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LEE JEANS MAKES DENIM DAY A BIG DEAL Apr 21, 2008 6:04 AM, *PROMO Xtra*, By Richard Tedesco.

When Lee Jeans launched National Denim Day in 1995 as a vehicle to combat breast cancer, it was simply hoping to strike a chord among female consumers with a cause that resonated among them.

Lee perceived women as core consumers, doing most of the family shopping, so tying the idea of wearing jeans on a day designated to also draw \$5 donations for breast cancer research seemed like a copasetic connection.

"We thought it was a really good fit," Liz Cahill, Lee Jeans vice president of marketing, told an audience at last week's ANA Brand Innovation Conference. "Any cause we got involved in had to be relevant to women's concerns."

That simple idea, to dress casual in denim on the first Friday in October—Breast Cancer Awareness Month—has grown into an advocacy phenomenon that Cahill said has generated more than \$70 million to the cause since its inception largely due to the Internet.

In the initial years of Denim Day, phone reply cards were the primary method used to register people to participate. Today 99% of fund-raising teams—a tactic established in 1999—register online at <http://www.denimday.com>. Employing a viral strategy, Lee made connections to YouTube, Google, Flickr, Wikipedia and blog sites to spread the word.

"What we didn't anticipate was the way it would take off," Cahill said. "If you spread the word about something [online], you can spread it like wildfire."

Traditional media also figured prominently in spreading the word too, with Web video playing a supporting role. Actress Mariska Hartigay helped raise \$22,000 for Denim Day, making TV appearances with Ellen DeGeneris and others, with clips finding their way to YouTube. Cahill said other celebrity "ambassadors" for Denim Day such as Billy Ray Cyrus also inspired a "tremendous response."

Mike Swenson, executive vice president of Barkley, the creative agency that helped Lee develop Denim Day noted that a plug from the cast of NBC's "The Office" took on a life of its own when it hit YouTube: "Where it got its power was when it got out virally."

Swenson advises anyone using blogs to promote a cause to find bloggers who feel sympathetic to it. Barkley currently employs blog-savvy surfers who audit blog sites and engage in dialogue about breast cancer.

Cahill said the next phase of Lee's Denim Day campaign would be an expansion of online communications this year with a particular emphasis on hitting social networking sites. She said tactics would include posting videos about breast cancer research initiatives "so people know their money is going."