

Hit Film Goes Viral...Aims to Cure Disease

Armed with a series of viral videos, a loyal Facebook following, and a strategic web campaign, the twelve crew members of a hit indie film have set their sights on selling one million DVDs in one year. In the process, they hope to bring an end to the fatal childhood disease that has struck one of their own. The disease is Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD). The film is Darius Goes West.

Darius Weems, the subject of the movie, was diagnosed with DMD when he was five years old. Before Darius Goes West, Darius had never left his hometown of Athens, GA. The film follows him and a crew of his friends as they journey west, absorbing the lessons of the road while hoping to get Darius's wheelchair customized on MTV. After a tour of prominent film festivals around the world, Darius Goes West won more awards than any other film in 2007. The movie boasts an unprecedented 28 awards, along with widespread critical and audience acclaim.

Now Darius and his crew have a new goal: sell one million DVDs in one year. Outlining this mission, the crew has produced a string of viral videos--on-line videos that can easily be shared through email or social networking sites. You can find the videos by searching "Darius Goes West" on YouTube.

As advertised in these videos, proceeds from the DVD sales go to scientific researchers working around the globe to develop treatment or a cure for DMD. Each DVD costs \$20; \$17 goes straight to research and \$3 covers costs to make more DVDs. The crew's decision to self-distribute the DVDs allows more money to go directly to the quest for a cure; however, it also places the enormous challenge of marketing a million DVD campaign solely on the shoulders of twelve inexperienced young men, including Darius himself.

The rag-tag crew is working full-time to meet this challenge. Though certainly new to the marketing realm, they are no strangers to fundraising. Darius Goes West was financed for \$70k, earned by hosting local barbecues and selling movie credits for \$10 each. Last year, Darius Goes West raised \$1.5 million for DMD research through audience support at film festivals, prize money, and private benefit screenings across the country. The Darius Goes West DVD, with its unique method of connecting with and motivating audiences and its capacity for fundraising, is a proven vehicle that can affect DMD. And this year, with the DVD itself serving as their donation's basket, Darius and his crew are bringing their act to the public.

To complement their viral campaign, the crew will spend the year traveling around the country to attend screenings hosted by supporters. They already have over 80 screenings on the books, with more to come. Also, in their customized RV complete with exterior large screen TV, the crew will add video updates from the road to the collection of viral videos they have already been promoting on-line.

Selling one million DVDs in one year is a difficult task for even a major distributor promoting a box office hit. However, no previous blockbuster marketer has packaged the notion of devoting \$17 million to help researchers cure a fatal disease. The crew will pursue their goal through guerrilla-style, grassroots marketing in person and on the web with relentless zeal.

Innovation and energy are vital to this campaign, as the crew's goal is urgent. DMD is a degenerative disease that melts the muscles away. It is 100% fatal. Young people with DMD generally die from respiratory or heart failure in their late teens or early twenties. Even as Darius and the crew look forward to celebrating his nineteenth birthday this month, their minds are heavy, knowing that Darius's brother Mario died from DMD when he was nineteen.

Darius Goes West is a charitable subsidiary of Charley's Fund, a nonprofit foundation that funds medical research into a treatment or cure for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. DMD is the most common and aggressive form of muscular dystrophy. In four years, Charley's Fund has financed more than \$13 million of medical research. The goal of the foundation is to develop a treatment or cure for DMD in time to help Charley (7 yrs old) and an estimated 60,000 children like him around the world. #

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