

Charity fundraising and brand building: do they go together?

Nigel Firminger, Total Media Charities & Campaigning Orgs, shows how charities with larger budgets can get brand benefits from fundraising communications

RAISING AWARENESS AND raising money are forged from diverse disciplines. The organisational structures of large, integrated charities endorse this. Every charity, large or small, is beset with the issue that awareness levels, or the lack of them, and fundraising are linked. This evidence-based article will describe the issues and possible solutions facing charities and campaigners faced with these twin objectives.

At the risk of generalisation, awareness is driven by coverage-raising disciplines, and fundraising by frequency. Coverage and frequency are complementary - as one goes up the other goes down. Also, some charities have relatively low awareness yet remain effective fundraisers. Tobin Aldrich, director of fundraising at NDCS, writes 'Measuring the relationship between awareness and fundraising is notoriously difficult. Although charities with the strongest brands are generally the most successful fundraisers, the causal relationship between these two elements is not easy to demonstrate. Is fundraising made more effective by the brand or has brand awareness been built by the fundraising? Or is it a bit of both?'

'Some charities with very low brand awareness are nevertheless very effective fundraisers - in the UK, Plan International and World Vision are good examples. The evidence for the impact of brand awareness on the effectiveness of activities to recruit new supporters is mixed. The performance of particular recruitment campaigns appears to be related more to the effectiveness of a specific fundraising proposition. For example, SightSavers' fundraising success was established on its simple and emotive '£15 to cure blindness' proposition, rather than on its limited levels of brand awareness. However, charities such as the NSPCC with its well-known 'Full Stop' campaign successfully combined awareness-raising and fundraising activities into a single campaign that built both income and brand effectively.

Online effectiveness

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Research into churn levels among donors supporting charities through a regular monthly gift has demonstrated a clear link between awareness of specific charity brands and churn. Donors are more likely to cancel their gift and will cancel at an earlier stage for charities with lower levels of measured awareness (1). There is considerable evidence that there is a close relationship between brand awareness and the effectiveness of online fundraising, an increasingly important area for charities. The charities that raised the most money online in the US for the 2005 tsunami (based on the figures from the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*) were those with the highest awareness levels'.

One campaigning organisation, Our World Our Say (OWOS), built from zero and precluded from television by current rulings, took a novel approach to the need to instantly raise both awareness and the funds to survive and thrive. Its founder Tim Walker explains: 'OWOS was formed at the beginning of 2003, as war against Iraq loomed. The aim of the organisation

was to give people a voice when politicians take world-changing decisions without any sort of consultation with the electorate. A bold strategy of full-page press ads, along with online, was chosen to reach the maximum number of people, so as to rapidly build a database and exert maximum pressure, while also building the brand.

The aim of the ads was simple: to get people to contact their elected representatives *en masse* via letter, phone, fax, email or even in person. Ads were timed to coincide with key phases of the build-up to war with Iraq, for example the parliamentary debate days before war started. A chord was struck and within three months over 11,000 people had been recruited to the press ad campaign and within a year over 60,000 had taken a campaign action'.

'Why did the ads work so well? One key element of the approach was full-page ads with long copy. We understood that certain people need very little persuading to act, so we spoke to them through headlines and sub-heads that summarised

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the key action points; but to increase response long copy was essential, to reach the less convinced or motivated. While we recognised that the anti-war message was popular, trying to get people to support a new organisation was not easy. So we had to address the concerns many people might have about the organisation being *bona fide*, and we had to persuade people who were unused to taking political action to do so.

'A further complication was that this was both fundraising and campaigning. So, again, long copy was necessary to persuade readers both to donate and take a campaign action. We also had to build the 'brand' and this was done through consistent design and copy style. We were clear that we didn't want to use clever copy or ad-speak, and we needed to be straight-talking, but back up what we were saying with facts. From this beginning has grown an organisation that campaigns on a wide range of issues where politicians and the powerful are taking major or world-changing decisions without any consultation with those who elect them - such as nuclear arms, ID Cards and the War on Terror. From working on many campaigns for different types of organisation, it is clear that the quality of the supporters is very good - four years later repeat donations are high, as is the number of people still taking action.

'I think a key issue related to this is the number of charities who think they have to go down the brand-building route to increase their fundraising, even though they just don't have the budget for it. As we know, brand-building only really works with a large and consistent spend over a long period. So they end up wasting money pursuing a false proposition. In my experience there is little or no link between brand and fundraising if the cause has a clear proposition. If the proposition is less clear, as with some social charities, then it helps to have historical brand awareness - for example, Bamardos.

'A lot of donors prefer supporting niche charities that they feel are reaching areas the bigger charities aren't reaching. Also they feel that these smaller charities are better run - less waste. If smaller charities

can deal with the 'trust' issue that some potential donors throw up, they stand as good a chance as anyone in fundraising. My personal view is that only a handful of charities can pursue the brand route, and smaller charities would be better to forget that and just concentrate on direct fundraising (but with brand integrity, so brand-building is integrated into the fundraising, as with OWOS).'

News opportunities

In the absence of financial resource and brand resonance it becomes important to recognise and seize editorial and news opportunities, by having clear lines of command, and by distress buying, to deliver solutions to seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Shirley Stewart, previously head of fundraising at Medical Aid for Palestine explains how our approach delivered on target outcomes, despite low awareness and limited resources (2): 'MAP had to switch to an emergency strategy when the EU and US suspended humanitarian support to the Palestinian Authority in April 2006. So in mid-May we placed a full-page ad in the *Guardian*, followed next day by the *Independent*. At the time, media coverage of events in Gaza and the West Bank was high and people responded accordingly. Overall the campaign raised £176,160 and gave us an ROI OF 3.5:1.'

Alastair Irons, CEO of TW CAT, throws further light on this: Any fundraiser trying simultaneously to raise money and grow brand saliency is only doing what commercial organisations do all the time, at every brand touchpoint - whether on the supermarket shelf, in advertising, through product placement on TV, PR or any of the above-the-line, below-the-line or indeed through-the-line disciplines. Where direct-marketing fundraising has traditionally erred is in adopting the worst excesses of advertising and ignoring lessons from those organisations whose ambitions most closely mirror charities - direct sales organisations. Look at the off-the-page advertising for sland-out products like Bose audio systems, the *Sunday Times* Wine Club and Lands' End clothing and you see hugely valuable

consumer brands principally built through direct marketing.

It is to these brands that the third sector should be looking for its inspiration - rather than aping the creative excesses of the advertising world. And there's one very good reason: money. In direct sales, the minutiae of the effect on income of every element of a press ad, for example, are pored over to uncover improvements to return on investment. Copy rotation, placement, proposition including price points - all attract the attention of analysis more commonly associated with actuaries than direct marketing planners. This scrutiny can transform the success of 'broadcast' direct marketing - that is, using media more traditionally associated with above-the-line activity such as broadcast press, rather than 'narrowcast' media more usually associated with below-the-line approaches and best exemplified by direct mail.

It is therefore appropriate that fundraisers seeking to raise awareness &

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hand-in-hand with raising funds should do so using techniques that have proven most robust in off-the-page sales, where success can be measured in monetary terms, but where increased brand awareness can be written into the objectives of the campaign and measured using traditional above-the-line and PR measures such as recall, increased market share, and media coverage of core messaging. What shapes the very nature of direct-sales advertising is the prioritisation of ROI, for one simple reason. Most direct-selling organisations have few or no outlets, so virtually all their sales come from direct marketing. Unlike Heinz Baked Beans, which are available in every supermarket, direct sales have no other routes to market. In this way they are very like fundraising appeals.

'On a practical level this means using propositions that work as headlines, long copy that turns features into benefits, details of precisely how to respond and giving the audience the range of options they expect - and reassurance that yours is a trustworthy organisation. Any compromise of direct-selling techniques involves sacrifice, so objectives, both financial and brand, need to be set accordingly. Just as traditional advertising

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recognises that the absence of a response device is certain to mean missing direct sales, so direct selling, including fundraising, shows that compromises to accommodate advertising styles are exactly that - compromises, which will sacrifice responses, income and ROI.'

Campaigns without limit

Moving on to a current issue: being able to campaign 'without limit'. The UK's Advisory Group on Campaigning and the Voluntary Sector reviewed whether charities should be able to engage in political campaigning 'without limit', provided it is not party political activity, and has recommended that trustees be 'free to decide to engage exclusively in political campaigning in furtherance of their charitable purposes'. Current Charity Commission guidance is that charities can undertake political campaigning only if it is ancillary to their core activities in the long term - their concern being that removing this ruling would 'lead to a politicisation of the charity brand and would damage trust, goodwill and confidence in the sector'.

Many feel that this no longer reflects the reality of voluntary-sector activities and priorities. Given the increasing breadth and depth of civic activities involving the voluntary sector, and the parlous state of political party finances, it can only be a matter of time before deregulation sees political advertising on our screens. The Treasury certainly is not going to take issue, particularly if political donations are capped at £50,000.

Ten steps to success

In summary, there are steps that can mitigate lack of awareness, resources, brand resonance and the current trend in fundraising towards higher donations from fewer people. All this is against the backdrop of deregulation. Campaigners and fundraisers alike should be seeking the following:

1. Proven, experienced wordsmiths and graphics experts. Long-copy technique is a powerful motivator. Concern's advertorials endorse this - they are effective as awareness tool, brand builder and they deliver on-target ROI. Their 8/16 page supplements, work as a loose-insert financial appeal and provide original, not syndicated, editorial. Glossy facsimiles can be used as mailers to maximise ROI, and five-year online archiving can ensure traffic flows as material is refreshed.
2. The ability to be fast and accurate throughout the communications chain when needed; for example, to integrate a commercial message with a favourable

news narrative. At some point this confronts every fundraiser and campaigner, so being able to re-size in hours is important. You want to be able to respond to whatever the market offers.

3. The ability to quantify risk is all, not least for unprecedented media opportunities. Recently we brokered Raw Cuts 1, a series of advertiser-funded films for the NSPCC, using user-originated material, in programme format, to terrestrial broadcast quality. A first for both the NSPCC and UK broadcaster Channel 4.

4. The lowest entry price for every media format. This may mean even time-sensitive appeals are placed by distress purchasing. Where there is advantageous news coverage, reach is all.

5. Creative adaptability can save money. Recently a banker-off-the-page ad for Dogs Trust was re-formatted and tested effectively as an escalator panel. Text as a response route was successfully tested too. This sustained the case for colour and integration.

6. Ensuring somewhere in the marketplace you are the only charity message. This can be difficult in a business driven by repetition, copycats, even plagiarism. However, if you are launching an organisation, or a new campaign, part of it should achieve 100% share of voice, so as to emerge from the shadows of larger spenders.

7. Test all return paths (maximum of two together - for example, text and web), and quantify fulfilment by each return path. With particular target audiences 'text' response beats telephone via lower-cost messages. Contact strategy is crucial.

8. If you can't measure it you don't want it. (You can make an exception for free ads, of course!)

9. Mobilise online. A transactional website with a memorable URL and an active offline strategy delivers the road map for learning as a player not a spectator. While campaigners have discovered online offers a cost-effective route to deliver a message uniquely, fundraising techniques, other than cost-per-acquisition deals, require more method and less haste than is usual.

10. Remember, many media hosts are prepared to help, so let them.

The power of causes never ceases to amaze me. ■

1. *A Sargeant and E Jay: Face to Face Fundraising. 2004.*

www.chantyfundraising.org.

2. *Professional Fundraising, January 2007.*

