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CASE STUDY 1B

SAVING THE EARTH ONE DIAPER AT A TIME: HOW GDIAPERS BECAME A SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS STORY

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gDiapers was founded in 2004 by Australian couple Jason and Kimberley Graham-Nye. Prior to starting the company, and in fact prior to getting married, Jason and Kim went on over 200 dates around Sydney and published two guidebooks on dating in Sydney and around Australia. With so much dating, a marriage was inevitable and, soon after that, babies arrived.

It was while they prepared for the birth of their first son in 2002 that they had their lightbulb moment. They read a statistic that one disposable nappy takes 500 years to biodegrade. They also learned that a cup of oil was used to make each nappy and that in Australia nappies are the third-largest contributor to landfill. In the US, 20 billion nappies are landfilled every year.

Jason and Kim found a unique alternative in Tasmania from a company called Eenee, which made a flushable, home-compostable (wet ones only) nappy that didn't have to end up in landfill. The couple started using the product with their son and were so impressed they bought the global rights to the intellectual property.

Next, they moved to the US to launch the product under the new brand 'gDiapers', and had their second son as they were building the business. As a couple in the thick of parenting small kids of their own, they were instantly relatable to their customers. The company's social media strategy started in 2005 with a phone call from a customer just after they

launched. The customer said she loved the product but distrusted any brand's website. She said she would like to moderate a Yahoo user group for the brand (Facebook at that time was still limited to university dorm rooms). Jason and Kim agreed and watched as a community of 6000 loyal customers grew, exchanging an average of 5000 messages a month. This became both a marketing research tool and a marketing communications tool, as the founders could learn what was on the minds of their customers and respond, all within the context of the social media platform. They saw that the discussions covered much more than just nappies, including just about every aspect of parenting.

Some members of the Yahoo user group reached out to the company to see if they could volunteer for gDiapers. Like the founders, they were new parents (mostly mums) who wanted to do some work but still wanted to be with their little ones. A 'gMum' program was launched. This saw 5000 mums essentially volunteer for the brand. The program lives on today, running the full gamut from blogging about the brand to attending baby shows, and from facilitating mums' groups to demonstrating the product at stores, checking store shelves to record out-of-stocks and connecting with store staff. Having customers do in-store demonstrations across the country and interact with store staff has been especially valuable for gDiapers. The mums are happy to promote a product that is good for the Earth, and the stores are thrilled to have happy customers help with product

demonstrations. When the company surveyed the gMum group asking if they would like to be on the payroll, they unanimously declined. They expressed that they just wanted to volunteer and be part of something special. For them, gDiapers was more than just a good product, it was one that they were truly passionate about. The founders decided to develop a series of 'g'-branded items just for this group as an ongoing thank you to them. When Facebook launched in 2006, the 6000+ Yahoo gDiapers user group members all moved over. The gDiaper Facebook group was born and by the end of 2018 it had over 200 000 followers. Today, there are 10 or so additional Facebook groups run by customers for customers, including parents who want to 'B/S/T' (buy/sell/trade) their gMerchandise to those wanting a smaller community of fellow customers with whom to interact.



Source: gDiapers

The company hosted a monthly 'gTea', inviting mums and their babies to the office for a morning tea. Between 20 and 30 mums would attend from the local area, and it was a great community builder, especially for new stay-at-home mums who feel particularly isolated. One month, when the gTea was promoted on Facebook, a mum from the other side of the country responded, saying she was going to get on a plane, bring her baby and attend the gTea. Within a day, another 20 had said they too would be flying in for the morning tea. Not only that, they self-organised with other gMums in the local area to organise accommodation. The gTea became a three-day event including a tour of the local area, a sleepover in the office and a celebratory dinner. It turned out that sharing the joys and challenges of raising a small child while caring deeply about the environment was the basis of strong friendships among the gMums.

More recently, 200 of the gMums partnered with gDiapers and Australian bag brand Crumpler to co-design a nappy bag. When customers fall in love with a brand, and the brand is willing, the possibilities for collaboration are many. The result is the most powerful marketing tool of all, namely positive word-of-mouth.

These examples show the power of a community gathering around a brand that has a strong mission with transparency at the core. The founders are relatable, committed to the environment and treat every one of their customers as a friend. They have satisfied their core customers to create brand preference, they have delighted them to create brand love. They also bring their loyal customers inside the tent and let them be a part of the brand. Thanks to the power of social media combined with a truly great product, gDiapers has become a hugely successful brand that is helping the Earth, one diaper at a time.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What are the social media advantages for gDiapers of being an environmentally friendly (green) product that is marketed to new parents?
- 2 Imagine that you want to sell environmentally sustainable fair-trade chocolate in Australia. What could you learn from the gDiapers case to help you promote it on social media?
- 3 Go to the gDiapers Facebook page. What impresses you most? What improvements might you suggest? Explain your answer.

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