Other Causes Seek Their Own Ice Bucket Challenge

CBSNews -- The ice bucket challenge has become a huge success for the ALS Association, thanks to its clever strategy of tapping social media and "challenges" from friends.

With the effort still going strong, other caused-based charities are looking to create their own version, turning such things as a pie-in-the-face to strike the same magic.

But the real challenge will be whether they can achieve the same combination of creating a thrill and making an impact that allows regular people to feel as if their efforts are as important as a "hyperagent" like billionaire Bill Gates, said Paul Schervish, director for Boston College's Center on Wealth and Philanthropy. (Gates, by the way, also accepted the ice bucket challenge.)

So far, the ALS Association has raised more than $112 million, with people uploading videos of themselves pouring ice water over their heads and challenging their friends to do the same within 24 hours. In a way, the ice bucket challenge is a modern-day chain letter with a philanthropic angle.

"One of the things that always makes philanthropy successful is when it is easy to do for an important cause," Schervish said. The ice bucket challenge "energizes friends to be in contact with each other, and it is a relatively inexpensive way to make a major impact. This is what I call social movement philanthropy."

Other cause-based charities have taken note.

"There are a lot of discussions like, 'Why aren't we doing something like the ice bucket challenge?" said Christopher Cosentino, director of marketing at the Huntington's Disease Society of America, referring to discussions among marketing professionals at cause-based philanthropies.

Some of those look-alike efforts are springing up organically, such as the "pie-in-the-face" challenge that has raising money for Huntington's disease research, Cosentino noted. So far, that challenge -- where people tape themselves getting a pie in the face -- has helped more than quadruple funds for the Huntington's Disease Society of America, which strives to promote and support research and education about the illness, a deadly inherited brain disorder.

Last August, the organization raised about $10,000 in donations. This August, thanks to the pie-in-the-face challenge, the group has received more than $50,000, Cosentino said.

People who have taken a pie in the face include North Carolina Mayor Dana Outlaw, who got seven plates of whipped cream in his face outside of New Bern City Hall, as well as supporters in Ireland and Scotland, according to a Facebook page about the challenge.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention started its "Doubtfire Face for Suicide Prevention," after the suicide of comedian and actor Robin Williams. The idea is to recreate a scene from his film "Mrs. Doubtfire," when his character, who is masquerading as a female nanny, sticks his head into a cake's icing, hoping it will look like a facial
Not every challenge will succeed, cautioned Boston College’s Schervish. But if charities can hit upon the right formula, they have the chance to tap into a new movement, he added. “It’s time for regular people to win back the impact of their philanthropy,” he noted.

Some critics have complained that the ice bucket challenge isn’t really about the charity (http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2014/08/12/icebucketchallenge_you_don_t_need_an_ice_bucket_to_donate_to_als_research.html), and fails to raise awareness for ALS. But those complaints miss the point, said Cosentino.

“If you have an opportunity to fund-raise, build awareness and educate, it’s been successful,” he said. “The ice bucket challenge did that, and the pie-in-the-face challenge is doing it for us.”