

CASE STUDY

United Nations Relief and Works Agency



How UNRWA United People Around a Powerful Photo to Create Change on the Ground

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) wanted to capture the world's attention with a single photo.

A powerful image showing thousands of people waiting for food in the Yarmouk Camp in Syria was spreading across the Internet, and UNRWA wanted to amplify it even more. "We wanted to make a difference on the ground and get food through to hungry people in besieged parts of Syria," said Chris Gunness, a UNRWA spokesman.

The agency created a Thunderclap campaign centered around the photo, and set a target for 23 million social media impressions for the #LetUsThrough hashtag, to represent the pre-war population of Syria. If the goal was reached, the photo would be shared on a giant screen in New York City's Times Square, and on an electronic billboard in Tokyo's Shibuya District simultaneously.

UNRWA recruited support from 130 humanitarians and civic society organizations and 30 celebrities, promoting the hashtag and amplifying the message even more. Gunness sent numerous email blasts to gather support, and gave a number of interviews to major media outlets.

"It is worth investing time and effort in planning the campaign, assembling alliances and partnerships, and doing some serious media outreach with both old and new media," he said. Gunness and his team promoted the campaign every day, and every day it received media coverage.

Partner organizations translated email blasts and promotional messages to connect with a broader audience. Within hours of the Thunderclap's launch, the goal was reached.

On Thursday, March 20, 2014, the image appeared on the giant screens, while citizens' groups gathered for a silent vigil. In total, the #LetUsThrough efforts generated 38.5 million social media impressions, and reached over 26 million people.

According to Gunness, "The fact is that we are getting access into Yarmouk and this is very likely because of the huge amount of international publicity Thunderclap (and the noise around the campaign) gave us."

38.5 MILLION

SOCIAL MEDIA
IMPRESSIONS

10,000+

AID PARCELS
DELIVERED

PRESS

TIME

BBC

AL JAZEERA

NBC

THE NEW YORK TIMES

NPR

"[The campaign] was hugely successful because it gave us a **simple, easy to use, high-impact, mega-wide reach** platform which was clear and easy for the many different partners to understand....

We wanted people to feel that by making one or two clicks they could make something **visible and high-profile** happen in the real world that would help bring about positive changes in Syria. **Thunderclap is an ideal vehicle for this.**"

- Chris Gunness,
UNRWA Spokesperson

