



# STANFORD

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## GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

CASE: M-331  
DATE: 08/25/2010

## ALEX'S LEMONADE STAND FOUNDATION: ERADICATING CANCER, ONE CUP AT A TIME

### INTRODUCTION

In many ways, Alex Scott was a regular kid. Her favorite food was French fries; her favorite color, blue. She hoped to be a fashion designer one day. But in other ways—perhaps most ways—Alex was different. In 1997, just before her first birthday, Alex was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, an aggressive form of childhood cancer. A tumor was removed from her abdomen and back, and doctors told her parents, Liz and Jay, that if she beat the cancer she would not likely walk again. Two weeks later Alex moved her leg—one of the many early clues about her determination and capabilities.

When Alex was four, after receiving a stem cell transplant, she came up with a plan that would change how she and her family coped with cancer: “When I get out of the hospital I want to have a lemonade stand,” she said. Her parents were puzzled and replied, “Whatever toy or game you want, we’ll buy it for you.” But Alex’s aspirations were higher than money for a new toy; she wanted to raise money to cure childhood cancer.

Her parents laughed. Admittedly, it was an unlikely proposition. Although one in every 330 American children is diagnosed with cancer before age 20, childhood cancer research is consistently underfunded.<sup>1</sup> Alex was advised that it could be challenging to raise money 50 cents at a time. “I don’t care; I’ll do it anyway,” she replied.

Alex set up a table in her front yard, and like thousands of other junior entrepreneurs around the country, started selling paper cups of lemonade to neighbors and passersby. Her hand-printed sign advertised, along with the price of the lemonade, that all proceeds would go to childhood

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<sup>1</sup> “Childhood Cancer,” Cancer.net, July 2008, <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Childhood+Cancer>, (May 27, 2010).

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Sara Gavisier Leslie, Heidi Kwan, and Professor Jennifer Aaker prepared this case as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation.

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cancer research. Customers ignored the \$0.50 price she posted; they paid with bills (\$1, \$5, \$10, and \$20) and allowed her to keep the change as a donation. Alex was determined and successful; her first stand earned \$2,000.

By selling lemonade every year in her front yard she helped raise \$1 million and built awareness for her cause. Alex passed away in 2004 at the age of eight, but her hope to cure childhood cancer through selling lemonade only grew. In 2005, her parents formed a nonprofit foundation, Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, to raise money to eradicate children's cancer. As of 2010, ALSF had raised over \$30 million dollars for childhood cancer.

### **A SIMPLE GOAL: HELP DOCTORS ERADICATE CHILDHOOD CANCER**

Alex held her first lemonade stand in 2000 because she wanted to give money to her doctors at her hospital, Connecticut Children's Medical Center. Impressed with Alex's efforts, one of her relatives contacted the *Hartford Courant* and the newspaper picked up the story. Alex was a "determined, courageous, confident and inspiring child with big dreams and big accomplishments."<sup>2</sup> She continued to hold lemonade stands, spreading the word about her efforts to raise money for childhood cancer research. By her third stand, Alex was able to raise \$18,000.

In 2004, a news reporter interviewed Alex after hearing about her successful lemonade stands. The reporter wanted to know Alex's fundraising goal and Alex answered, "I want to raise \$1 million."<sup>3</sup> She knew she could not do it alone; she was convinced that she could reach her goal if she was able to engage others to help her. She insisted, "If people all around the country hold lemonade stands and send in their money, I think I can do it."<sup>4</sup>

### **Stands upon Stands**

In order to get more people involved in her cause, Alex's friends and family organized "Lemonade Days" to be held in June 2004. This was a national fundraising weekend where people all over the U.S. held lemonade stands to raise money for childhood cancer. These volunteers developed a lemonade stand kit so that anyone could start a stand and help Alex meet her goal. The kit included information on Alex's goal, childhood cancer, and holding a successful stand. (See **Exhibit 1** for contents.) Before long, supporters held lemonade stand fundraisers in each of the 50 states as well as Canada and France. The media attention that Alex received was phenomenal; *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *The Today Show*, and other national and local programs picked up the story.

Alex's own stand and Lemonade Days made \$700,000. In July, Volvo got in touch with Alex and pledged to help her reach her \$1 million mark. When Alex died that August, she had met her goal. She garnered significant contributions through her own stands but the key to her

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<sup>2</sup> "Meet Our Founder: Alexandra Scott," Alex's Lemonade Stand, <http://www.alexlemonade.org/about/meet-alex>. (March 3, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> All quotations are from the authors' interviews unless otherwise noted.

<sup>4</sup> "About Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation for Childhood Cancer," Alex's Lemonade Stand, <http://www.alexlemonade.org/about>, (March 3, 2010).

success was that she inspired her friends, neighbors, and, most importantly, people who had never met her. She also demonstrated that making a difference can be fun.

### **LEMONADE FOR A CAUSE: CAPTURING ATTENTION**

Alex's efforts were organic and created an emotional connection between her and anyone who heard her message. Everyone she touched, either directly or indirectly, was in awe of her determination and need to do something for others. Equally important, as Gillian Kocher, director of public relations at ALSF, explained, "was the fact that holding a lemonade stand was simple, fun, and accessible to anyone. It's something anyone could do and, thus, was appealing to people from age four to retirement; it simply translated well to so many lives." The fundraising activity was also extremely flexible and scalable—no special skills were required, stands could be elaborate or simple, and stand holders could be anyone from individuals to large groups.

ALSF conveyed its optimism and accessibility through its brand. Using yellow, as the theme color on the home page and in all written material, created an immediate association with the organization's main fundraising activity. A whimsical font and the tagline, "Fighting childhood cancer, one cup at a time," made the site inviting and immediately conveyed the connection between lemonade stands and curing cancer.

### **ENGAGEMENT AND SPREADING THE WORD**

ALSF practiced a high-touch but technology-supported model. This approach allowed participants to feel appreciated and connected to the cause as well as to raise money as simply as possible. When an individual, group, or organization decided to hold a lemonade stand to raise money for childhood cancer research, they went to the ALSF web site and completed a simple registration with the basic information about their stand. A representative from ALSF was then assigned to the stand, and personally contacted the host through phone or e-mail to provide support. ALSF immediately shipped the host a "lemonade stand in a box" set, which included helpful tips and instructions for stand holders (boxes for special events also included banners and cups). Many of these tools were also available on the web site. (See **Exhibit 2** for stand resources online.) ALSF would support stand hosts with coaching assistance (via a toll-free number) as required, and would visit as many stands as possible to provide support and stay in touch with the volunteers.

Stand holders, in addition to serving lemonade, handed out information on Alex, ALSF, and childhood cancer. ALSF also realized that, as the organization grew, future hosts and supporters would not necessarily know Alex's story. As Kocher explained, "Alex will always be part of the ALSF story but, as time passes, her story will be joined by other stories of childhood cancer." In order to remain relevant and attract new supporters, ALSF started a hero ambassadors program that connected other children with cancer to stand hosts. (See **Exhibit 3** for an example of an ALSF hero.)

## **USING SOCIAL TECHNOLOGY TO SELL LEMONADE AND RAISE MONEY**

ALSF's social network got off to a strong start offline. However, the foundation encouraged stand holders to use whatever methods they wished to use in order to publicize their stand. ALSF's public relations staff simplified publicity by initiating public relations activities, providing press release templates and contacting media outlets on their behalf. (See **Exhibit 4**, **Exhibit 5** and **Exhibit 6** for public relations information.)

Stand organizers were encouraged to personalize the media press release, not only with logistics information but also with personal reasons for running the lemonade stand. Following the event, children who held stands could mail letters to ALSF. These letters were then posted to the ALSF website (see **Exhibit 7** for stand host mail).

Local media coverage in newspapers and television, including a telethon, helped create a local community of supporters. As ALSF grew, it transferred this network online using its web site, e-mail, blog, Facebook, Twitter and You Tube. Nevertheless, ALSF reiterated that it did not have a "strategy" behind its public relations and marketing efforts.

### **www.AlexsLemonade.org**

The organization used the web site to host simple-to-use tools including guides to set up a lemonade stand and fundraising and media letter templates. This made it easy for anybody to plan and organize a stand or participate in scheduled stand events. The ideas of simplicity and simplification were reflected throughout the website; materials and instructions were written in a very straightforward manner and were appropriate for both young and older participants.

Photos of children hosting their own "Alex's Lemonade Stand," along with their personal stories, allowed for a quick and emotional connection (see **Exhibit 8** for ALSF brand images). The web site also highlighted ALSF's focus community building, having fun while raising money, teaching children about cancer, and the importance of charity rather than simply raising money. (See **Exhibit 9** for photographs of community engagement.)

The internet played a key role in spreading the story and the organization's homey feel. Alex's story connoted authenticity, and viewers could easily distinguish it from other fundraising information on the web. The closeness and inclusiveness ALSF offered, regardless of the physical location of a supporter, added to the strength of this grassroots effort. ALSF believed every dollar counted and showed gratitude and respect for each donation, regardless of the amount.

### **The Lemonade Blog**

LemonadeBlog.com, ALSF's first foray into social media, went through many phases. At first, the content was short, and event- or sponsor-driven (i.e. Mike-and-Ike promotions). Subsequently, it focused on foundation news and, later, stories about other children with cancer. Alex's parents took over writing responsibilities; ALSF learned that people really want to hear from the parents of a child with cancer.

## **YouTube**

YouTube was the destination for ALSF's public service announcements as well as videos about Alex Scott, lemonade stands all over the country, and other ALSF events including the Lemon Ball, an annual fundraiser. ALSF felt its biggest asset was its inspiration, the story of a four-year-old who started to sell lemonade in the front yard of her house. They hoped this story would be more vividly expressed through YouTube and that television news channels would pick up content from YouTube.

ALSF was quick to learn what worked and what did not. Before they jumped in and ran with an idea, they researched through trial and error. Built-in analytics made it easy for ALSF to learn what worked on YouTube. For example, the footage of its 5K Lemon Run was originally six minutes, but the hot-spot analytics helped the organizers realize exactly when viewers lost interest. Editing it down to one-and-a-half minutes kept viewers engaged. As Melissa Jones, social media specialist, explained, "Our success comes from figuring out how long is too long and how long is not long enough. We're in the process."

## **Facebook and Twitter**

ALSF created ways to constantly stay connected to its followers through regular postings on Twitter and Facebook. Their "Million Dollar Monday" and "Freshly Squeezed Friday News" communication blasts highlighted lemonade stands or other unique events that were connected to ALSF. (The foundation also kept in contact with past supporters and current followers through quarterly e-mail newsletters which included reports on donations and grants, as well as the profiles of other cancer survivors.) For all of these communication vehicles, Jones clarified that, "There's no implied attempt to get donations, but rather keep things fun and random."

When ALSF started branching into social media, it found that the old rules did not apply. ALSF was conscious of not overwhelming fans or subscribers by the frequency and content in each contact medium. ALSF used Facebook to engage supporters or sell tickets to events—for instance, supporters could vote on the new ALSF t-shirt design. ALSF tweeted about stands that supporters were holding around the world, or provided quick references to media mentions and events. However, because these tools were new, ALSF experimented with many kinds of communication. In the process of prototyping, iterating and executing, ALSF gathered, empirically, several insights:

### ***Timing Is Everything***

Most scheduled tweets on Twitter went out every hour, on the hour. ALSF found that if they sent a tweet at 15 minutes past the hour, given Twitter's scrolling layout, it was more likely to stay on-screen longer. To avoid viewer fatigue, the ALSF community manager tweeted for 12 hours and then took 12 hours off before starting again.

### ***Facebook and Twitter Are Different Species***

ALSF learned that Facebook users loved to comment and interact in an indirect manner and see others discussing the things that were shared interests. Twitter followers wanted more direct interaction with the person behind the tweets and got excited when a tweet mentioned them by

name. In addition, Facebook enabled ALSF to have a unified, brand-centered voice, whereas on Twitter ALSF achieved better engagement with a more personal, casual tone.

### ***Less Is More***

Similar to ALSF's experience on YouTube, real-time analytics enabled the foundation to cut down non-Twitter contact frequency to once or twice daily. It also recognized the need to be sensitive about the time zones of those receiving Facebook and e-mail updates, so as not to bombard subscribers. Although many supporters are happy to hear from the foundation more than once a day, they did not want to wake up to an inbox full of ALSF items to clear!

In 2010, ALSF was still working on a formalized strategy for using social technology, as Jones explained:

It's very hard to predict where we will be in a year because a new tool may come out. We just try to continue to be very active and consistently explore new media. Our biggest story has been Alex and what she did in a short time and at such a young age. We are focused on engaging kids, stand hosts, people, cancer-fighters, medical researchers, nurses—really everybody who is involved with us has a story to tell. It's just finding the angle that resonates with people and the amazing things that they're doing in fighting childhood cancer.

## **EVALUATING SOCIAL MEDIA EFFORTS**

### **Spend**

The foundation employed 20 individuals to manage all aspects of operations, fundraising, donor relations and program management. The fundraising expenses equated to \$268,260 or approximately 4 percent of donations in 2009 (nearly \$7 million).<sup>5</sup> ALSF had no budget specifically set aside for social media.

### **Reach**

In May 2010, ALSF had 38,240 followers on Twitter and 46,791 fans on Facebook. Co-marketing partnerships included Volvo, Country Time Lemonade, Rita's Water Ice, Just Born Confections (makers of Mike and Ike candy), among others (See **Exhibit 10** for more information on sponsors.)

Alex's story garnered international attention especially in Brazil, Korea and Japan. The Alex's Lemonade Stand children's book was translated to Japanese. A key component of ALSF's success was the ease with which they recruited participants. As Jay Scott, Alex's father, explained, "ALSF has been a hub-and-spoke organization. Originally, the foundation was single hub but now we have created new ones. Our goal is to both nurture the existing hubs and create new hubs."

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<sup>5</sup> From ALSF FY 2009 Form 990, (Part IX, column D, line 25). Includes printing, promotional materials, licenses and fees, postage and website services related to fundraising.

## **Impact**

ALSF inspired more than 10,000 volunteers to organize over 15,000 lemonade stands. As of January 2010, it had raised in excess of \$30 million and funded more than 125 research projects at 50 institutions in the United States.

Social technology and celebrity partnerships brought funds to ALSF in unique ways. For example, fans of the popular movie *Twilight* raised \$82,000 through the "Twilight Fandom Gives Back" online campaign, pushed by both a popular author and a cast member.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Facebook updates reached out to individuals who marked ALSF as a favorite cause but were not being actively asked for donations. As Jones explained, "With little interaction, we have made over \$15,000 on Facebook, which is a new source of funding for us."

Alex assembled a band of cancer-fighting evangelists (family, friends, neighbors, citizens, corporations) that was far more powerful than anyone, even those closest to her, ever thought possible. ALSF called these people to action, and grew the group exponentially with the help of social media, which allowed the organization to garner a strong and faithful fan base—30,000 Twitter followers and 33,000 Facebook fans. People all over the world took Alex's idea and transformed it into a movement.

## **FUTURE: KEEPING THE CORE STRONG**

Jay Scott admitted that Alex's story would not hold its power forever. In addition to continuously introducing new stories of other children battling cancer, ALSF also experimented in easy-to-replicate and effective fundraising efforts such as a 5K "Lemon Run"—the first in October 2009. Surprisingly, 1,200 people signed up and the turnout was significant. Further, ALSF was increasing its West Coast presence, especially in cities that have been enthusiastic about the organization, such as Los Angeles.

The success of ALSF was not as much about raising money as it was about inspiring people to take action. The organization recognized that traditional fundraising (dialing or dining for dollars) was a relatively passive act. By helping children around the country set up their own lemonade stands to fight childhood cancer, Alex mobilized a population of young ambassadors whose involvement and heightened awareness made a much more significant impact.

ALSF focused on the goal to honor Alex's wish to raise money to fight childhood cancer; it grabbed attention by tapping into a deep-rooted American tradition, the lemonade stand; it engaged people's emotions by telling and retelling Alex's compelling story using traditional and social media. Finally, it excelled in enabling others to take action.<sup>7</sup> When you grab people's attention, they sit up and listen. When you engage people, you motivate them to buy in. When you provide the inspiration and tools, you get people to do something. You require individuals to

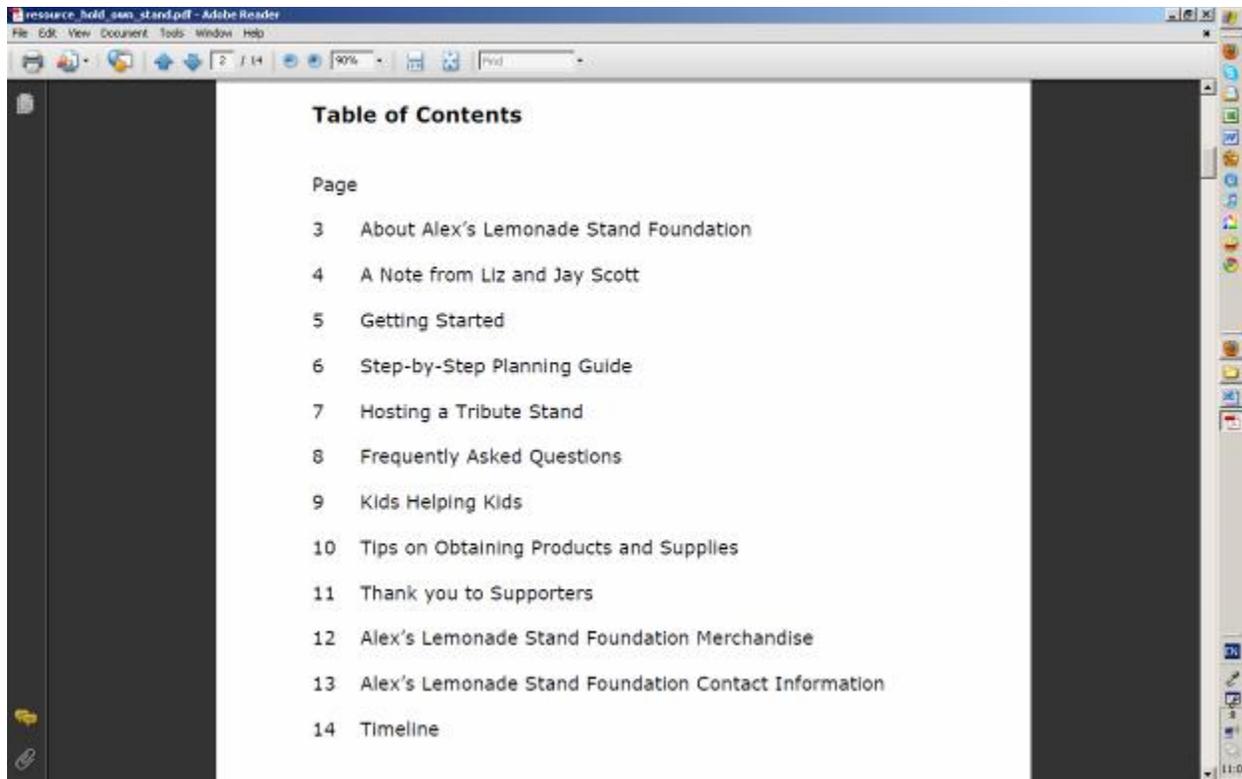
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<sup>6</sup> " 'Twilight' Fans Raise \$82,000 for Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation for Childhood Cancer," *The Examiner*. November 23, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> See Jennifer Aaker and Andy Smith, *The Dragonfly Effect*, (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass), 2010 for more information on this four-step process.

exert themselves, and transition beyond being interested by what you have to say to actually doing something about it. ALSF did it all.

## Exhibit 1 Hold Your Own Stand Packet

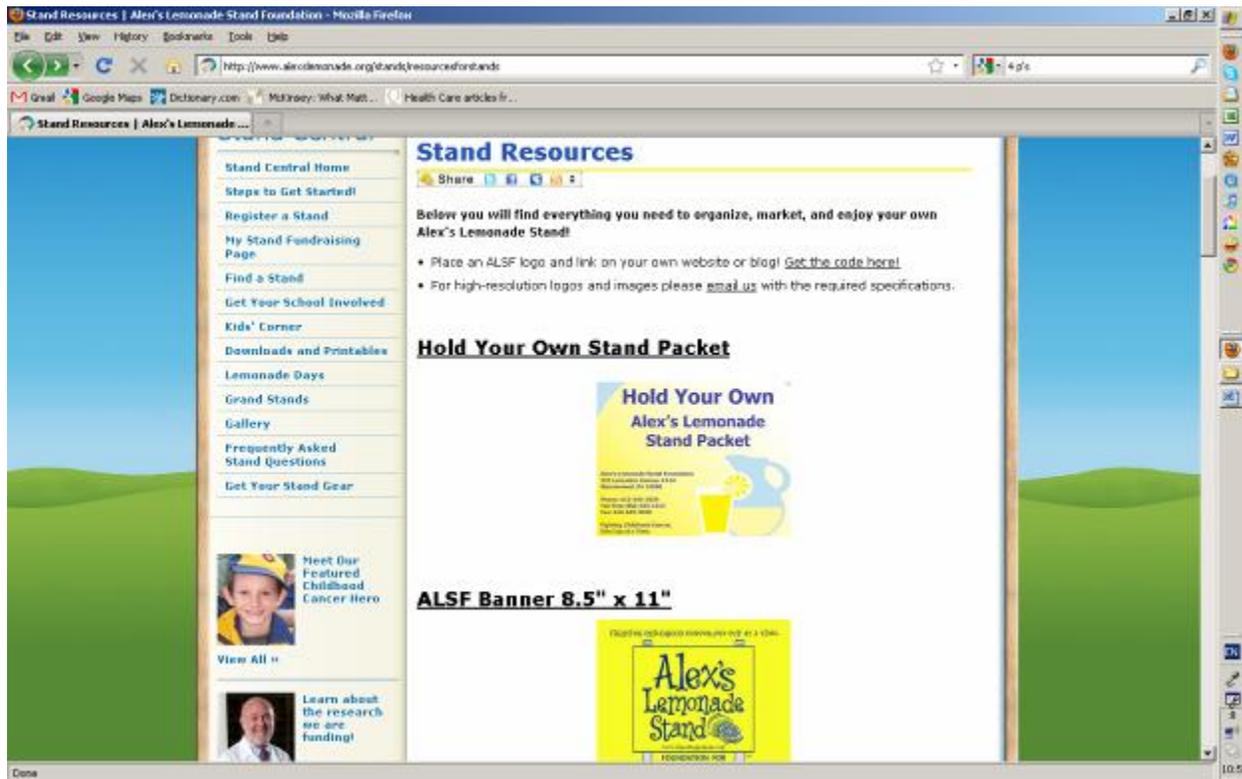


The image is a screenshot of an Adobe Reader window displaying a PDF document. The window title is "resource\_hold\_own\_stand.pdf - Adobe Reader". The menu bar includes "File", "Edit", "View", "Document", "Tools", "Window", and "Help". The toolbar shows various navigation and editing tools. The document content is a "Table of Contents" with the following items:

Page	
3	About Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation
4	A Note from Liz and Jay Scott
5	Getting Started
6	Step-by-Step Planning Guide
7	Hosting a Tribute Stand
8	Frequently Asked Questions
9	Kids Helping Kids
10	Tips on Obtaining Products and Supplies
11	Thank you to Supporters
12	Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation Merchandise
13	Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation Contact Information
14	Timeline

Source: ALSF

## Exhibit 2 Resources Page



### Resources Page Contents:

Place a badge on your website linking to ALSF  
 Hold Your Own Stand Packet  
 ALSF Banner 8.5" x 11"  
 Brochure (2-Sided)  
 Checks Payable Sign  
 Donation Container Sign  
 Fact Sheet  
 Lemon Cut-Out  
 Newsletter Signup Form  
 Sample Fundraising Letter  
 Sample Thank You Letter  
 Stand Advertiser  
 Stand Construction Blueprint (Advanced)  
 Stand Summary Sheet (Submit with checks)  
 Volunteer Information Packet  
 Walk-a-thon Information  
 We Support Alex's Lemonade Sign

Source: <http://www.alexlemonade.org/stands/resourcesforstands>.

### Exhibit 3 Childhood Cancer Hero

#### Our Childhood Cancer Heroes

ALSF revolves around the principle that it is all about the kids. Our vision is a world free of childhood cancer. This page is dedicated to the kids who have fought and continue to fight childhood cancer.

#### Kristen Lindsay



Kristen was diagnosed with Burkitt's lymphoma shortly after her 14th birthday. She was an active, healthy cheerleader and would soon be a freshman in high school. The treatments she received for her cancer were aggressive, harsh and very hard on her body, mind and soul. Kristen held her head high and triumphed to victory in January of 2007. She's now getting ready to start her senior year in high school and plans to join the Navy after she reaches her 5 year cancer free mark. Kristen continues to fight the effects of cancer and its treatment, but that does not stop her from living her life to the fullest and volunteering for several cancer organizations...she wants to help make a difference.

### Exhibit 4 Public Relations E-mail

**From:** Gillian Kocher  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 04, 2009 9:47 AM  
**To:** Gillian Kocher  
**Subject:** Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation – Media

Hi there –

I hope you are well. My name is Gillian Kocher and I am the media contact for Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation for Childhood Cancer (ALSF). I was so excited to hear about your lemonade stand with ALSF that I wanted to get in touch with you to see if you would be interested in my help garnering some media coverage of this.

As you have seen on television and in newspapers, there is a great deal of interest in Alex's Lemonade Stand and those participating in the efforts to cure pediatric cancer. In that regard I thought it may be appropriate for you and I to work together in contacting local media in your area to see if they would be interested in either doing an item or larger feature story on your desire to continue Alex's mission. Of course I wanted to speak with you first to see if this was of interest to you.

Drop me a quick note when you have a chance and let me know your thoughts. I would of course also love any additional details regarding your stand that you would be able to provide to me.

Speak soon,

Gillian

## Exhibit 5 Sample Press Release



CONTACT: Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation  
Gillian Kocher  
610-649-3034, 646-209-3252 (cell)  
[Gillian@alexlemonade.com](mailto:Gillian@alexlemonade.com)

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### ALEX'S LEMONADE STAND TO BE HELD IN LAFAYETTE, CALIFORNIA

In an effort to join the battle against childhood cancer, young Lafayette residents Sophie and Cole Foster with Cooper, Devon and Tea Sloane Smith, will host an Alex's Lemonade Stand **on Saturday, November 14, 2009 from 1-3PM, 3491 Mt Diablo Blvd.** Members of the community were inspired to get involved with Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation after seeing a local news story on Twitter about foundation creator Alexandra "Alex" Scott. After finding out how easy it was to get involved, they decided to hold a lemonade stand of their own. And they were excited to donate a matched set of proceeds (donated by the parents who are playing cheerleading role) to their own social good charities. For example, Devon Smith would also like to cure swine flu. Further, they are branding this event in yellow, with tshirts, banners and balloons. Of note, Tea Sloane Smith enjoys wearing yellow (after pink). Cole Foster enjoys Sunny Delight juice. And all 5 kids are picking 'yellow' songs for a DJ dance party to create ambiance during the lemonade stand ("Here Comes the Sun", "You are my Sunshine", "Lemon" by U2). Why would you miss it?!

[Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation](#) (ALSF) emerged from the front yard lemonade stand of cancer patient Alexandra "Alex" Scott (1996-2004). At the age of 4, Alex announced that she wanted to hold a lemonade stand to raise money to help find a cure for *all* children with cancer. Since Alex held that first stand, the Foundation bearing her name has evolved into a national fundraising movement, complete with thousands of volunteers across the country carrying on her legacy of hope. To date, Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, a registered 501(c)3 charity, has raised more than \$25 million towards fulfilling Alex's dream of finding a cure, funding over 100 research projects nationally.

**WHAT: TEAM FOSTERSMITH HOSTS ALEX'S LEMONADE STAND – TO CURE CANCER**

**WHEN: SATURDAY, NOVEMBER, 2009  
1-3PM**

**WHERE: 3483 GOLDEN GATE PARKWAY  
(1<sup>st</sup> & GOLDEN GATE)  
LAFAYETTE, CALIFORNIA**

**\*\*\*Alex's Lemonade Stand will be located near the Lafayette Library\*\*\***

## **Exhibit 6**

### **Template for Letter to the Media**

Dear Lee:

I hope this finds you well. I wanted to put a local event on your radar for this weekend that I thought may be appropriate for coverage.

In an effort to join the battle against childhood cancer, young Lafayette residents Sophie and Cole Foster along with Cooper, Devon and Tea Sloane Smith (deemed team Foster-Smith), will host an Alex's Lemonade Stand on Saturday, November 14, 2009 from 1-3PM, 3491 Mt Diablo Blvd. The local children were inspired to get involved with Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation after hearing about foundation creator Alexandra "Alex" Scott on twitter. After finding out how easy it was to get involved, they decided to hold a lemonade stand of their own. The five children plan to have a yellow themed event complete with t-shirts, banners and balloons, and are even choosing 'yellow' songs for a DJ dance party to create ambiance during the lemonade stand ("Here comes the Sun"...). In addition to the lemonade stand, the young participants' parents will be donating a matched set of proceeds to other social good charities.

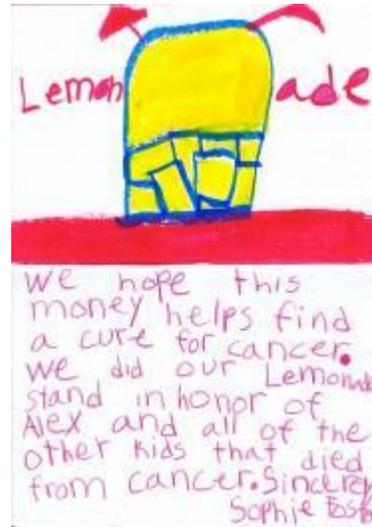
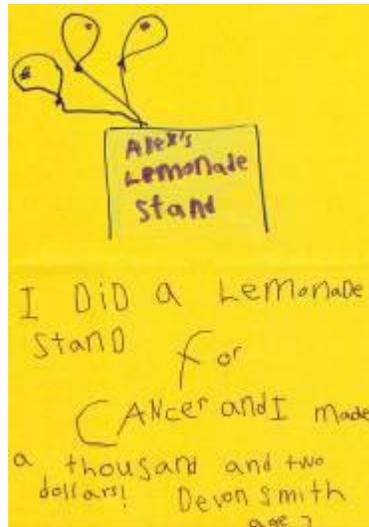
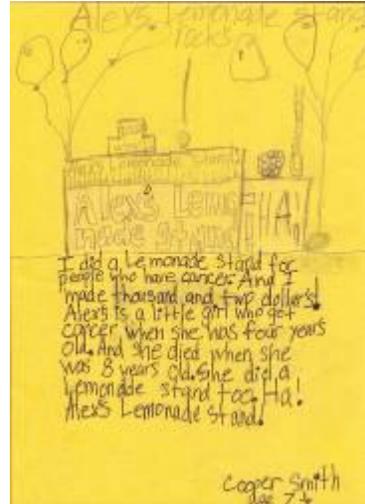
I am attaching a media advisory with more details, but thought this might be appropriate for a photo or larger feature coverage as these young residents spend their Saturday raising funds for a good cause.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

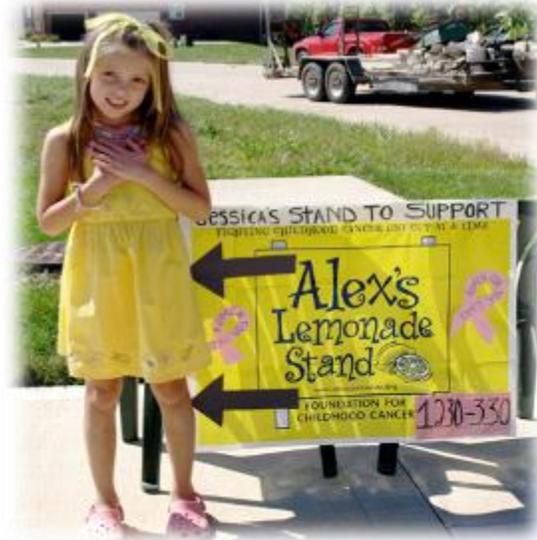
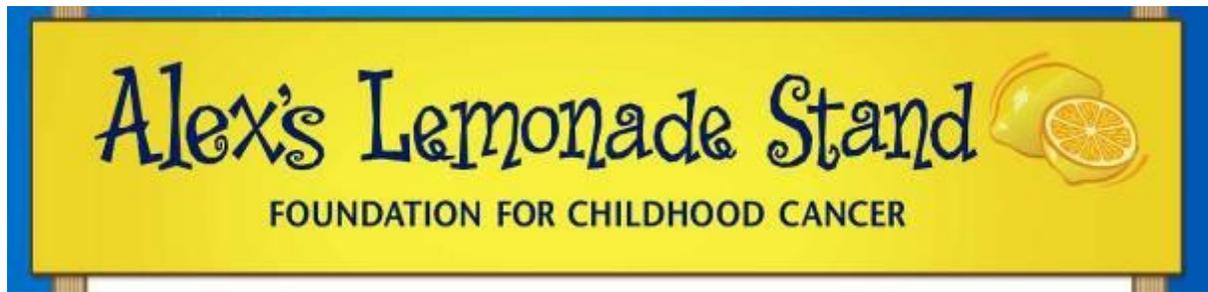
-Gillian

Source: ALSF

### Exhibit 7 Mailbag Letters



### Exhibit 8 Brand Images



## Exhibit 9 Community Building



