

Virtual Event Planning

A case study on the power and challenge of virtual events



covenanthouse.org
facebook.com/CovenantHouse
twitter.com/CovenantHouse
instagram.com/covenant_house

Meet Your Panelists



Amin Tehrani



Pam Sandonato



Daniel Karp



Session Agenda and Key-Takeaways

Agenda

- Background
 - What is Covenant House?
 - Impact of Covid-19
 - Statement of Need
- Solution Set
 - SWOT analysis
 - Decisions
- Planning Process
 - Production
 - Promotion
 - Streaming
- Execution
 - Marketing Ops
 - Event Day

Key Take-aways

- Criteria for decision making
- List of Nice to Haves
- List of Must Haves
- Easy mistakes to avoid
- General Budgeting Advice
- A Planning Tool or Two

Background

Covenant House

- For nearly five decades, Covenant House has helped transform and save the lives of more than a million homeless, runaway and trafficked young people. We offer housing and support services to young people in need – currently reaching 74,000 youth every year.
- Our comprehensive program model builds a life-affirming bridge for young people by engaging youth on the street (Street Outreach) providing no-barrier, safe, short-term housing to meet their immediate needs (Immediate Care), and longer-term transitional housing (Rights of Passage) to assist those who are ready for more independent living.
- 31 Cities in 6 Countries
- Operation Budget ~\$66MM Annually
 - (DRTV, Digital, F2F, DM, Phones, Sustainer ~\$36MM [55% Total Receipts])



Background

Impact of COVID-19 and Overall CHI Response

- Covenant House familiar with emergency care
- Homeless and trafficked youth highly vulnerable (significant risks to frontline staff)
- Major systemwide disruptions to basic services
 - Outreach programs, facility capacity, in-take and safety protocols, meal services, medical services among most affected
- In nearly 50 years of service, our doors have never closed, and we were determined to keep them open during the pandemic.
- 24/7
 - fundraising campaign in response to the COVID-19 health emergency (www.covenanthouse.org/covid)
 - established a new solicitation framework that unified the fundraising goals of each channel
 - designed to match the interests of media outlets seeking news stories about the virus while also serving as a reminder to existing and new donors that when everything is shutdown, Covenant House doors are open.
 - **You can't stay home if you don't have a home. Right now Housing is Healthcare.**



Background

How Coronavirus impacted CHI Fundraising

- Major Gift and Planned Giving officers pivoted new action plans for soliciting emergency gifts using the 24/7 campaign solicitation framework while also sensitively checking in on our donors (many of whom are older)
- Increased awareness driven by successful PR efforts resulted in significant investment from existing corporate partners and several new largescale corporate donations
- \$3,250K at direct risk (not counting site revenues) due to loss of in-person events scheduled for March, April and May
 - Sleepout and SOA (signature P2P and DIY programs) forced to go all virtual for first time ever
 - >\$2MM at risk with loss of signature gala event at Lincoln Center in May (Night of Broadway Stars)
- Mass Marketing and Direct Response
 - Digital and DRTV programs saw early positive returns and significant growth after pivot to emergency fundraising
 - Direct Mail and offline followed shortly after
 - National coronavirus PSA received \$10MM in Ad Value between April and May

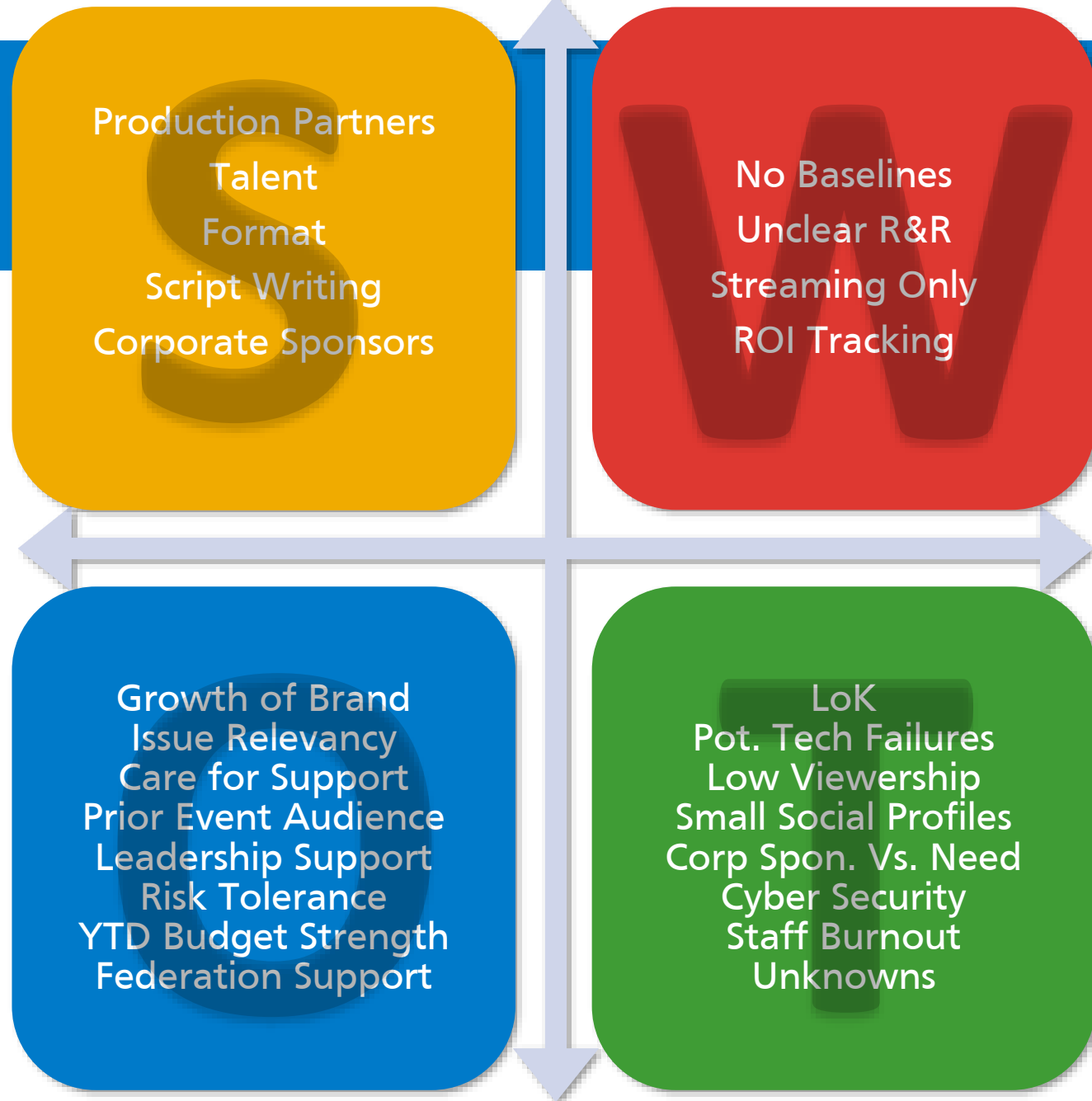
Background

Statement of Need

- How can we minimize revenue losses from main spring gala event (NOBS) while providing something of value to the loyal audience of event participants that would prevent a gap year for donors who primarily give only through this event? *Keep them connected and engaged.*
- Given the success of earlier mass market events, the widespread awareness, overwhelming response to emergency fundraising efforts and the rapid growth of the CHI brand during the lockdown crisis, *could we pivot to a model that:*
 - Meets the initial objective;
 - Opens the door to a much wider audience without being viewed as placeholder “virtual gala”;
 - Maintains brand awareness, re-focuses consumer attention through the prolonged emergency phase (*combat donor fatigue*), re-assert mission urgency and provide a valuable content experience for consumers stuck at home.

Solutions

- SWOT Analysis of Night of Covenant House Stars Proposal
- Why a Virtual Event?
- Decisions Made



Planning Process

Decisions

- Internal Buy-In
 - CDO 100% Supportive of Vision
 - Support from C-Suite and Board
 - Unifying Priority for Cross-Division Collaboration
 - CH Site Support
- Project Org Structure
- What were our constraints
- What were our opportunities
- While it was Covenant House International that led the effort to establish a virtual Gala that celebrates our entire community and we agreed to take on the risks associated with the event, we knew that we needed buy-in from all of our sites to achieve our goals, especially with an increased fundraising goal of \$1,500,000 to cover unanticipated COVID-19 related expenses.



Planning Process

Production/Creative

- Production team 100% volunteers from previous in-person galas
 - Produced and directed by a Broadway theater director and CHI Board Member
 - His work was supported by a co-director and assistant
 - A Broadway musical director handled all composition and arrangements. His donation of services did not include music clearances
 - Our strategy was to tell meaningful and detailed stories of youth anchoring the narrative and moving performances by talent to create a highly emotional experience
 - We wrote the show script in advance, and while there was room for flexibility, we did not compromise the story arc as talent signed on – mostly completed by internal staff
 - Instead, we plugged them into pre-written scripts and invited their edits. We did not pay any talent fees.

Planning Process

Streaming/Virtual Production

- We signed a contract with OS Studios for virtual event production
 - Support for up to eight live streams of our choosing. We connected with potential streaming partners up until 48 hours before the live stream. Some partners were selected because of the ease of in-app fundraising, others were chosen because of mutual benefits rewarded and Amazon Prime Video was identified as our featured partner because of prestige and reach.

Run of Show/CTAs

- MC Format hosted by entertainer/board members (Audra McDonald and John Dickerson)
- Celebrity Cameos moving the narrative along in-between emotional and powerful performances by Broadway actors and musicians
- With only a few constraints, Direct Response lead most decisions on CTAs and on-screen fulfillment information

Execution

- **Marketing and Promotion Ops - Earned Media/Press Relations**
 - Summary of our PR Strategy
 - Topline results of earned media
 - A few big PR wins drove interest and awareness

Execution

- **Marketing and Promotion Ops - Corporate Partners**

- We adjusted our corporate partnership benefits to include COVID-19 response giving as a part of event recognition. Our highest level contributors to the campaign received “commercial” spots in the show while others were included on the scroll and in the show credits.
- Additional benefits were made available to corporate partners and major donors looking to host their own pre-show cocktail parties or viewing partners. Our corporate partnerships team was very hands-on while creating custom experiences that included virtual conference room drop-ins by surprise guests and Covenant House leadership.
- While we explored many opportunities with our caterer to repurpose the expense that was not refundable, including sending gourmet gift baskets to our higher level sponsors on the night of the event, we instead chose to allocate it for a future event.



Execution

Marketing and Promotion Ops - Organic Social and Web Promotion

While we knew scale viewership and reach would require a significant paid media investment and strong earned media coverage, organic and viral social media presented opportunities to build on talent and reinforce entertainment value and quality of the event.

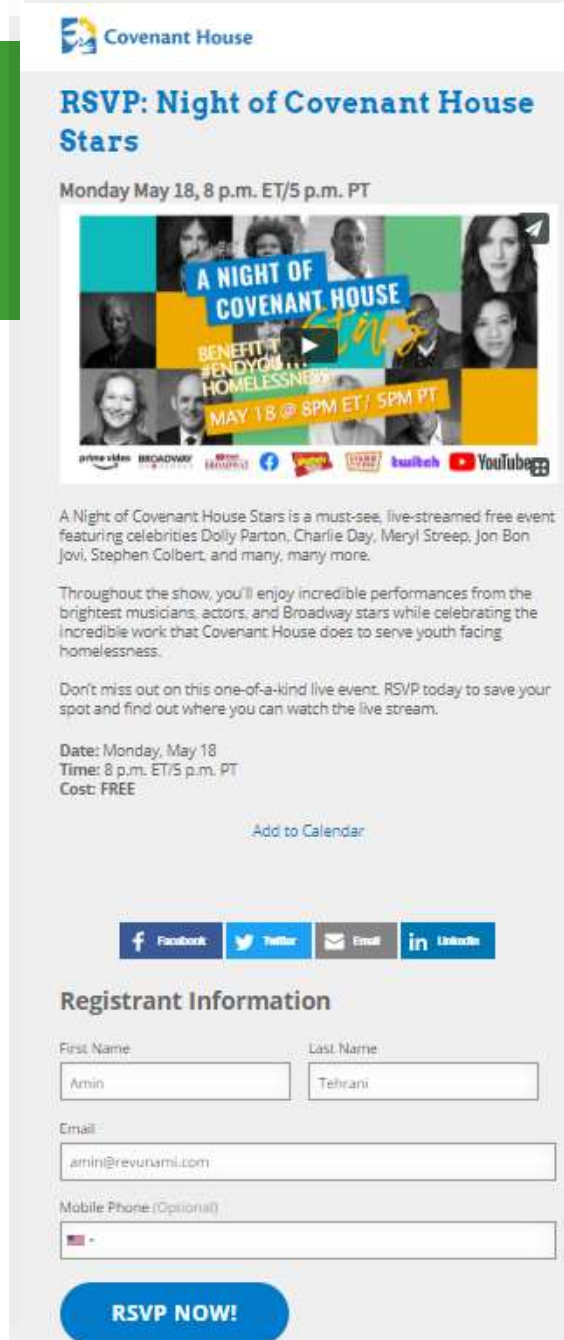
Organic Social Media Strategy

- Early and heavy rotation of brand aligned content
- All about the talent and CovHouse Youth
- Bill as previously exclusive “not to be missed” event
- Black Tie and Big Night Out vs. Pajamas and Virtual Community



Targeted Ad Strategy

- **Unique Environment**
 - Large number of Americans at home with idle time
 - Dearth of new or live content
 - Many advertisers scaling back or eliminating ad spends
- **Bold Decision**
 - Set an aggressive goal for viewers
 - Utilize campaign to drive lead generation in addition to awareness
 - Zig when everyone else was zagging
- **Strategy**
 - Find the overlap between prospective Covenant House Donors and fans of the various celebrities to create an advantageous moment for Covenant House



Covenant House

RSVP: Night of Covenant House Stars

Monday May 18, 8 p.m. ET/5 p.m. PT

A NIGHT OF COVENANT HOUSE
BENEFIT FOR #ENDYOUTH HOMELESSNESS
MAY 18 @ 8PM ET / 5PM PT

amazon prime BROADWAY THEATRE LIVE! kulture YouTube

A Night of Covenant House Stars is a must-see, live-streamed free event featuring celebrities Dolly Parton, Charlie Day, Meryl Streep, Jon Bon Jovi, Stephen Colbert, and many, many more.

Throughout the show, you'll enjoy incredible performances from the brightest musicians, actors, and Broadway stars while celebrating the incredible work that Covenant House does to serve youth facing homelessness.

Don't miss out on this one-of-a-kind live event. RSVP today to save your spot and find out where you can watch the live stream.

Date: Monday, May 18
Time: 8 p.m. ET/5 p.m. PT
Cost: FREE

[Add to Calendar](#)

[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Email](#) [LinkedIn](#)

Registrant Information

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Mobile Phone (Optional):

[RSVP NOW!](#)

Digital Marketing:

Prospect & Lead Generation

Utilize YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram to drive low cost video and page views

Utilize Search for NOCHS branded terms to further drive lead generation

Drive Viewership

Retarget and remind visitors, viewers, and engagers how to watch leading up to the event.



Capture Revenue

Utilize paid search & retargeting ads night of event and after to capture revenue


Continue to cultivate non-donors who engaged or RSVP'd.

Sample Social Ads




Ad Preview




 **Covenant House International** 
Sponsored · Paid for by Covenant House · 

On May 18th, Meryl Streep, Diane Keaton, Audra McDonald, Charlie Day, Jon Bon Jovi and many other talented celebrities will be joining us for "A Night of Covenant House Stars." This one-of-a-kind, live-streamed event will feature special performances, raffles, prizes, and inspiring stories of youth overcoming all odds to not only survive, but thrive, under our care. RSVP today to save your spot!



COVENANTHOUSE.ORG
RSVP to Save Your Spot: Space is Limited! [Learn More](#)
Covenant House serves homeless and trafficked youth in 31 cities and 6 countries.

   Erma Moffitt, Dj. Smith and 573 others · 7 Comments · 176 Shares · 1.6M Views

 Like  Comment  Share

 **covenant_house**
Sponsored 

A NIGHT OF COVENANT HOUSE Stars

FEATURING
Dolly Parton



May 18th, Covenant House is hosting a unique, bucket list-worthy experience and you're invited! Join us for a live streamed event with celebrities like Charlie Day and Meryl Streep as we celebrate the ... [more](#)

[Learn More](#)

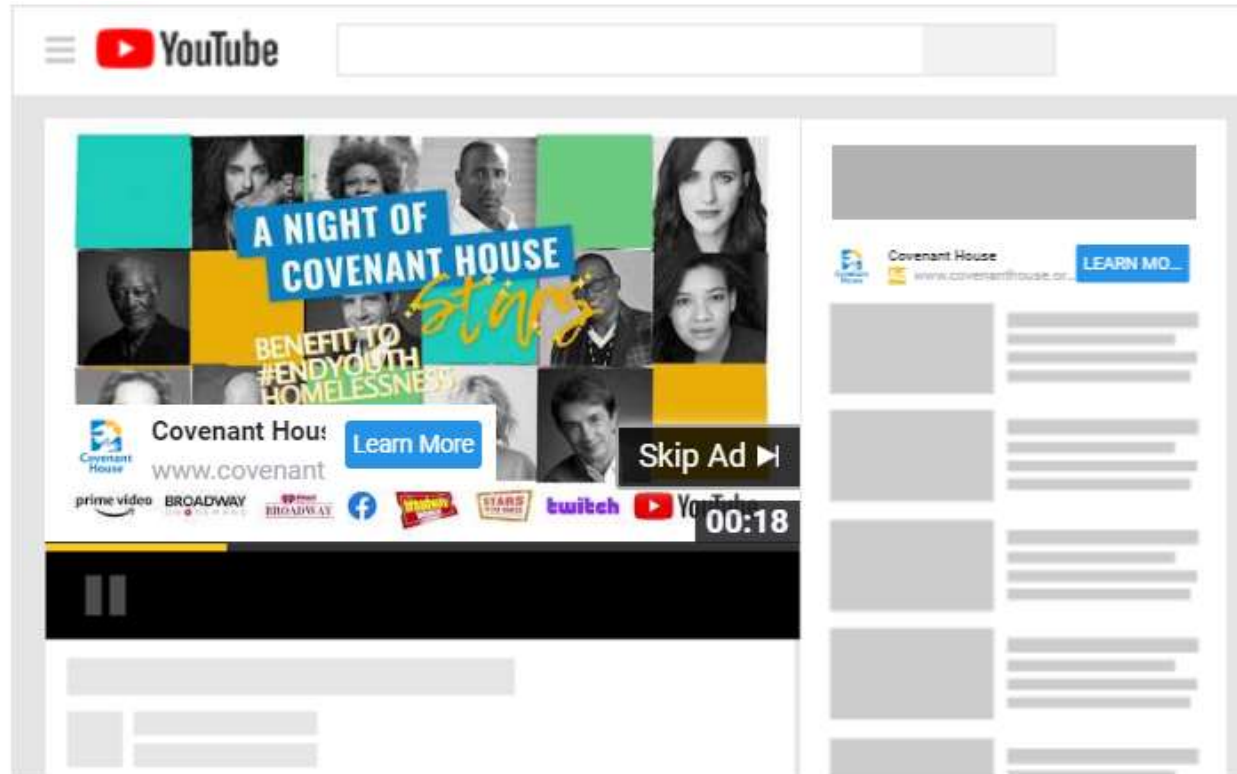
 **Covenant House International** 
Sponsored · Paid for by Covenant House · 

On May 18th, Covenant House is hosting a unique, bucket list-worthy experience and you're invited! Join us for a live streamed event with celebrities like Charlie Day and Meryl Streep as we celebrate the amazing resilience of youth facing homelessness, and our generous supporters who have helped us keep our doors open 24/7 throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.



COVENANTHOUSE.ORG
Join Your Favorite Celebs Online, 5/18 [Learn More](#)
Covenant House serves homeless and trafficked youth in ...

Sample YouTube & Search Ads



Dolly Parton, Stephen Colbert | Free Live Stream Event | Join Us on May 18th

www.covenanthouse.org

RSVP to save your spot and find out where to watch A Night of Covenant House Stars. Join your favorite stars and learn about the work being done in our youth shelters.

Join Your Favorite Celebrities | Free Live Stream Concert | Jon Bon Jovi, Meryl Streep

www.covenanthouse.org

RSVP to save your spot! During the pandemic, Covenant House remains open 24/7 to protect kids facing homelessness.



Online Ads Results

- RSVPS: ~12,000/~9K NTF
Retargeting Pool: Over 300,000
- View through Cnt. of paid promo videos: 400,000+
- CPM Impressions: <\$8
- Day of event organic search traffic was up 511% over the previous 15-day avg. and up 1088% YoY
- Paid Search queries were up 1851% over the previous 15-day avg and **33,675% YoY**
- Clicks were up 364% over the previous 15-day avg. and 3184% YoY
- VPR of the 12K pre-registrants is already more than 2X the spend

Covenant House International
Sponsored · Paid for by Covenant House ·

Did you enjoy our live-streamed event? We're so thankful for everyone who participated in A Night of Covenant House Stars, and we're confident that we will create a brighter future for our kids together. If you missed your chance, it's not too late to donate and keep our doors open 24/7 for homeless kids.

COVENANTHOUSE.ORG
COVID-19 Emergency Relief [Learn More](#)
Provide vital services to homeless and trafficked youth.

1.5K 21 Comments 229 Shares 65K Views

Like Comment Share

House File Emails

- **Pre-Event**

- Some of the strongest performing engagement KPIs of the year.
- 3 email series
- Low end >50% higher click-rate than baseline
- High end >60% higher click rate than baseline
- Open Rate ~20% than baseline
- Click per Open Rate 100% higher than baseline for best performer (email #3 – Day of)

- **Post-Event F/U**

- Click per Open Rate >100% higher than baseline.
- Open Rate ~10% higher than baseline
- Click Rate ~50% higher than baseline



[Don't miss all your favorite stars — from Streep to Dolly Parton and Diane Keaton. House Stars! RSVP N](#)

Daniel, while much of the world has stopped, it has opened its arms wide to protect youth from COVID-19.

Even now, in spite of this crisis, nothing can't together (virtually) to celebrate the amazing overcoming homelessness at Covenant Ho

[Join us on Monday, May 18 for A Night of C spectacular evening of joy and community - this special event >>](#)

During this unique virtual experience, you'll wit and performances from some of our celebrity fr McDonald, Dolly Parton, Morgan Freeman, J Stephen Colbert, Ariana DeBose, Jodi Picou importantly, you'll hear inspiring stories and per of the show — Covenant House youth.

Daniel, your unwavering support has made a tremendous impact in the lives of our youth — and that deserves to be celebrated. You've been with us since the start of this pandemic, and we'd be honored for you to join us at this event to see the impact you've made.

Although we are in a dark moment, if our friends on Broadway have taught us anything it's that the show must go on! And at Covenant House, our doors must stay open — 24/7.

[So grab your fanciest attire \(or pajamas!\) and join us on Monday, May 18 at 8:00 p.m. ET / 5:00 p.m. PT to celebrate the strength and resilience of this community and to be there for our youth.](#)

RSVP NOW

See you there,

The Covenant House Team

A Night of Covenant House Stars wouldn't be possible without the support of our valued partners:

Presenting Sponsor

Cisco

Title Sponsors

John & Nathalie Berger; Denis & Meredith Coleman

Marquee Sponsors

Advent International; Blackstone Charitable Foundation; Delta Air Lines; Humble Bundle; Kia Motors America; Mother Cabrini Health Foundation; Rasmussen Foundation; Ed & Irene Shaw; Take-Two Interactive; Wells Fargo

DONATE



Paid Leadgen Test

Opportunity

- Would the mass appeal of a broad list of celebrity entertainers combined with COVID awareness make paid email lead generation viable?
- Tested two programs:
 - CPM Awareness seeking page views and back end CPA
 - CPA Registration program with fixed cost per registrant
- Results
 - CPA program did not reach spend cap
 - CPM program drove very high traffic, but relatively low lead conversion



RSVP: Night of Covenant House Stars

Monday May 18, 8 p.m. ET/5 p.m. PT



A Night of Covenant House Stars is a must-see, live-streamed free event featuring celebrities Dolly Parton, Charlie Day, Meryl Streep, Jon Bon Jovi, Stephen Colbert, and many, many more.

Throughout the show, you'll enjoy incredible performances from the brightest musicians, actors, and Broadway stars while celebrating the incredible work that Covenant House does to serve youth facing homelessness.

Don't miss out on this one-of-a-kind live event. RSVP today to save your spot and find out where you can watch the live stream.

Date: Monday, May 18
Time: 8 p.m. ET/5 p.m. PT
Cost: FREE

[Add to Calendar](#)



Registrant Information

First Name	Last Name
<input type="text" value="Amin"/>	<input type="text" value="Tehrani"/>
Email	
<input type="text" value="amin@revunami.com"/>	
Mobile Phone (Optional)	
<input type="text" value=""/>	

[RSVP NOW!](#)

Event Day - Promotion

- **Target Ads:**
Last minute push to drive “day of” registration and live viewership. Ads ran through first 30 minutes of event.
- **Main Website:**
Transitioned homepage creative from registration to streaming instructions, call center support and a countdown.
- **Donor Service & 3rd Party Call Center:**
Increased donor service staffing throughout Day. Flipped TFN on website to external call center 1-hour before airing.



Covenant House International ✓
Written by Revunami [?] · May 18 · 🌐

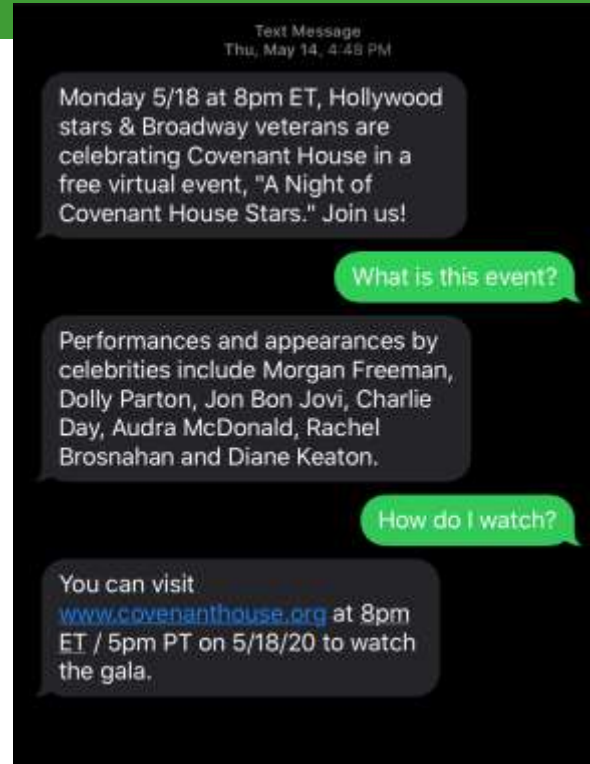
Streaming live tonight! Join us for a very special, star-studded celebration of support for youth experiencing homelessness and the heroic frontline workers keeping them safe during the COVID-19 crisis.



COVENANTHOUSE.ORG
Tune in NOW: Live Stream Performance
Event proceeds will benefit Covenant House's work across 31 cities in 6 countries. [Learn More](#)

Event Day - Promotion

- **Email:**
"Join me" email to 130K recipients from host Audra McDonald at 3pm. Raised ~\$13K. 2X click through rate baseline.
- **SMS:**
Partnered with Synergy Direct on P2P SMS push with live operator response. 95% delivery rate. ~1% "chatted" with agent.



Dear Daniel,

I'm so thrilled to celebrate the incredible youth of Covenant House tonight. [I'd like to personally invite you to join me, along with my co-host, CBS 60 Minutes correspondent John Dickerson, to Covenant House's virtual gala, A Night of Covenant House Stars >>](#)



... Holiday in Lady Day at Emerson's ...
... make an opening-night gift to a local ...
... legendary singer. Billie Holiday, like ...
... become so much to find success — ...
... rejection.

... on at the shelter, I witnessed an ...
... If sprang into action, comforting him ...
... ved by the experience, and I've been ...
... s. Nothing has been more rewarding ...
... fending homelessness.

... t our shared humanity — our ...
... e — through the characters I've ...
... ies in our youth at Covenant House.

... stories tonight, Daniel. [If you ...
... low for A Night of Covenant House ...
... dances from our youth >>](#)

... I won't be the same without you!

... member

Key Learning & Takeaways

Planning

- Don't wait to promote if possible. With more time to optimize spends, we could have greatly increased investment and ROI of promotional efforts (entire paid media program deployed 2 weeks out from event);
- Establish essential function working groups with a single authority for decision making;
- Manage executive expectations;
- See the bigger picture. It's not about revenue to any one channel;
- Take a big swing, don't let fear of failure prevent the effort. Learning opportunities abound;
- Invest in systems, platforms and methods to track viewership to marketing. Not easy to do without locking down event.

Key Learning & Takeaways

DR vs. Gala vs. Brand Event

- You can get it all when you push the best practices of each to their limits;
- The quality of our event had universal appeal to hi-\$\$ and low-\$\$ donors and drove significantly more impressions and awareness of our organization than the single gala alone would have;
- A well executed virtual event with heavy and DR-like CTAs doesn't take away from a truly exceptional experience;
- If your costs are manageable, focus on the quality of the product. Make it something consumers will want and the viewership will follow.

Key Learning & Takeaways

Streaming/Digital/Tech

- Do not underestimate importance a seamless execution. Viewers do not have patience for SNAFUs regardless of the content;
- Don't presume you can simply stream to your site or your own social feeds without professional level understandings of bandwidth, server allocations and signal issues;
- If you use vanity URLs to optimize promotion and advertising, ensure your hosting and redirect settings are correctly set the host and server level. Small issues can result in large numbers of failed requests;
- No matter how low you feel the barrier to entry is for users to access your content, there will be lots of frustrated people looking for help.

Key Learning & Takeaways

Showtime

- If streaming to social channels with the intent to utilize chat and groups, have an aggressive staffing plan to monitor and provide support across all channels;
- Do start the stream 15-30 minutes early with a live countdown everywhere the event will stream;
- Have backup donation capture options ready to share with users who, for whatever reason, can't fulfill through the planned methods;
- Unless you are producing the Emmy's, expect very few attendees to watch through the entire event without tactics to keep them engaged – you can use SMS, trivia, and even Ads to keep them watching;
- If you plan to offer on screen CTAs, follow Direct Response practices and keep the information up that maximum allowable time;
- If you have "surprise" content or really want viewers to stick it out, give them a reason. Use teasers. Keep them guessing.

Thank You! Questions?



Amin Tehrani

Amin@revunami.com



Pam Sandonato

psandonato@covenanthouse.org



Daniel Karp

dkarp@covenanthouse.org