survival has doubled both its number of contributions and its fundraising total compared with the previous year's results. This year's event brought in about 22,000 gifts totaling more than \$2.4 million, compared with 2009's results of 11,000 gifts and \$1.2 million. Overall, the four-year-old event has raised approximately \$4.5 million for MSKCC's research. [See table for full results.]

HOW

Cycle for Survival's success can be attributed to well-targeted marketing and, simply put, "the Jen factor," says Scott Rosen, COO of Equinox Holdings Inc. in New York, of Goodman Linn. "She's special, special stuff. ... She's an amazing person and she convinced us that we could do something special—and we have."

Equinox partners with MSKCC to produce Cycle for Survival.

Goodman Linn, a 39-year-old marketer with experience in consumer marketing and brand strategy for companies such as Nike and Ann Taylor Corp., has been fighting a rare form of soft-tissue cancer called malignant fibrous histiocytoma since 2004. She has relapsed and conquered it five times. While being treated at MSKCC, Goodman Linn has found solace and strength in daily spinning classes at her local Equinox gym in Manhattan. In 2007, she and her husband decided to launch a spinning-related fundraiser benefitting MSKCC's rare cancer research and to make it a relay to increase participation. "It allows our target market to be a whole lot bigger," Goodman Linn says. She got approval from the fitness director at her local Equinox gym to borrow the cycling space for the event.

In its first year, Cycle for Survival attracted 230 cyclists on 50 teams and raised more than \$200,000. In its second year, following a promotional and operational investment of \$5,000 from Goodman Linn's own pocket, the event raised \$650,000. By year three, Goodman Linn realized: "We're getting too big for our britches. We have to tell corporate." With that, Equinox became an official partner.

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SCOTT ROSEN



NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION	CYCLE FOR SURVIVAL, NEW YORK	
FUNDRAISING PARTNERS	EQUINOX FITNESS CLUBS MEMORIAL SLOAN-KETTERING CANCER CENTER	
BENEFICIARY	MEMORIAL SLOAN-KETTERING'S RARE CANCER RESEARCH	
YEAR	NUMBER OF DONOR GIFTS	FUNDRAISING TOTAL
2007	1,627	\$209,730
2008	4,259	\$652,689
2009	11,086	\$1,221,110
2010	22,653	\$2,455,792
FOUR-YEAR TOTAL	39,625	\$4,539,321

Source: Cycle for Survival/Harvard Business School case study by Ted Seides and Matt Spielman.



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Now Equinox and MSKCC, which now owns and operates the event, share the overhead costs and do much of the event's promotional work. Equinox hangs signs in participating gyms, encourages spinning instructors to promote the event and generates PR. MSKCC promotes Cycle for Survival to its database of donors through direct mail and e-mail, and partners with local radio and TV stations to run promotional spots. Neither Equinox's Rosen nor MSKCC Director of Annual Giving Amy Carpenter will disclose their marketing budgets for Cycle for Survival promotions, but Rosen calls it a "grassroots, viral" effort.

The Cycle for Survival partners also promote the event on CycleForSurvival.org and on Facebook, and they attract many participants by generating word of mouth among colleagues, friends and family. "Patients and caregivers, by far, raise the most money," Goodman Linn says.

"The most important thing for me is what we're doing with the money and where it's going," she adds. Thus far, Cycle for Survival's proceeds have funded clinical drug trials related to sarcoma, and research projects on pediatric and pancreatic cancers, according to MSKCC's Carpenter.

Cycle for Survival's impact extends beyond raising much-needed research money. It also helps raise Memorial Sloan-Kettering's profile as a cancer research hub and garners positive attention for Equinox. But any positive marketing glow or gym membership bump is an added bonus, Rosen says. "We haven't seen any measurable uptick in membership sales, but we're certainly not in it for that reason." Equinox's participation in the event is about "doing something for humanity," he says. "It has a tremendous side effect for us: It makes us feel good." **m**



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