

Face to Face, Not In Your Face

Amnesty International Canada's success with face-to-face fundraising for acquiring monthly donors is typical of nonprofits that have adopted the technique since it was invented by Greenpeace in Europe in the mid-1990s. "It's the single most popular form of fundraising, working well in more than 30 countries worldwide," says Daryl Upsall, chief executive of Daryl Upsall Consulting International SL (www.darylupsall.com) in Madrid, Spain. "It's a proven and statistically well-managed tool. It's also quite a democratizing tool."

Although the up-front costs of face-to-face recruitment are high, it is incredibly cost effective, according to Oliver. Per-donor operational costs are less than 5 cents per dollar raised. Nevertheless, according to the Public Fundraising Regulatory Association (PFRA) in the UK (www.pfra.org.uk), every year face-to-face campaigns recruit 500,000 donors.

Face-to-face campaigns, in which a small army of paid

professionals canvas public places and go door-to-door registering donors for monthly EFT withdrawals, represent significant investments of time and money. The break-even point can be a year from launch, and first-year attrition rates can reach 40 percent. However, face-to-face differs in at least one key way from other channels. "Direct marketing may capture the first gift, but not the first committed gift," emphasizes Upsall, who developed the first large-scale, face-to-face campaign for Greenpeace and netted more than 1.4 million new donors representing more than \$150 million per year. "Face-to-face is the tool of the moment for recruiting committed donors. Even in Spain we are recruiting more than 200,000 new donors each year via face-to-face campaigns."

While the popularity of face-to-face fundraising is consistent across cultural and national boundaries, legislation varies widely. For example, in the UK the PFRA acts as the single regulatory body, but in the United States nonprofits



Within a week of the earthquake that devastated Haiti in January, Canadian and American humanitarian aid organizations, including the Red Cross, Oxfam, The Salvation Army, UNICEF and Plan Canada, received more than \$27 million in pledges texted via mobile phones. While that amount might appear small compared to other fundraising channels—according to *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, in the first three days following the earthquake U.S. charities raised \$68 million altogether—it represents a significant increase. The American Red Cross, for example, received twice as many text-messaged pledges in the three days following the earthquake as it had received the entire previous year. Numbers like that are convincing fundraisers that mobile giving has finally come of age.

However, stories like the Red Cross's should not lead charities to conclude that mobile giving will reap enormous windfalls overnight, warns Paul Habig, executive vice president of SankyNet, the online services division of fundraising consultants Sanky Communications (www.sankyinc.com) in New York City. It can take some time to set up mobile fundraising for the first time, and you should build in lead time for text campaigns. The vendors providing the service may require weeks to review and approve a mobile campaign and may not make pledged funds available until their customers' monthly bill payments have been processed—up to 90 days later. However, once set-up has been accomplished, the channel is very efficient in getting a quick fundraising message out.

The technical and regulatory limitations on mobile giving can be frustrating as well. Service providers cap not only the amount that can be donated—typically \$5 per campaign—but also the number of donations that a caller can make in a month. However, some providers have a monthly giving option, which somewhat alleviates these issues. Additionally, nonprofits should weigh these factors:

- Under the standards developed by the Mobile Giving Foundation, charities must have a minimum annual gross revenue of \$500,000 to be eligible.

- Telecommunications regulations require donors to opt in to receive updates and upgrade offers from charities to which they have donated.
- Messages are capped at 160 characters and do not allow visual branding, which creates only a tenuous connection to the charity in donors' minds.
- Many providers charge callers for text messages received, which may further reduce opt-ins.
- Donors can pledge only to charities that are registered in their country.
- Service fees from mobile providers and payments to campaign vendors eat into the return on investment.

Habig speculates that the media focus on mobile giving following the Haiti earthquake has lured many first-time donors into giving below their capacity. For example, Habig reports that the average gift for one client conducting online-only fundraising for Haitian relief was \$125. "We don't want to cannibalize other mediums that can gift much higher," he warns. "When you overuse one medium, it's ultimately a disservice."

Nonprofits that are weighing the potential benefits of a mobile campaign should therefore find an appropriate place for it alongside other established fundraising methods—in conjunction with a high-profile TV or telemarketing campaign, for example, where heightened public

must reconcile codes at the local, county and state level, even from mall to mall. Because most fundraising ordinances cover cash solicitations and goods exchanges, not donor registration, face-to-face often falls into a legislative gray area. Nevertheless, advocacy and education are gradually raising awareness of face-to-face fundraising, or canvassing, in the United States.

The strength of face-to-face fundraising is that it uses conversation to turn strangers into lifelong donors, explains Gordon Michie, development director for Relationship Marketing (www.relationshipmarketing.org.uk) in Dunfermline, Scotland. The canvasser's job is to articulate and transmit the passion of your mission. "The more imagination you have, the better you can explain the cause," he says. "It's all about two people speaking."

Creative canvassers can tailor the conversation to the surroundings and the donor. "It's so successful because it's so

simple," Michie adds.

SickKids Foundation (www.sickkidsfoundation.com), which raises funds for The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, fires the passions of its door-to-door canvassers with tours of the hospital and research labs. "We want canvassers to have a strong connection to the hospital," says Tanya Tucker, the foundation's manager-donor acquisition, who says canvassers eagerly compete for the prize of reading to patients once a month. "You can see the effects the next day. They're talking from experience."

That is largely why the foundation's door-to-door program, which began as a small-scale pilot in 1999, has become its No. 1 acquisition channel for monthly donations. "Door-to-door wasn't really affected by the economic downturn, because it's affordable giving," Tucker says. In fact, gifts average \$15 to \$20 per month. In addition, the program's college-age canvassers are connecting with younger home-owning

awareness may boost mobile pledge rates. "Mobile has become just another channel," Habig points out. "It should reinforce messages that are already going out. Mobile fundraising has to be part of an overall strategic plan for marketing. It can't live in a vacuum. You need to find a place where you can really utilize it."

Nonprofits that succeed in finding a place for mobile giving also should be prepared to take advantage of new technologies that can provide the same kind of sustained donor engagement as traditional solicitation methods. In the wake of Apple's iPhone, a whole new class of phone has emerged whose full web-browsing capabilities, Wi-Fi and ability to run third-party applications ("apps") have more in common with computers than with cell phones.

"Apps allow a broader dialogue with the user," says Ron Vassallo, CEO of Kaptive (www.kaptivegroup.com) in Alexandria, Va. "Nonprofits are constrained by the wireless carriers' requirements. That's a missed opportunity in our view, and one that mobile apps can address."

Vassallo likens mobile apps to online newspaper sites that configure their content to display better on mobile devices. They do not have to be purchased, downloaded and installed; rather, users simply bookmark them in their phones' browsers. To illustrate, Kaptive recently partnered

