

# THE NEW TYPE OF ACTIVISM

Corporate marketing departments are not the only ones that have decided to take advantage of social media. Activists around the globe have started to discover advantages to reaching large-scale groups in cost-effective ways via social networks. On March 16, 2010, Greenpeace started a campaign against Nestlé by joining the company as a friend on Facebook.

Greenpeace launched their online protest by spurring a groundswell of online criticism on Nestlé's Facebook fan page, creating an anti-Nestlé advertising on YouTube and issuing an extensive report on the company's practices of using palm oil produced in areas which threatened rainforests and orangutang populations.<sup>14</sup> Nestlé responded defensively, warning it will remove off-brand logos from its Facebook page, which resulted in a flurry of negative comments. It's not totally clear if Greenpeace staged and executed the whole attack, but regardless, the community relentlessly dogpiled on the brand's Facebook page. While Nestlé responded with a Q&A on their corporate site, the company retreated from the discussion on the Facebook page, leaving the page open for detractors.

Greenpeace maintains an extraordinary ability to attract attention, whether it be traditional media or social media. It is interesting to compare Greenpeace's strategy with the Nestlé boycott in 2010 to the handling of the Shell Oil tanker in 1995. Shell planned to dispose of an oil tanker at sea, while Greenpeace insisted they dismantle it on dry land. In 1995, they sent boats and prepared guns. However in 2010 Greenpeace launched microsites and viral videos condemning Nestlé. Rather than shouting out loud like in 1995, they changed their approach in 2010 to shout



more effectively, by getting every Greenpeace employee to blast Nestlé's Facebook Page<sup>15</sup>

After Greenpeace's activism in 1995, Shell agreed to get the tanker to dry land. Greenpeace later admitted that approach was not actually the best ecological solution. It is important to remember that in the world of social activism, it is not important whether Greenpeace is objective in its corporate attacks, or even if corporations are being ethical. Rather, it is all about how the issue is presented to the public and how it is later managed by either party.

In the aftermath of 2010's events, Nestlé has committed to identify and exclude companies from its supply chain that own or manage "high risk plantations or farms linked to deforestation". The head of digital communications at Greenpeace, Tracy Frauzel, was understandably pleased. "They've made it so easy for us," she said. "Nestlé just doesn't seem to have a good understanding as to what happens in the social space."

The campaign Greenpeace waged against Nestlé was a real-life example of how organized groups can stage mass attacks on brands Facebook fan pages, overrunning them with negative messages. What's more, in these wars, corporations do not have any control over the content on their pages, because in the end it all belongs to Facebook. Greenpeace's efforts to influence Nestlé undoubtedly demonstrated one of the risks for any business who has a mere presence online. While it is risky, to refuse to tap into social media marketing it is like being afraid to drive a car because you might get in an accident.



**Lesson Learned:** If you plan to jump to social media space, do not jump without a parachute: social media requires the same strategic communication plan as traditional media does.