


Social media to rescue Jail4Bail campaign?

 By [Eve Dmochowska](#)

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Gerhard Pieterse, the executive director of Autism Western Cape, has committed himself to voluntary imprisonment as a fund-raising exercise in support of autism. With the goal of reaching R1 000 000 in raised funds, initially, the marketing of Jail4Bail has been much as you would expect: using traditional press releases, and relying on conventional media to spread the word.

 With about two weeks left in the campaign, the funds were about half way to target. And that is when social media, represented by [Rafiq Phillips](#), stepped in.

Phillips is what can best be explained as “super-connected”. He has even featured as the face of Web 2.0 on Carte Blanche. And he understands new media, specifically its viral opportunities. Phillips believed that if the right social media tools were mobilised, more funds could be raised and the campaign could reach the global market. He seems to be right.

Started small

What started as a couple of [twitter](#) messages to the 700-odd people that follow Phillips has culminated in Jail4Bail receiving prominent exposure. Note that some of the social media campaigns (such as the Zoopy videos) were live some time before Phillips began his promotional activity, which simply augmented the attention to those sites:

- Google: 6370 entries for [search term “jail4Bail”](#)
- Social media aggregator [Afrigator](#): Dedicated page and distribution of Jail4Bail badge
- Social media sharing sites Zoopy/YouTube: videos relevant to the campaign, including an message from [Hellen Zille](#), hosted on [Zoopy](#) and [YouTube](#)
- Facebook: a [Facebook profile](#) for Pieterse
- Microblogging service [Twitter](#): Twitter started the main social media campaign around Jail4Bail, and [continues the discussion](#)
- Blogs: Many individuals have boggled about the campaign. You can find a comprehensive list on the [Afrigator page](#).
- Social bookmarking services [Muti/Digg](#)
- Social media aggregator [Friendfeed](#): A room was set up on [Friendfeed](#) to follow the discussion around the campaign
- Website: [www.jail4bail.co.za](#) was registered and set up by Wogan May after the launch of the social media campaign
- T-shirt competition: [Vincent Hofmann of Moral Fibre](#) is having t-shirts printed that will be auctioned off to raise funds for Jail4Bail

Not all is good news, though. You might be tempted to think that because this is in aid of charity, that the new media environment is kinder and more receptive than it would be in other circumstances. But that is not necessarily true. [Criticism](#) and [slashback](#) are also evident. For instance, Adi, who is an autistic adult [blogged](#) her criticism of the campaign:

“I do not want this one-sided, negative view of autism that is reflected in the actions of the organisation to speak for me and other autistics, of all ages - at all. And if the AWC's message is not sympathetic towards the autistic, then what is it?”

True nature of the social media beast

This exercise shows the true nature of the social media beast:

- if there is something worthwhile talking about, the local social media network can come together and independently still work as a team;

- you cannot block yourself off from negative criticism, but you can respond to it pro actively;
- there are no geographical boundaries to social media campaigns;
- a successful social media discussion spreads fast, and on multitude platforms simultaneously
- you have to let go of the message, and trust others with it;
- getting your audience impassioned is a good tactic to ensure successful reaction;
- be transparent when voicing your goals for the campaign

Of course, the best media coverage (new or old) is worth nothing if it doesn't get results. The Jail4bail campaign will finish at the end of August 2008, and it will be interesting to see what percentage of funds raised will be generated in these last two weeks of heavy social media involvement. Already we know that 500 Euros were sent in from Belgium, local companies have pledged additional funds and that the "SMS for R10" has been used by the online community.

Usually we hear about [social media success stories/case studies](#) well after they are over, and we tend to only talk about the successful ones. Now, the campaign is out in the open, there is nowhere to hide, and it will be interesting to see whether this will also be a case study for the books.

To support the campaign, you can SMS "VUKA" to 38010 at a cost of R10 (and stand a chance to win a Vuka). Visit the official website at www.autismwesterncape.org.za for more information, and updates on money raised.

ABOUT EVE DMOCHOWSKA

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