

How to get donors to inspire each other by sharing your stories

Project 18. Supporters as champions for your mission

Richard Turner, February 2017

Reviewed by: Grant Leboff

The original brief

Most traditional fundraising models fail to recognise how connected people are nowadays and how marketing has changed fundamentally over the past ten years. How causes will win and keep customers is changing too, so fundraisers eager to engage with and retain supporters must ensure their prospects and customers will want to engage with them. This project will look at the basic fundraising model differently, to try to define how supporters in future can be used as channels and networks to spread opportunities, grow income and to provide donors and potential donors with a rich array of rewarding experiences.

For senior management and trustee boards, this project will:

- Show how the rules of fundraising have changed and explain how they can embrace this change within their own organisation.
- Explain the benefits of using the collective 'social capital' of staff, volunteers and supporters.
- Help them understand the paradigm shift that has occurred in business marketing and how this affects fundraising.
- Encourage them to consider other measurements for success that are based on supporter engagement.

For donors, this project will:

- Increase opportunities for donors to use their own networks to promote the causes they care about.
- Make them feel inspired about spreading the stories of their favourite organisations.
- Show how they can advocate for your cause and make it crystal clear to them on the emotional WHY of your work.

1. Summary

How did a small charity grow its annual unrestricted income fivefold in five years without significant investment in fundraising? How did a start-up charity in the US become a household name throughout fundraising and grow its income without any advertising spend? What is the mindset of the charity that results in community fundraising three times the national average and a fourfold net increase in income raised over four years? What is a key ingredient of one of the most successful fundraising campaigns in the UK?

There is a completely different way of looking at fundraising, based on radical thinking that is taking place in the business world. It has been implemented, with great success, by some charities in the UK and the US—and it is grounded in fundraising principles. Fundraisers can start implementing it now. In the long term, it could very well transform the whole way we think about fundraising.

This Commission on the Donor Experience (CDE) project examines that approach and gives practical actions, relevant to charities of any size, that can be started immediately.

‘Supporters’ or ‘Donors’

The word ‘supporters’ is deliberately chosen over ‘donors’, as this approach is about how anyone who is interested in your cause or mission can help attract funds, whether they give or not. Adopting this approach will also have a significant impact on improving the donor experience.

i. Principles

Many thought leaders believe that, as a consequence of the Internet providing the first many-to-many means of communication, the rules of marketing and sales have changed. If that is the case, it is not unreasonable to consider so too have the rules of fundraising. If we can understand what changes are taking place and the behaviours people now adopt, fundraisers can begin to adapt their approach. This knowledge will give fundraisers the courage to implement change that improves the donor experience because it is entirely strategic in raising more funds, not just the right thing to do.

The following is a summary of the paradigm shift proposed by thought leaders in marketing and sales, as well as its implication for fundraising:

- 1. In a world of abundance of information, it is much harder to attract attention.**
The traditional sales funnel (using the metaphor of a funnel that is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom) is no longer effective. The principle is you target the many to get a response from the few, as it worked on the basis that attention was plentiful. It no longer is: attention is now scarce due to the abundance of information. Marketing has been about the interruption of someone else’s audience; much of fundraising works on this basis, especially individual giving. Now that attention is scarce the model no longer works.
- 2. We are all now channels (organisations and individuals).** Word of mouth is more efficient and, as it feels more authentic coming from an individual, it has greater value than authoritative and institutional voices. If you recognise everyone is now a channel, then they have the potential to spread your story or share a bad experience (whether they are a donor or not).

3. **We have ‘social capital’.** It is stronger when people tell their network of friends, family and colleagues about your charity than when it comes from the charity itself, as the ‘social capital’ they have with their network is greater than yours. Social capital is the strength of the relationship built with people over time. You can actually help increase the social capital of your supporters by providing them relevant content that they wish to share.
4. **In this increasingly connected world, you just do not know to whom people are connected.** We are now connected in ways we have never been before. So, if your supporters advocate on your behalf as champions for your mission, this might not just lead to individual gifts, but also opportunities with foundations, corporate partners, major donors and even statutory funders (or the opposite if people have a bad experience).
5. **We use social proof to make decisions.** We trust the recommendations of people like us. Peer recommendations count and the best ask comes from someone we know and trust who shares our beliefs. This applies even more in a world where information is abundant. If social proof applies to giving, then how can you get people to inspire others and spread your story to their own network? The ask or recommendation is better coming from peers than the charity itself. This is a different approach to thinking about how you can get people to give money.
6. **Your reputation is built on what other people say about your organisation.** This is more powerful than your brand, i.e. what you say about yourself. Your reputation is what other people say about you. An increase in your reputation will lead to more inbound leads and opportunities, and it will be a better use of your time in responding to and engaging them.

Charities could continue to focus on response-driven techniques measured on direct donations received. These are highly measurable, but as they become less effective the pressure to adopt even more intensive messages, or to target more people, to provide the direct response will increase. This will inevitably lead to more people having a bad experience, which they will share. These intensive high volume tactics focus only on getting donations and do not seek to uncover supporters interested in the charity’s mission and helping spread its story. More may be raised in the short term to counter the declining trends, but your reputation will not be enhanced, and it is less likely to encourage advocates. The paradigm shift helps explains the symptoms we experienced in 2015 and 2016.

ii. Actions

Immediate actions

1. **Understand the paradigm shift: why your marketing needs to change and how this affects fundraising.** Fundraisers face huge pressures to deliver results and change is not easy to implement. Without understanding how the world has changed, it is far less likely a charity will have the courage to adopt a different approach, even if its fundraising is becoming less effective. Read books like *Sticky Marketing*, *The New Rules of Marketing & PR* and *The Networked Non-Profit*.¹ Set up an internal book club to discuss what the paradigm shift means for fundraising.
2. **Adopt a mindset of how to inspire people to spread your story.** Stop thinking in terms of how to target people for money. Use this new mindset to help you make decisions about what activities to do and what to prioritise.
3. **Ask the questions: What is our purpose? Why do we exist? What is the problem we are best placed to solve?** Set out to answer these questions. So that people can clearly advocate on your behalf, you need to be crystal clear on what you believe. Articulate WHY you do what you do, not just WHAT you do. Your WHY is nearly always emotional. A critical outcome is to develop a consistent story that you can use to engage people.

Finally, share this project document with your CEO. Their buy-in is critical, both to give fundraisers permission to take up this approach and to help set the WHY of the organisation.

Long-term actions

Once you have clarified and agreed on your WHY (which could take weeks or months depending on your organisation), then focus on the following:

4. **Determine your 'meta' or mission story.** This should be the overarching story that your entire organisation tells and uses based on your ambition/purpose/focus. Use classic storytelling frameworks, such as hero–villain–obstacle or 'sliding doors', to help tell your story in a compelling and emotional way.
5. **Empower your supporters to share your story.** Identify people and organisations who share your beliefs. Give them permission to spread your story and actively engage them in communications, activities and events that inspire them to do so.
6. **Provide an experience that donors will talk about and recommend to others.** This is particularly key at the point of donating. It is another way to inspire people to spread your story.
7. **Be ready to react.** Have a plan in place when opportunities come to you as your reputation builds. Be on the lookout for what gets the attention of audiences who share your beliefs.
8. **Determine new measures based on engagement.** Focus on the measures that help encourage you to do the right activities, not just giving or return on investment (ROI).

You could start these actions immediately but they will be far more effective if you have clarified your mission/purpose and the stories you tell have a consistent basis.

¹ *Sticky Marketing* by Grant Leboff, *The New Rules of Marketing & PR* by David Meerman Scott and *The Network Non-Profit* by Beth Kanter and Alison H. Fine.

Building on the principles of fundraising

Although this approach develops from understanding the change in the way people now behave and act, many of the actions are at the very core on which fundraising is built (see the case example of the NSPCC Full Stop campaign, Action 5). It also builds on many of the practices advocated in *Relationship Fundraising* written by Ken Burnett and first published in 1992. The proposed approach prioritises areas that often receive less time and resources, such as focusing on telling your story well and delivering exceptional donor care, as they are now of even more strategic importance to attracting attention and inspiring supporters to be champions of your mission.

2. The approach to compiling case examples

Content outline

The next section expands on putting the principles and actions into practice. It starts with references to published works that support this approach to fundraising, i.e. to fully understand the paradigm shift that has taken place and the principles that follow. Further sections expand on each of the actions recommended in the Summary.

Each action overlaps with the next and follows a sequence. For example, if you first understand the paradigm shift that has taken place, you are more likely to adopt a different mindset. As you use that different mindset and tell your mission story, you realise how it is stronger coming you're your supporters.

There is at least one case example provided with each action, apart from the first action on understanding the paradigm shift and the last action on measurement, which points to another CDE project. After each case example there are *suggested questions* for your organisation to consider.

SolarAid deliberately adopted this approach to its fundraising for a five-year period. It is, therefore, the main case example used throughout, and Richard Turner, former Chief Fundraiser at SolarAid, provided it. During this time, despite a steep learning curve, unrestricted income grew fivefold without a comparable investment in fundraising spend. More importantly, the organisation significantly increased its impact on the lives of families in Africa.

Anthony Nolan has built a reputation for instilling 'Relationship Fundraising' and has achieved consistent growth in its three main areas: income, number of stem cell donors recruited and awareness. The average income fundraised by an individual is three times the national average and the net income from community fundraising has grown four-fold in four years. As part of its approach to enable its supporters to tell their stories, Anthony Nolan recently set up an engagement division headed by Richard Davidson, Director of Engagement, who submitted examples of their approach.

Charity: water has long been admired by UK fundraisers for its focus on peer-to-peer fundraising and has been included for this reason. Angharad McKenzie, Head of Key Relationships, has provided relevant examples.

Stewart Graham, Individual Giving and Legacies Manager, has included a case example on the mindset adopted by **Henshaws**, after hearing about this project as part of the sector communication by the CDE.

Giles Pegram CBE offered the **NSPCC Full Stop Campaign** as a powerful reminder of donors leveraging their networks.

Alzheimer's Society was approached for its extraordinary 'Songaminute Man' story by a supporter. Michael Dent, Director of Fundraising, provided the background.

In addition, Anne-Marie Huby, co-founder of **JustGiving**, provided some useful insights on social sharing and the inspiring story of Caroline Jones. The founder of Donative, Laurie Ainley, highlighted the inspiring example of the **Australian Tourist Board** in getting people to share their stories.

Finally, there is an outline of the characteristics you could expect to see from an organisation that applies this mindset and adopts an approach that leads to winning supporters as champions of its mission.

Fundraising practitioner Richard Turner compiled the project, including the principles and recommended actions. Fundraising consultant Matthew Sherrington provided a peer review. Grant Leboff, author of *Sticky Marketing* and *Digital Marketing*, provided further guidance and also reviewed the final document. Appendix 2 is a summary of his speech delivered at a lunch hosted by Flow Caritas and attended by an experienced group of Directors of Fundraising from some of the UK's leading charities.

3. Putting the principles & actions into practice

Action 1: Understand the paradigm shift

‘What really has happened is that the word-of-mouth network has gotten more efficient—much, much more efficient.’

Foreword to the *New Rules of Marketing & PR* (2010) by David Meerman Scott

If you take time to read books on the paradigm shift in the way we communicate and make purchasing decisions, you will begin to comprehend its profound impact on fundraising. Publications like *Sticky Marketing* by Grant Leboff, first published in 2011, and *The New Rules of Marketing & PR* by David Meerman Scott, first published in 2010, explain the paradigm shift and how this affects sales and marketing. Whilst not written for the voluntary sector, the principles these thought leaders outline can be translated to fundraising, which is a combination of sales and marketing. Understanding them helps you begin to both think and apply a different mindset. These are written in a way that is easy to digest.

The challenge is that many of us just do not have the time to read books like these. It is an exercise that often has to be done outside of work, and so it is often put off. This section summarises some of the key ideas.

What are these principles, and what evidence do these authors cite?

In *Sticky Marketing*, Grant Leboff explains the symptoms:

We are now:

- *irritated by the amount of direct mail that we receive*
- *irritated by the number of spam emails that monopolize our inbox*
- *irritated when we answer a cold call*
- *irritated when we are interrupted by advertising when we are busy trying to do something else.²*

In fundraising, these symptoms manifest themselves as falling response rates and rising costs. This led to charities sending and doing more, and consequently garnering bad press, which dominated the media in 2015 and 2016.

What is the possible root cause or reason? David Meerman Scott in *The New Rules of Marketing and PR* observes that

[A]dvertising, in all forms, has traditionally relied on getting prospects to stop what they are doing and pay attention to a message... With the average person now seeing hundreds of seller-spun commercial messages per day, people just don't trust advertising. We turn it off in our minds if we notice it at all.

The web is different. Instead of one-way interruption, Web marketing is about delivering useful content at just the precise moment that a buyer needs it.³

² *Sticky Marketing*, p. 16, Chapter 1.

³ *The New Rules of Marketing*, p. 7, Chapter 1.

Jump ahead to 2016 and Grant Leboff shared his thinking with a group of Directors of Fundraising. These are the key points he made about the consequence of this:

- *For the first time in history everyone is now a channel.*
- *As a result, we get our information not just from media channels but also any organisation that has a website, Facebook page, a YouTube channel, or a Twitter account - as well as from individuals.*
- *The direct effect of living in a world of abundance of information is scarcity of attention. And if you don't have people's attention they won't donate.*
- *The traditional marketing model (a wide funnel narrowing to a small funnel) works in a world where attention is relatively easy to get. It always works on the premise that only a small amount of people are in the market to buy what you've got and it's going to touch them at that particular moment. When attention was plentiful a small response was acceptable. In 2016 attention is scarce. So, that's why that model is failing.*
- *Marketing (and fundraising is a form of marketing with an outcome of a donation) used to be the art of interrupting someone else's audience. **Now what you have to do in marketing is build an audience and retain it.** That is a fundamentally different skill from interrupting someone else's audience, which is completely transactional.*

So if this explains the problem, does it help provide an opportunity for fundraising? If everyone is now a channel, can this help charities attract attention?

Grant Leboff in *Sticky Marketing* writes,

The creation of the internet is changing all the rules of communication. The internet is the first many to many medium...The internet is capable of facilitating a dialogue between potentially millions of people in a way no previous media outlet could.⁴

*As consumers live in a more connected world, with mobile phones, text messaging, blogs, forums, wikis, instant messaging, social networks etc, they take more of their **social proof** directly from each other... Most people today will rely on only two sources when looking to make a purchase: searching the internet and asking their network.⁵*

⁴ *Sticky Marketing*, p. 14, Chapter 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29, Chapter 2.

So can we also excite our audience whose attention we attract and retain to become champions?

According to the Nielsen Global Trust, the most credible form of advertising comes straight from the people we know and trust. Eighty-three per cent of online respondents in 60 countries say they trust the recommendations of friends and family.⁶

Your best marketers and fundraisers are the people - the ecosystem - you create around the audience you build. You can say that you are a worthy cause and you are a brilliant charity and I probably won't believe you... Your best marketers are when a friend of mine shares a video with me or a piece of content with me saying 'this is really great'. Then I'm absolutely going to look at it. That is how you cut through in a world where we have attention deficit disorder, because I might not be looking at official channels but I will look at what my friends say.

Grant Leboff, 2016

This approach emphasises that the best message comes from an individual, as Anne-Marie Huby, co-founder of JustGiving, explains:

There is growing evidence of the value of enabling individuals to tell an organisation's story. A recent experiment by LinkedIn illustrates this. To better understand the value of word of mouth LinkedIn compared the click-through rates of an identical post, when shared by an employee, or from the company handle – i.e. the exact same content, but published by two different 'champions'. You won't be surprised to hear that employees get twice the number of click-through from their shares, compared to company shares of the exact same content. That's a pretty clear endorsement of the power of Word of Mouth.

There is also a hard fact of life that charities need to consider: they achieve less cut-through on Facebook than their own supporters. Your average Facebook post by an individual is seen by about 12% - that's about three times the rate achieved by organisations. Algorithms change all the time, but the nature of Facebook's business model makes it unlikely for the balance of power to be fundamentally altered.

Does peer recommendation apply to fundraising? Is buying a product different from donating to charity?

⁶ Nielsen's Global Trust in Advertising Survey

In 2013, **New Philanthropy Capital** published a report titled *Money for Good*.⁷ For high earners (classified as individuals earning over £100k p.a.), the top two reasons a person chose a particular charity, other than being an existing donor, were because they had been asked or recommended by a family, friend or colleague.⁸

So social proof does matter in our world. In *The Networked Non-Profit*, Beth Kanter and Alison H. Fine use a term similar to social proof—‘not-so secret sauce’ or ‘social capital’—which they describe as:

*Social capital is the stuff that makes relationships meaningful and resilient. Within such relationships two things generally exist: trust and reciprocity. People do things for one another because they trust that their motives are good and that they will receive something in return some time in the future.*⁹

Not only can your cause leverage that social capital, but you can also help people increase their own social capital, as Grant Leboff states:

People share things to increase their own social capital. I share something because I know it's going to make you laugh, or you're going to find it useful or you're going to find it interesting... No one is going to share a piece of material that reflects badly on them. The opposite is true they are going to share material that's going to reflect well on them. So you need to think about that when you start to build your marketing.

JustGiving also found the very association of an individual with a cause increases the likelihood their connections will support that cause:

Most important of all, when someone fundraises for a cause, something other than money moves around their network. By lending their name to a cause, supporters also lend some valuable social equity to it. In effect, their support for the cause changes the way their connections perceive it – whether they are aware of it or not at the time. In JustGiving's matching experiments, we have found that people who have sponsored a friend for a particular cause in the past have a significantly higher propensity to support the same cause in the future, compared to other potential donors in similar demographics. This means it pays off both in the short and long term to consider one's supporters as high-value advocates.

Anne-Marie Huby

⁷ Money for Good UK, New Philanthropy Capital.

⁸ See also the follow up report, *Fundraising Perspectives*, with reflections from fundraisers, <http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/fundraising-perspectives>.

⁹ *The Networked Non-Profit*, p. 33, Chapter 3.

In the context of the voluntary sector and fundraising, the impact of social capital is potentially even more powerful. Donations by their very nature are not a fixed price, unlike a particular camera model. A recommendation from a donor could lead to a larger donation, open doors to a company or get the attention of a foundation. Also, our sector can be proactive in asking individuals to help spread our organisation's story in a way that a camera manufacturer could never be. In fact, it is probably more socially acceptable for individuals to actively advocate for a charity.

So can we use the fact we are all now channels and leverage our social capital with our networks to impact donations and fundraising?

The battle in the marketplace is no longer for transactions. Rather, it is for attention.¹⁰

Grant Leboff goes on to explain:

If you're interrupting someone else's audience it's just a transactional thing I interrupt you, you give or you go, and you're on your way. Suddenly I'm trying to build an audience and retain it. It is a completely different discipline. It's a fundamentally different mindset.

This changes the approach to ongoing communication with your existing supporters too:

...You used to produce interesting content just for your audience. If you were going to direct mail 10,000 people you were producing content for those 10,000 people. Now you're going to produce content to share - because that is the new currency. And that's a different skill. It has to engage me otherwise I'm not going to share it. But engaging me is not enough. You've got to engage me and encourage me to share in some way as well.

Marketing today requires us to keep as many people engaged as possible. Even if they do not become paying customers some of these prospects will tell others about your company.

In the context of fundraising, it is not just about asking for money (!)—it is now about engagement and telling your story in a way that others will spread it for you.

The [principles outlined in the Summary](#) are derived from understanding this paradigm shift.

This section has extracted elements from relevant books to help you understand the paradigm shift and outline the opportunity it provides. The books contain much more on what to do as a result, so please read the publications (and follow-up publications). For a list of suggested books see [Appendix 1](#). Please also read the speech notes delivered by author Grant Leboff in November 2016, to a room of Directors of Fundraising from a range of UK charities, in [Appendix 2](#).

Questions to ask: Does your organisation understand the changes in marketing that have taken place and their impact on fundraising? How can you create time and space for staff to learn about these changes and think through the implications?

¹⁰ *Sticky Marketing*, p. 40, Chapter 3.

Action 2: Adopt the right mindset

Adopting the right mindset is probably the most important action of all. It is what you need in place at the outset and it influences the actions that follow. In time, it will be part of the overall culture within the organisation.

Fundraising now needs to move away from the mindset of 'How to get money out of people' and change to 'How to inspire people to spread our story' — see the examples below. This change leads you to answer questions, such as 'How do we inspire or motivate people in the first place?' and 'What story do we tell and get others to spread?'.

To adopt the right mindset, and have the courage to apply it, it is important to understand the paradigm shift that has taken place, i.e. why fundraising needs to change ([see Action 1](#)).

All of the charities in the following case examples had a mindset in place and, in some cases, this manifested itself as an internal mantra for their approach to fundraising.

*'Our approach is very much to **think about our supporters as people, all with their own stories and motivations for getting involved**. Our staff simply help them to identify how they can tell their stories to support us.'*

Richard Davidson — Director of Engagement, Anthony Nolan

*'At SolarAid our mantra was "**How can we inspire our supporters to spread our story?**"'*

Richard Turner — Chief Fundraiser, SolarAid

Case example: Building communities of inclusion

Stewart Graham – Individual Giving and Legacies Manager, Henshaws

At Henshaws, we understand that our **supporters have networks in many places that we will never have**, e.g. their local communities, churches, groups. As we are a small fundraising team, we are looking to build on these networks and help our supporters to see how they can help us to grow.

We are doing it in a number of different ways, including developing the concept of Henshaws Ambassadors, where we invite supporters to training about the messages that we are trying to get across, and ask them for advice on how to get the message out. It is amazing to see how, slowly but surely, people start to suggest different ideas or opportunities that we have never thought of.

We have recently held some awards ceremonies and brought some of our supporters onto the judging panel to help them get a wider understanding of what we do. This has led to them seeing how they, the organisations they work for and the communities they are in, can really get behind what we are trying to achieve.

As fundraisers we know that **we are not just here to ask for money, but to build communities of inclusion**, so by bringing our supporters into the inner circle, they are much more connected to what we do, and occasionally bring opportunities to us. Some of this has been through simply picking up the phone to ask what they think about a campaign we're running, or asking them about where best to hold an event for example.

It is early days but it's definitely paying off, as long as we **listen to what they say and follow up on opportunities**. Part of the fundraising team's role becomes assessing what opportunities are worth pursuing and following them up.

Case example: Philosophy of asking people to raise, not give

Angharad McKenzie – Head of Key Relationships, charity: water

It all started with a birthday party.

In September 2006, charity: water came to life when Scott Harrison, Founder & CEO, brought 750 of his nightclub club list together to celebrate his 31st birthday, each donating \$20 for clean water projects in Northern Uganda.

\$15,000 was raised that night and so was the birth of an idea that has shaped charity: water's fundraising strategy till this day: **ask people to raise and inspire others on your behalf.**

Asking people to raise donations from their network was not a new phenomenon. Volunteer fundraising has been the cornerstone of charity fundraising for centuries. However, charity: water made it cool, and, fundamentally, it recognised the important role it could play in building the social capital of its supporters.

The donate your birthday idea was simple, infinitely scalable and sticky. Donate your birthday and ask your friends to donate your age in dollars for clean water projects had mass application and it excluded no one. Everyone has a birthday every year *and* it has an inbuilt acquisition mechanism!

From five year olds to 98 year olds, people asked their friends, family and colleagues to give, utilising their chosen forms of communication that resonated with their network. Charity: water's job was simply to provide the inspiration and platform upon which they could see their efforts come to fruition, and, most importantly, to show gratitude by recognising and celebrating them.

Asking people to raise money for clean water by foregoing the gifts they did not need, or often want, was a win-win. By fundraising, people could have more impact than if we'd asked them to simply give themselves. By acting as ambassadors for charity: water and inviting their network to support an organisation they vouched for, they also filled the acquisition funnel, with an average of seven people launching their own birthday campaigns after donating to someone else's campaign.

Birthdays were just the start.

With a zero dollar advertising budget and a firm belief that the rules of marketing had changed, the concept of harnessing peer-to-peer fundraising was woven into the organisational fibre.

Whether fundraising from individuals, communities or corporates charity: water to this day seeks to inspire generosity and build community through the act of collectively raising funds for clean water.

Questions to ask: Does your charity have a mantra when it comes to how you view supporters? If not, what could yours be?

Action 3: Ask the question, ‘WHY do we exist?’

To maximise the impact of using people as channels and leveraging their social capital, whether they are donors or not, the organisation needs to have a clear compelling story that is used throughout the entire organisation. Everyone must be clear on your purpose or mission —your WHY.

The WHY is at the heart of your organisation. It is almost always emotional. It is your belief.

As well sounding and feeling authentic, stories that are based on your WHY will have a consistency. That way as your story spreads—or ripples out—and you get inbound enquiries returning, the story someone hears has the same theme as the one that prompted them to get in touch. It enables you to communicate consistently. This is critical in a world where attention is now scarce.

‘With consistency people will see and hear without a shadow of a doubt what you believe.’

Simon Sinek

Simon Sinek’s TED-X talk, ‘How Great Leaders Inspire Action’, explains the significance of understanding why you do what you do (Google ‘Simon Sinek, TED-X’).

As well as providing a consistent basis for the stories you tell, and authenticity to your message, understanding your WHY has many other benefits. Here are some in the context of non-profits adapted from Simon Sinek’s book, *Start with the Why*, which goes into more depth:

- **Loyal supporters vs one-off donors**

Simon Sinek explains how you can manipulate or inspire—both get similar results. Manipulations lead to transactions, not loyalty. Manipulations work (but not in the long term) and not a single one breeds loyalty. Whereas inspiration creates a ‘feeling’ we are in this together.

- **Faster internal decision-making**

With a clear WHY that staff understand, anyone within the organisation can make a decision as clearly and accurately as the founder, i.e. it potentially unleashes scalable gut decisions by the many. As a result, organisations get more out of fewer people and resources when they all fit around the original intention or WHY. Conversely, not knowing your WHY makes decisions harder. When in doubt we look at data, and customers tend to ask for quality, service and features, i.e. WHAT and HOW. Yet many decisions are emotional.

- **Attracting champions**

As we want to be around people and organisations who share our beliefs, your WHY can help attract those that believe in what you believe.

Of course, supporting a charity in some capacity, including donating, is a decision. It is the limbic part of the brain where emotion resides and where we make decisions. So, the very act of determining your WHY should also help people in their decision to support you.

Yet we have trouble saying clearly in emotional terms WHY we do what we do. We offer rationalisations that, although valid and true, are not enough to inspire others. Language resides in the neocortex part of the brain, whereas decision-making resides in the limbic part, along with feelings and emotion.

So although your WHY can be difficult to determine, you can see the effort and time to do so is likely to provide multiple benefits.

How to find your WHY

Every fundraiser, at any level, has the right to ask questions, like ‘Why do we exist?’ and ‘What is the problem we are trying to solve?’. Answering them will help you fundraise far more effectively and align the entire organisation.

Having a problem to solve that inspires people has also been key to lasting fundraising growth.

‘Daring to believe’

In 2013, Professor Adrian Sargeant and Professor Jen Shang published the *Great Fundraising* report, commissioned by Alan Clayton, analysing charitable organisations that achieved transformational growth in fundraising. Alan Clayton’s analysis of its findings identified that a key factor was setting an ‘impossible dream’ or ambition.

In all cases where charities achieved significant growth, they did not know a) how they would achieve their mission/ambition when they set it and b) where the money would come from. This has been born out with further action research with charities both in the UK and elsewhere. This approach is counter-intuitive to creating a strategy and working out its costs to provide a fundraising target that then has to be raised. The start is to set the ambition first —your WHY—and then work out how you do it.

‘A passion for the work and **daring to believe** in what **might be achieved** was considered paramount.’

Great Fundraising, Professor Adrian Sargeant¹¹

¹¹ [Great Fundraising](#) by Prof Adrian Sargeant and Prof Jen Shang.

Case example: Asking the question, ‘What’s our purpose?’

Richard Turner – Chief Fundraiser, SolarAid 2011–2016

In 2011 SolarAid had a programme that was quite broad: developing solar cookers, installing solar panels on schools and clinics, and a small project distributing solar lights. It was not clear what our key purpose was. We realised this could limit the effectiveness of our fundraising.

So we asked the question, ‘What’s our purpose?’. As a direct result, within a few months the organisation set a goal. We called it our ‘BHAG’ or ‘Big Hairy Audacious Goal’: **to eradicate the kerosene lamp from Africa by 2020**. This was now our focus; the problem we were trying to solve. The way we would solve it was to sell solar lights at a fair market price to families who use kerosene lamps. Now we had a clear purpose to communicate and a disruptive story to tell.

At the time we set the goal we were just distributing a few hundred solar lights. The focus had an immediate impact on the effectiveness of our fundraising (with 100% growth in one year that was sustained the next). Within three years, SolarAid’s social enterprise, SunnyMoney, became the biggest distributor of solar lights in Africa. In 2015 we closed our programme in Tanzania, where we had sold just shy of a million solar lights, as we were no longer needed there. The market for solar lights had taken off. Since setting the goal, SolarAid has distributed and sold nearly 2 million solar lights reaching over 10 million people, becoming one of the largest distributors in Africa and regarded as an expert in this field. Unrestricted income has grown five-fold over a five-year period and supporters continue to champion our story. Asking the question was a key part of our journey.

‘Charities, like entrepreneurial companies, should not be afraid of shooting for audacious missions and not hitting them.’

Jeremy Leggett – Chairman, SolarAid

Questions to ask:

- *Why do we exist?*
- *What is our purpose or ambition?*
- *What is the problem we are trying to solve?*

Answering these questions is not easy.

Most organisations say WHAT they do or HOW they do it, but few articulate WHY they do what they do (check your own website—it probably has a section dedicated to what you do). Larger organisations have often diversified their programme and perhaps lost touch with their founding moment. Smaller and newer organisations may still be figuring out their true purpose or area of best focus. Yet it is easy to fall into a trap, as Matthew Sherrington explains:

Where do most non-profits tend to start when it comes to telling their story? They start with themselves. 'Who We Are', or on their website 'About Us'. And then they move on to 'What We Do', a description of the activities or themes they work on. More about 'me'. But people generally aren't interested in you. They are interested in the cause or issue they are passionate about. They are interested in the difference they can make. So it's not about you. And starting with the Who We Are and What We Do, keeps you talking just about yourself. Me, Me, Me. Only later, if you remember, or if you've given your poor listener time to ask a question, might you go on to the Why – the nature of the problem, and why it matters. Who we are? What we do? Why it's a problem? Wrong questions. And in the wrong order.

Matthew Sherrington,

[101 Fundraising blog: Are you answering the right questions if you don't want to bore people?](#)

As your WHY is likely to be emotional, you cannot easily think it or rationalise it—you need to feel it! A clue will be in the stories that you already tell within your organisation. Or go back to your founding moment: what was the spark that started the organisation?

You need top level buy-in

This is not just a fundraising strapline. It is the organisation's mission or ambition. It, therefore, needs the buy-in from the top.

Take your time to get it right

It is worth investing time and resources to get it right, so it will inspire your supporters to spread your story as champions, in a consistent way, as it relates to your mission or purpose.

Getting clarity on your purpose is a key building block before doing anything else.

See also the case example of the NSPCC Full Stop Campaign included in Action 5, and the ambition it set as a result of the WHY it identified.

Action 4: Tell your mission story

All fundraisers are aware they need to tell stories well so they can convey quickly in a way that engages people. Now it is even more important to spend time to understand how to tell powerful stories. There are plenty of story frameworks, such as the one below, that you can use to help refine your story and make it as powerful as possible.

EXAMPLE STORY FRAMEWORK (source: Jackanory Politics, BBC Radio)

- The hero, who provides a point of view
- The problem the hero is confronting
- An antagonist—sometimes that is personified as a villain, but it is really just an obstacle
- A moment of awareness that allows the hero to overcome that obstacle – the ‘ahhhh’ moment.
- Finally, the change that occurs.
- And throughout there is The Storyteller. That’s you!

The stories you tell should relate to your purpose or mission, i.e. WHY you exist. That way, if an individual, who is inspired when first hearing it, is compelled to tell others, who in turn decide to support you or continue to spread the story, it all joins up. When someone contacts you, the story they hear back is part of the same mission story they were first told, by someone they know, that prompted them to get in touch.

This should naturally follow if you have identified your focus or the purpose of your organisation.

This is David Meerman Scott’s take on how your story needs to be authentic:

Authentic storytelling sets the tone¹²

- *People want authenticity, not spin.*
- *People want participation, not propaganda.*
- *Your organisational story cannot be dreamed up by an ad agency.*
- *The individual at the top of the company is the master storyteller, the conductor of the organizational orchestra.*
- *With social networks, every employee has a role in sales and customer service and must sing from the same hymnal.*
- *Buyers want information in language they understand, not gobbledegook-laden jargon.*

Recommended further reading:

¹² *The New Rules of Sales and Service*, p. 39, Chapter 2.

Storytelling Can Change the World by Ken Burnett

Made to Stick by Dan and Chip Heath

Armed with your story, you need to find places where you can engage the right audience to tell it. This may mean doing activities that you would not choose to do if you were applying a direct ROI but are excellent opportunities to engage people who share your beliefs. These following case examples illustrate the benefit from doing so.

Case example: The power of telling a story and leveraging social capital

Richard Turner – Chief Fundraiser, SolarAid

SolarAid had just set its goal to eradicate the kerosene lamp from Africa. As a result of this goal, we now had a clear and compelling story to tell with all the elements of a good story: a villain = the kerosene lamp, a hero = the solar light, and lots of challenges to achieve our ambition.

We decided to focus on activities that helped us engage people and tell our story. We attended a summer festival knowing it would need a lot of time and resources and probably just raise a few pounds in the bucket—but it would be a good place to engage people. We let our supporters know we would be there. A former volunteer heard we were at the festival and decided to go along to see us. At the event one of our staff told her about our new goal. She was taken aback about the dangers of kerosene lamps. Two weeks later she called me to say, *'I didn't tell you this at the time but I am in contact with a trust. I'm not a trustee but I could put you forward.'* Not only did she put us forward, she wrote the application and did the presentation to the foundation's trustees. Nine months on, we were awarded one of our biggest trust grants for £250,000. And it didn't end there, of course—she continues to be a great advocate for all we do.

Logged against our events income will be a few hundred pounds. Logged against our trust income will be this major grant. Yet it was the event that led to the grant. Which goes to show we shouldn't judge performance of a particular area of fundraising, especially when it provides high levels of engagement, on direct return on investment. This taught us to look at the overall return on investment and recognise how things connect.

Case example: Inspiring potential supporters from the first contact

Stewart Graham – Individual Giving and Legacies Manager, Henshaws

Our students, who are all 16–25 with disabilities, run a young enterprise at the college. They ran a stand at an employment fair, selling things rather than fundraising for us. It was there that Chris, who is a wealth manager in Harrogate, met some of our students and heard about us for the first time. Seeing their enthusiasm and hard work, Chris wanted to help us to make life better for them and to give them the skills they needed to live life beyond expectations, so he got in touch. At one of our first meetings, we shared our aims and hopes for the year to come with Chris, and his colleague, Sue, including a new sensory room and refurbishment of the garden. Chris and Sue went away from the meeting to think about who might be able to help us with these opportunities. They have already mentioned two different potential funders and are considering others that might want to help.

Question to ask: What activities will provide a high level of engagement, where you can engage the right audience and inspire them about your story— even if they provide a low immediate ROI?

Action 5: Get your supporters to share your story for you

‘Your best marketers and your best fundraisers today are not you. Your best marketers and fundraisers are the people - the ecosystem - you create around - the audience you build’

Grant Leboff

Once you know your overall story, how can you get others to tell it for you? What do you need to do to encourage and empower supporters to talk their network of contacts? Maybe it is just encouraging them with their own story, as Anthony Nolan does so effectively. It could simply be a result of the great work you do that directly impacts someone and provides the inspiration for them to tell their story, as the case examples from the Alzheimer’s Society shows. Maybe it is providing something to show others, as SolarAid has done.

Either way, the key lesson is if your supporters can tell your story for you it can be more powerful coming from them than from you, as the NSPCC Full Stop campaign demonstrates.

Be especially on the lookout for supporters who come up with creative ways to tell your story (their story) which could take off, as shown by the case examples from JustGiving and charity: water. How can you encourage supporters in the first place and support their initiatives? Your story is more powerful coming from them.

As this is the core of the project, six examples appear below.

Case example: Helping supporters tell their stories

Richard Davidson – Director of Engagement, Anthony Nolan

Although we often use our stories to communicate, it is more about **supporting our supporters to tell their own stories**, in ways that work for them and to their networks. We find this more powerful.

Although we do have some products, such as the events programme, direct debits, raffles, etc., within the Engagement team at Anthony Nolan it’s about **helping people use their stories to engage as many people as they can to help the mission of the organisation**. Often, that is about raising the most money they can but it’s also about recruiting potential stem cell donors, campaigners or volunteers.

It’s about building relationships **so people are inspired to tell their own story and tell other people about how they can help us**. If someone chooses to fundraise for us, it’s all about the support we give them. For some people fundraising is something that takes their mind off treatment, or it can be around helping them remember their loved one, or around doing something that they consider ‘paying back’.

We believe this approach has led to a high average on our ‘Do your own thing’ community fundraising of £1,300 per person against a sector average of £412.

Net income from community fundraising by Anthony Nolan grew from £189k in 2011 to £1 million in four years—and growth is expected to continue into the future.

Question to ask: Are all your staff doing all they can to inspire others to tell your story?

This next case example of Simon McDermott shows how your story can be more powerful coming from a champion of your cause than it can be from the charity itself.

Case example: How a beneficiary told their story

Michael Dent – Director of Fundraising, Alzheimer’s Society

‘I’m raising money for Alzheimer’s Society because of a woman at the end of a phone.’

That’s the tag line written by Simon McDermott, whose dad suffers from Alzheimer’s. Simon was prompted to raise money for the charity when, in his hour of need, he phoned the helpline run by the Alzheimer’s Society. The advice he received from a couple of phone calls had such an impact he decided to fundraise for them. His initial target was £1,000.

Simon’s dad was a former Butlin’s Redcoat and was a singer. Simon found when he sang his dad came ‘back’. To tell his story, Simon put a dashcam on his car to film his dad as they drove around the neighbourhood singing songs together. It started to be shared on social media and attract donations. Once it got above £1,000 that triggered someone from the Alzheimer’s Society to get in touch. Together, they did some local press and combined with sharing on social media it then hit some sort of tipping point.

This led to over £130,000 being donated by over 8,900 supporters on JustGiving with donations from all over the world. Just one of the many [YouTube videos](#) has exceeded 3 million views and the Facebook page continues to share their story and attract a following. The family have even been doing the thanking.

As a result of his story, the Alzheimer’s Society have even had charitable trusts contact them wishing to support the helpline. And by the time this report was drafted, a single had reached #43 in the UK singles chart and #8 in the UK sales chart, which could feed into corporate fundraising and raise even more funds.

Here are the opening paragraphs from Simon’s JustGiving page, which provides a very clear opening on why he is fundraising for the Alzheimer’s Society.

When a supporter develops their own means to tell their story (as the example above shows), it can be extremely powerful. This is another inspiring story by an individual as a result of their fundraising.



**Case example: Knickers Model Own
 Just Giving**

In 2015, in memory of her mum who died following a battle with breast cancer, Caroline wore a different outfit sourced from Cancer Research UK shops every day ('Knickers Model's Own' was her tag line). It took off in just 6 days before it was picked up by the BBC. As the coverage picked up, fashion brands like Boden were even watching her social media posts. Caroline raised £58,000 on JustGiving and her idea has been replicated by others inspired from hearing her story. In 2015, she was awarded 'Creative Fundraiser of the Year' at the annual JustGiving awards. She has now written a book about it and continues to advocate and raise funds for Cancer Research UK.

Platforms like JustGiving are not only a conduit for someone doing a fundraising activity so they can attract sponsors, but also as a basis for individuals to tell their story with passion about a cause that is close to their heart. The power we feel from these examples is that stories told by people like Caroline and Simon help connect us back to the WHY or purpose of the cause. Such individuals are often close to the emotional heart of your cause. If you are struggling to pin your WHY down (Action 3) and have an inspiring example of such a supporter fundraising for your own cause, consider the story they are telling to help you.

Questions to ask: Are you on the lookout for supporters who tell your story in a creative way? Do you know how to help them the moment it happens? Can you equip such fundraisers to tell your story? Can they help you determine what your story is?

As these previous two examples could be considered as a one-off, or exceptional, the following case examples show you can be strategic in encouraging supporters to share your story.

Case example: Equipping supporters to tell your story

Richard Turner – Chief Fundraiser, SolarAid

Once we set our purpose and had a focus to our work selling solar lights in Africa, we realised one of the most effective ways to get across SolarAid’s story and mission was to simply show people a solar light. This was an idea a supporter suggested (obvious in hindsight).

We decided to offer a solar light if donors gave £50. This fell within the gift aid incentives permissible in the UK (for donations up to £100 you can give a benefit of up to 25% the value of the gift). We also started selling the solar lights at a premium price, making it clear that the profit was used to help distribute more solar lights in Africa. So this helped us get solar lights into the hands of donors and helped spread our story. We added a leaflet and a tag (see picture) so the story stayed with it. All of this was hard work—importing solar lights is not easy! Here are four instances of how this helped attract even more donations:

- A new donor who gave £5,000 cited that a professor friend of his had bought a solar light from us.
- A church in California raised \$5,000 when a member of the congregation showed a solar light to the congregation as a result of her own donation.
- A donor knocked on every door in her street with her solar light in her hand, suggesting neighbours donate £50 to SolarAid (we figured this out due to the run of new donors from the same postcode area in a very short period of time).
- An employee of a London City firm proposed SolarAid, leading to a donation of £25,000 after buying a solar light from us.

Question to ask: What could you offer donors that would help them spread your story?

Giles Pegram, who led the NSPCC Full Stop Appeal, provided the next case example. It illustrates that the principle of ‘supporters as advocates’ is rooted in the foundations of great fundraising and can be extremely powerful. If this worked in 1999, in a world before individuals became even more connected, then in 2107, where everyone is a channel, it is vital.

Case example: Fundraisers as enablers of supporters

Giles Pegram CBE – NSPCC Full Stop Appeal

This is an example of an entire major appeal, raising an unbeaten £274,000,000 built on the concept of ‘supporters as advocates’.

Our meta story was this: *‘Somewhere in the UK, a child is being cruelly treated. In the next week, that child will die. We know that almost all child cruelty can be prevented, if the will to do so is there. “Cruelty to children must stop. Full Stop.”’*

£250,000,000 was set as a target. ‘*Supporters as champions of our mission*’ was the strategy, but in our words at the time. The target could not be achieved by incremental growth; it required a transformational shift. Responsibility for the target had to shift from staff to volunteers using their friends, networks and contacts. **The role of staff was to support the volunteers in achieving their target.** That was fundamental. It was not negotiable. There was no compromise.

From the original idea, in late 1995, to the launch in 1999, there were 3½ years of planning and preparation, including approval by the trustees and recruiting the early volunteers.

- After a gathering of wealthy, influential, well-connected existing volunteers/donors, a steering group of volunteers was recruited. The group took six months to challenge the ‘*meta story*’ and the fundraising target.
- From this, an Appeal Board of *six* volunteers was formed, who used their friends, networks and contacts to recruit others. **Using the same story, they recruited others, who recruited others, etc.**
- This was done 1:1, through small dinner parties and cocktail parties, dinners we organised for 100 and receptions we organised for 500. In all cases, the invitees would be the friends, networks and contacts of the volunteers themselves.
- By the end of the Appeal, there were 3,000 active members of subcommittees, event committees and local committees, all linked together. They raised the money.
- No mass marketing techniques were used in the way one volunteer influenced their friends. No mass marketing techniques were used in the way the 3,000 fundraised.
- **Supporters linked to trusts, linked to companies, linked to local individuals, trusts and companies.** The silos were broken down. They had to be.
- They raised £274,000,000 and left behind a vast network of supporters

Of course, this wasn’t simple. An internal machine needed to be created to provide support the volunteer network of advocates. Staff, events, receptions, dinners, drinks parties, etc.

Using ‘*supporters as champions of our mission*’ was the total, unswerving strategy.

We needed to reorient 400 fundraising staff, which required away-days and meetings and more meetings.

- Fundraising, in the main, existed in silos. The boundaries between them had to be broken. For example, an event might be organised by an event committee, who

Question to ask: What measures and targets could you remove and replace with ones to encourage staff/teams to work together to support donors advocating on your behalf?

If using supporters to engage their own networks worked so effectively and powerfully in 1999, think how much more effective it will be now! In fact, every one of your supporters, not just those who you can identify as wealthy, has the potential and capability to spread your story and open doors to other sources of funding.

In getting supporters to tell your story, can you make it even more powerful by being their story, as shown by this example using birthdays as a way for people to talk about their support for charity: water?

Case example: Getting supporters to tell their story.

Angharad McKenzie – Head of Key Relationships, charity: water

At charity: water, we don't equip supporters to tell our story. We equip them to tell theirs!

That's how Jessie raised \$36,000 by listening to Nickelback for 138 hours. It's how Riley raised \$15,000 eating rice and beans for a month, and it's how Will and Jada Smith raised \$216,000 when they gave up their birthdays.

We learned early on that **charity: water's story was the story of every single person who chose to do something to give clean water to others.**

When Rachel Beckwith was tragically killed in a car crash a few weeks after fundraising for clean water for her eighth birthday, it was her story that went viral and raised over \$1.2m for clean water projects. Rachel's legacy was the story that inspired the generosity of complete strangers to give to her birthday campaign, which her mom asked charity: water to re-open in her honour. And it is Rachel's legacy that reminds us every day that charity: water is a global community of world-changers working together to end the water crisis in our lifetime.

Equipping supporters to tell their story is at the very heart of charity: water, as is our commitment to tell their stories to inspire others.

115 families around the world support charity: water through a community we call 'The Well'. Their investment in charity: water affords us the opportunity to direct every \$ raised by the public to fund clean water projects (the 100% promise). It's 'The Well' who fund salaries, printer ink, travel and every other cost, including programme management, so that we can leverage the 100% promise to inspire generosity from an increasingly sceptical public.

It started with an angel gift of \$1m from one family, just when the organisation was about to go broke. Just like Rachel, their act of generosity has since inspired a global community of investors to not only support the overhead costs of the organisation but also to go out and inspire their friends and colleagues to get involved too.

From hosting dinner parties to blogging to making one line email connections between their network and ours, our Well Members are not only channels to others, but it's their social capital that feeds our reputation.

Question to ask: How can you encourage and help supporters tell their story?

Finally, for an inspiring non-charity example, see how the Australian Tourist Board got its 'supporters' to tell 60,000 stories in one year, leading to Australia becoming the most talked about holiday destination on Google+, Facebook and Instagram—with just three staff assigned to social media. Although not a fundraiser, it illustrates the impact of enabling others to tell your/their story in a digital world and the benefits of creating a community who continue to advocate on your behalf. Click on the kangaroo to jump to the story! (or Google



search 'Slide share, the World's biggest social media team').

Action 6: Provide an experience that donors will talk about

An ideal opportunity to inspire supporters to spread your story is simply when people give or choose to fundraise for you. It is when they have taken the emotional decision to support you.

Excellent donor care is not just a good thing to do—it is now totally strategic—not only in helping line up future gifts but also as an opportunity to encourage people to share your ‘thank you’ with their network. So, it is worth taking the time and investing resources to improve the experience that donors have so that it provides a talking point and/or donors recommend you.

Simple but effective ways to achieve this include:

- Producing ‘thank you’ cards with your mission message and blank insides so you can handwrite messages to supporters. Get the whole office to be involved in signing the cards.
- Phoning donors to say thank you (it is a great excuse to engage them and it will surprise them you have taken the trouble).
- Considering thanking regular donors on the anniversary of their donation.

Recommended further reading:

Raving Fans: A Revolutionary Approach to Customer Service

by Kenneth Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles

‘Your customers are only satisfied because their expectations are so low and because no one else is doing better. Just having satisfied customers isn’t good enough anymore. If you really want a booming business, you have to create Raving Fans.’

Sheldon Bowles

The two case examples that follow show how you can take even more trouble to create a donor experience that people will share, talk about and help attract other donors.

Case example: The power of proof

Angharad McKenzie – Head of Key Relationships, charity: water

According to New Philanthropy Capital, *‘People would give an extra £665m to charity if organisations provided more information on how money is spent and evidence of impact.’*

No s***, Sherlock. We all know this, right. But knowing it doesn’t make it easy.

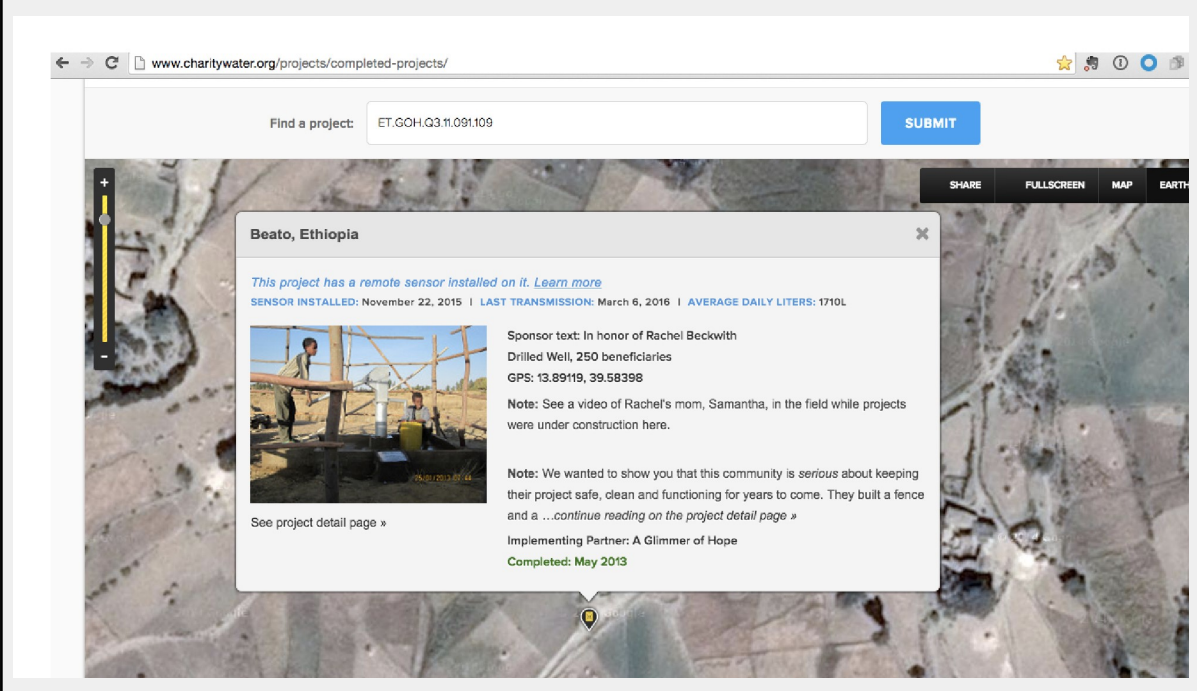
For decades charities have learned the delicate art of when to use ‘could’ rather than ‘will’, and with huge operations built around a model of careful copywriting, it’s a difficult ship to turn, to provide real transparency on how donors gifts are spent.

Maybe charity: water was lucky to come into the fundraising space at the exact time Google Earth launched and social proof was the marketing buzz word. Or maybe it truly wanted to reinvent charity for the better, through radical transparency.

Whatever you choose to believe, for charity: water the supporter experience and proof go hand in hand. As Scott Harrison would say, *‘If we’re building water projects, we should know where they are, and what impact they’ve had. And we should share this with the people who made them possible.’*

In 10 years, charity: water supporters have built over 21,000 water projects in 24 countries, serving over 6.4 million people with clean water. We know this because we have the GPS coordinates of every single project all mapped on the completed projects page of our site.

Supporter experience doesn’t get more complicated than that!



Question to ask: What proof can you provide about the impact of your work?

More involved methods of providing a better donor experience need a bit of time and investment:

- Considering determining the impact of donations instead of using ‘could’. For every £x you receive, what are the outputs and related impact your organisation achieves? Share this information when you reply to donations. Better still, equate the donor’s impact to their gift.
- Make your entire donor process for giving online simple and quick. Consider investing funds to improve the forms and minimise the number of fields people have to complete.
- Ask people WHY they gave to you as an optional field when they give (both online and offline). It adds to the donor experience and it could give you insights about your donor’s motives, both generally and specifically to help engage them further. Take this a step further and, with permission, share these donor comments.

Case Study : How to get donors to ask their network

Richard Turner – Chief Fundraiser, SolarAid

Could we inspire donors so when they gave online they would share that moment with their network? We did some research calling up supporters when we were developing the concept. We asked them what would inspire them? A photo of family or child receiving a solar light was too much. What did come up again and again was the location of the light in Africa.

We heard a talk by the inspiring Paul Young from **charity: water**, who stressed how donors really valued knowing the location of the water pumps they had funded and, although it took a lot of trouble to set up, it was worth the hassle.

So, we fed the data from solar light sales in Tanzania along with their locations. Then when a donor gives we assign them the number of solar lights they have funded and their location, and we show them where.

Hopefully this inspires someone enough to share it with their friends—if they then give as well we credit the original donor.

Here is a supporters' network below. It shows they have funded 136 solar lights through their network of contacts and attracted 35 people to donate. Yet only 10 of those lights are from direct donations by them—the rest are donated by their network.

All this time it was a live prototype with no marketing invested to promote it. Over this period, it continued to attract new donors and more than doubled our background rate of acquisition.

This has now been integrated into the SolarAid website and called the Power of 10. It has also helped attract two significant corporate partnerships wishing to use the platform to engage their customers and staff.

Whilst there is still much to learn, we wanted to share this so others could copy the approach.

See <https://solar-aid.org/power-of-10/>

Question to ask: How could you inspire donors to share your story after giving to you?

There are several CDE projects that have more focus on the area of donor care. Please refer to **CDE project 4 – Thank you and Welcome** compiled by John Grain, and also **CDE project 16 – Creating a service culture that delivers a great donor experience** compiled by Joe Sutton.

Action 7: Be ready to react

As your story begins to spread by your supporters, you should get an increase in inbound enquiries or offers of support that are not a result of a direct response communication, i.e. they are a result of people hearing your story from others they know and trust. These are likely to be from a range of sources and may even seem quite random.

Responding to such enquiries can often be put off, as they do not fit a direct response system, such as a completed coupon from an appeal. Yet the time when the person calls or presses send on the email to your info@ or general email address is when they are clearly engaged. So, the ability to react to their enquiry and engage them at the earliest possible opportunity is critical. There may be other moments you can identify, such as when someone sets up a fundraising page for your charity. Are you ready to react when these moments occur? For example, SolarAid has introduced a simple chat function that visitors to their website can use to start a conversation with one of the team. The same applies to social media and being able to have conversations with people who engage with you.

The community fundraising team at Anthony Nolan meet first thing at 9:30 am every morning, and then again at 2:30 pm in the afternoon, to look at inbound emails they have received about new enquiries or offers to fundraise from individuals. Their aim is to respond within two hours of receiving an email and to speak to people as soon as possible ([see the case example in Action 6](#)).

Here is how Anthony Nolan prepared its *entire* staff so they are ready to respond.

Case example: The ‘Many Ways’ that a supporter can help

Richard Davidson – Director of Engagement, Anthony Nolan

Being ready to react to inbound enquiries is essential to our approach. If the person who answers the call isn’t able to have relevant and engaging conversations, then that support is often lost or not maximised.

When supporters approach us is when the vast majority of these conversations take place. **Everyone is trained to have a conversation with anyone who contacts Anthony Nolan to engage them and find out what they want.** Not just the fundraising team. Anthony Nolan has brought together all of the supporter-facing staff and created an Engagement function to lead on this. This new team covers not only fundraising, campaigning, and comms and marketing, but also stem cell donor recruitment and education. The vast majority of people who contact Anthony Nolan have a personal link. We try and find out what is their motive.

We call our approach ‘Many Ways’ internally. **‘Many Ways’ is an acknowledgement that there are many ways a supporter can help** save the life of someone with blood cancer: through joining the stem cell register, volunteering, campaigning, sharing their story or raising money.

All of our supporter-facing staff are trained to be very familiar with the many ways supporters can help our charity: from joining the stem cell register to volunteering, from donating the umbilical cord at one of our cord collection hospitals to running a marathon, from campaigning to setting up a direct debit. This approach is particularly well-developed within our different fundraising teams.

Here is an example of our first conversations and Many Ways approach:

A gentleman set up a JustGiving page in memory of his wife. As soon as the page was set up, we emailed him to ask for his number and we gave him a call straight away.

His wife had died just the day before, so he was very emotional, but really wanted to keep her memory alive by supporting Anthony Nolan. He really appreciated the opportunity to tell us all about her and what an amazing woman she was.

He initially just wanted to ask for in memory donations, as he wasn’t sure what else he could do. He talked about how important she was to so many people and had lots of family and friends and was known well in the local community; lots of people had asked him if they could do anything to help him but he didn’t know what to ask for. Shared fundraising is something they could do, something they could all come together for in her memory.

The Community Team discovered his friend was in a band - they are now doing a gig for us. He also talked about how he and his wife were going to do the Manchester 10K just before she died – this is now their main event and they have a team of 20 runners taking part - with a big party at the end to remember her. He then passed on our contact details to the many people that wanted to help.

His daughter-in-law went on to organise a clothes swap and his daughter is organising a three peaks walk with friends. Next year he hopes to hold a summer party at his home.

*Questions to ask: Have you mapped out the ‘many ways’ your supporters could help you?
Is everyone who takes an inbound enquiry able to deal with that first conversation?*

Action 8: Set up new measures

Adopting a mindset of how to inspire people to spread your story rather than target them for money will need new measures away from direct ROI.

You will also need to do activities that engage people, in order to help communicate your story, maintain their attention and activate them to advocate on your behalf. These activities may not deliver a high ROI. So, to apply this approach of supporters as advocates, you need to view fundraising holistically and see how it all connects, i.e. the ROI that really matters is the overall ROI. As the case example provided by SolarAid in Action 4 illustrates, an activity that provides high engagement but low ROI may lead to income that appears in another income area later. As the NSPCC Full Stop campaign illustrates in Action 5, by removing team targets you can encourage teams to work together better.

As the saying goes, 'You need to measure what you want to happen.'

Grant Leboff, author of *Digital Selling*, offers this guidance:

You should have three measurements:

1. *Your first measure should be how many people are in your ecosystem. So that would include numbers on your database (not just donors) and followers on social media. But that measure shouldn't be in a vacuum - it should be against your market. This will also force you to define your market. So now who have a % KPI of your total ecosystem against your market audience. This will also force you to understand who your supporters are.*
2. *Of people in your ecosystem how many are engaged with you e.g. donate, fundraise, send you an email, watch a video from your website, download content, open an e-newsletter. You need to choose a period you measure this over - no less than quarterly. You will also need a CRM that interacts with your database. Question to ask: how can you increase engagement by the next quarter?*
3. *Of the people engaged how many are donating, or fundraising, or getting others to donate or fundraise. Question to ask: How do I get those engaged to give more or more often or get others to do so?*

Also, consider measuring and capturing:

- **The number of inbound leads and unsolicited donations you receive each week.** Also record why someone gave to you and noting any 'sticky' examples, i.e. instances of donors choosing to support you as a result of hearing your story through someone they know or by learning about your reputation.
- **The quality of the donor experience you provide.** Can you collect feedback at the moment of giving, even to the extent of inviting a donor review similar to those placed on sites like Amazon?

Please read **CDE Project 3: Measuring satisfaction and loyalty – how your donors feel** compiled by Roger Lawson. *'We believe that an obsession with short-term financial KPIs is the single biggest reason that donors are dissatisfied with the way charities fundraise.'*

Recommended further reading:

Measuring the Network Non-Profit by Beth Kanter

4. Characteristics of applying these principles

Characteristics you would expect to see of a charity applying this approach would be evidence of:

- A mindset of inspiring people to tell your story
- A unifying story (your mission) the entire organisation tells, including trustees, staff and volunteers
- Activities that provide opportunities for high engagement to help tell your story—even if they deliver a low direct ROI
- Examples of supporters, both individuals and organisations, spreading the mission story for you
- New leads and inbound opportunities as a result of building your reputation from supporters advocating on your behalf.
- An excellent donor experience, from the moment of giving through to stewardship that donors share
- A highly responsive ‘customer service’
- Measures that are not just based on ROI of a particular area and that encourage supporter engagement
- A rise in funds and resources that help deliver on the mission as a direct result of supporters acting as advocates

The most important aspect is the mindset you adopt.

What you need to do to achieve this:

- ✓✓ Understand the paradigm shift
- ✓ Have a clear mission or ambition (your WHY)
- ✓ Engage relevant audiences with your story
- ✓ Use engaging, compelling stories consistently linked to your WHY
- ✓ Encourage and equip supporters to tell your story (individuals and organisations)
- ✓ Provide a great donor experience
- ✓ Be ready to react when someone engages you
- ✓ Use new measures

Appendix 1: Sources

Sources that informed and influenced this project appear below.

Recommended Booklist

To understand the paradigm shift, read:

Sticky Marketing by Grant Leboff

(updated to *Stickier Marketing* by Grant Leboff)

The New Rules of Marketing & PR by David Meerman Scott

The Network Non-Profit by Beth Kanter

Digital Selling by Grant Leboff

See also the following publications referenced in the subsequent actions:

Relationship Fundraising by Ken Burnett

Start with the Why by Simon Sinek

Storytelling Can Change the World by Ken Burnett

Made to Stick by Dan and Chip Heath

The New Rules of Sales and Service by David Meerman Scott

Raving Fans: A Revolutionary Approach to Customer Service

by Kenneth Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles

Measuring the Network Non-Profit by Beth Kanter

Reports Referenced

Great Fundraising by Professor Adrian Sargeant and Professor Jen Shang,
[available via Alan Clayton Associates](#)

Money for Good by New Philanthropy Capital, <http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/money-for-good-uk/>

Fundraising Perspectives with reflections from fundraisers (follow up report),
<http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/fundraising-perspectives/>

Corresponding author

Richard Turner

richard.turner@ifundraiser.co.uk

www.ifundraiser.co.uk

@ifundraiser

Appendix 2:

Sticky Marketing & Digital Selling – An audience with Grant Leboff

In November 2016, Rory White, founder of Flow Caritas, hosted an event with Grant Leboff, author of 'Sticky Marketing' and 'Digital Selling'. A group of Directors of Fundraising were invited to hear his views on marketing, and how it applies to fundraising. Here is an edited transcript of his key address to the group, reproduced with permission from Grant and Rory.

Grant Leboff: 17th November 2016

'For the first time in history everyone is now a channel - this is the revolution in a nutshell because essentially it changes several things.

The first thing that it changes is the way we get our information. Go back ten years and we got all the information exclusively from media companies. We woke up in the morning and our news came from a newspaper, the radio, and from the TV. You would get on the train and read the same. Or perhaps you would read a book, and the book was from a publishing business. You might listen to music put out by a record company - which is essentially another media business.

Almost all the information as you go to work was published by media businesses - even business to business trade magazines such as Haymarket publications. So, everything we got was put out by official media companies. That is still happening of course. Media companies are just putting more out, but then you're putting information out too. For example, every charity has a website with a YouTube channel, a Facebook page or a Twitter account. All those things are media channels. And finally, individuals have got those channels as well. There are 1.6 billion people on Facebook - that's 1.6 billion people who have used Facebook in the last month. Half the population of the UK log onto Facebook every day from a mobile device.

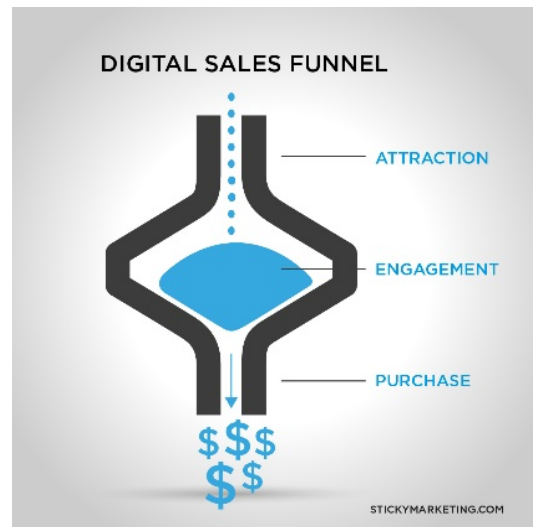
That changes a couple of things that are fundamental.

The direct effect of living in world of abundance of information is scarcity of attention. Why does that matter? Firstly, for fundraising if you don't have people's attention then they won't donate. The traditional sales model of a wide cone down to a narrow cone was codified in 1898. That wide cone worked in a world where attention was relatively easy to get. In America, they used to call it "spray and pray". If I chuck out a load of mail or I chuck out a load of advertising essentially attention is plentiful enough that I will get people to look at it. You will only get a small amount of responses because it always works on the premise that only a small amount of people are in the market to buy what you've got and it's going to touch them at that particular moment. So, there was always going to be a small response rate. That's fine - but the idea was that attention was plentiful.

The problem is that we live in a world today where attention is scarce and the top of that funnel works on the premise that attention is plentiful. So, if you chuck out your 100,000 mailers you will get your 2% response - but not anymore. So, the response by many charities

is let's just do it more often. So, then of course, the world gets upset because we're being bombarded by charity - which is the news story that came out. I'm not sure that was the most sensible response - "it's not working let's do more". So, you can see why it doesn't work. You need to understand *why* it doesn't work, because the model is based on the assumption that attention is plentiful. In 2016 it isn't. So, that's why you've got the failure of that model.

The digital sales funnel now has a narrow top because it reflects the fact that the attention is hard to get [see diagram]. The reason you have a wide middle is because once you got someone's attention, which is now the most precious thing in the world today, you have to keep it. With the old model, attention was plentiful, so, we just kept bombarding people and working transactionally so they donate. And a couple of months later we do it again, or six months later, or whenever, depending on the frequency of our activity. So, that's the first situation you have as a result of the changing world.



There is a second situation. You are media channels. You have all become media moguls because you own media channels. What is your website? Your website is just dead space on the internet. If you have a Facebook page what is it? It is dead space on the biggest social media platform in the world. What makes it interesting? Content. The BBC is a set of cables a licence to broadcast. What makes the BBC good, or not, is the programs. The reason content becomes important because it becomes the currency owning a media channel. Without content, it's dead space - it's boring. So, you own a media channel. That fundamentally changes your fundraising activity and it fundamentally changes your marketing and communications as well.

Marketing (and fundraising is a form of marketing with an outcome of a donation) used to be the art of interrupting someone else's audience. If you had chuggers on the street no one came down the street just in case there were people were collecting. You went to the high street because you're attracted by the likes of John Lewis and M&S, and the chuggers interrupted you. If you were doing it in a magazine you don't buy a magazine in case there's an advert for a charity - you buy the magazine to read the content of the magazine but you would 'interrupt' if you deemed it to be the right audience. Same with TV, same with radio. With direct mail it's the Royal Mail distribution system and you have interrupted it by buying stamps, but essentially you are interrupting someone else's audience. Here's the challenge - your website doesn't have an audience. No one wakes up and goes "I must go on your charities website" - it doesn't work like that - neither does your Facebook page and neither does YouTube. So now what you now have to do in marketing is build an audience and retain it. That is a fundamentally different skill from interrupting someone else's audience which is completely transactional.

If you're interrupting someone else's audience it's just a transactional thing I interrupt you, and you give, or you go, and you're on your way. Suddenly I'm trying to build an audience and retain it. It is a completely different discipline. Which is why most marketing departments aren't fit for purpose, because they are full of people that if they know what

they're doing, they know how to interrupt someone else's audience but do not know how to build an audience and retain it. It's a fundamentally different mindset. Then you're into content creation. And you need to ask what content will an audience find valuable so they will engage with us? Even if all your website says is "donate to us now", and even if it says what the cause is, people aren't going to keep on coming back to your website to see a "donate now" message because it's not compelling - so you have to give value to your audience.

In a world where everyone has got a channel there are two currencies: one is content because without content there is no media, and the other one is social sharing - how that content spreads. Your best marketers and your best fundraisers today are not you. **Your best marketers and fundraisers are the people - the ecosystem - you create around - the audience you build.** You can say that you are worthy cause, and you are a brilliant charity and I probably won't believe you because we don't believe in authoritative structures. In a we are witnessing that with BREXIT votes and Trump. We don't trust the establishment anymore. Your best marketers are when a friend of mine shares shared a video with me or a piece of content with me saying "this is really great" I'm absolutely going to look it. That is how you cut through in a world where we have attention deficit disorder because I might not be looking at official channels but I will look at what my friends say. In the UK, more people get their news from Facebook than any other platform including TV and radio and newspapers. This is also true of the entire Western industrialized world. More people learn about things through social channels than anything else. You now need to understand that.

This fundamentally changes marketing for a second time. The first time you now need to build an audience and retain it, and in the old days you were just transacting. And the other time is you used to produce interesting content just for your audience. If you were going to direct mail 10,000 people you were producing content for those 10,000 people. Now you're going to produce content to share - because that is the new currency. And that's a different skill. It still has to engage me otherwise I'm not going to press the share button. But engaging me is not enough. You've got to engage me and encourage me to share in some way as well. And the way to think about that is "social capital". People share things to increase their own social capital. I share something because I know it's going to make you laugh or you're going to find it useful or you're going to find it interesting. So, it becomes about me - even though people aren't thinking about that when they do share. No one is going to share a piece of material that reflects badly on them. The opposite is true they are going to share material that's going to reflect well on them. So, you need to think about that when you start to build your marketing.

Engagement becomes important because it's important to retain the audience. That's what it is - engagement. Although no one seems to know what engagement means. Why is it traditional that before you get married you get engaged? When you lock the toilet door what does it say on the other side? Engaged means busy occupied or taken - that's it. So, all you need to ask is how often is my audience that I am building busy or occupied or taken with me? You need to decide what is the frequency of that business because they're not going to engage with you everyday. You need to decide what that engagement will look like realistically for the content you are putting out. So, for example Tesco's engage clients every week. That isn't stupid on the basis 84% of the UK population go supermarket shopping at least once a week. If you don't engage with Tesco's for 3 weeks there are only three conclusions: you're on holiday, you've gone shopping with someone else, or you might of have died.

You shouldn't measure less than quarterly. Because if you go to six monthly it's so sporadic people will forget who you are – and it's about mindshare. So, I would say a minimum is on a quarterly basis. Then you just need the tools to measure it, such as social media monitoring software - so you know someone has retweeted you. You also need the back end of your website, though an application interface, or direct, so your CRM systems talk to each other. So, if someone goes onto your website and watching a video how do you know unless they are talking to each other?

It's not enough to just create content. Creating content that engages an audience is great, but, it's not enough. So, a website of cute fluffy dogs will lead to traffic but will it lead to any sort of donation? Because if it doesn't the traffic becomes vanity - it doesn't mean anything. So, you need to understand what are the “buyer motivations” to engage with you - not to donate to you, to engage with you. Is it because they want to be part of your movement what is it you need to understand what those motivations are. If you have less than three motivations you're in trouble because if you can't think of three compelling reasons why someone should interact with in you've got to ask if you have got any reasons why someone would interact with you. And if you've got more than six then you're getting too granular. These are big helicopter motivations. So, they will “believe in our cause”, but define the cause - they “believe in the cause of x”. That would be a motivation because there are lots of nuances below that. You are looking for between three and six motivations, and every piece of content that you could use you have to be able to internally link back to one of those motivations. If you are not producing content that links back on an emotional level back to those buying motivations you are going to miss the mark. So, it's ok to use pictures of cute fluffy dogs, but what is the context of those pictures and how does that link back to buyer motivation?

Then there is one of the thing you need to do ask yourself this question: what is it I want my customers to do next? You should never ever have a piece of content anywhere where there isn't another call to action. I've seen a picture of a cute fluffy dog so can I adopt a dog? Or is it they can watch a video on fluffy dogs? Is there a webinar on fluffy dogs? Click there. So, you understand the journey you are taking your customer/donor on. They won't all go on that journey - they will drop out at different times. That is also quite telling, so you are then able to refine journey and make it better. You will never understand the sensible customer journey if you don't understand the buyer motivation that content leads back to. For example, a recruitment agency may focus on the buying motivation of finding the right candidate. So, they could focus on, for example, interview techniques - producing ten killer interviewer questions on a piece of content - which you understand internally links back to the buyer motivation of getting the right candidate. Then you can come with sensible next steps in terms of a download, a seminar, a video, or a webinar.

Otherwise you're in danger in a digital world of building a nice audience but receiving no donation or no leads - in which case it's ultimately a waste of time.

Although the book is about digital selling you really must think about it as fundraising and marketing and not as digital. Digital is going to be the major platform because the one thing never changes in marketing is you have to be where your customers are. And your customers are on digital today. So, if you are not on digital you just aren't going to be where your customer and donors are. It's very unhelpful to think of it just as digital. It's marketing strategy. It shouldn't be thought of as digital marketing you should think of it as marketing in a digital world. Talking about digital marketing silos it in a way that is really unhelpful. Even when you do offline stuff it has to integrate with your online stuff.

It is a mindset. It's a way of thinking and that's the challenge.

You need to know WHO your market is (as Trump did). And then you create a HOW that that market will find compelling. It's not your WHAT - there are too many great causes.

When you live in a world of social sharing it's the die-hards, or early adopters, that spread the message for you. For example, those that queue for an Apple product. Those are your early adopters. Very few people queue for an Apple product but it's those dedicated few that cause the ripple effect leads to the TV station to go down – even if there are only 500 people queuing at the store, which in the grand scheme of a country of 63 million is not significant. But it makes other people think it must be a good product. It's those early adopters who help get attention through social sharing.

How do you make money out of news? Take a newspaper like The Guardian. It's not what they're presenting, it's WHO they do it for and HOW they present it which makes it interesting.

Charities need to do exactly the same, otherwise, none of this will work. So, one of your biggest challenges is to really define your marketplace. And then make sure your marketing resource and your marketing goals are aligned.

By understanding what your mission is (your WHY), your HOW changes. And then if you understand your WHO - that market you are going to appeal to - this becomes a really powerful fit together.

Google's mission was to document the world's information. Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg stated at the age of 19, "I don't have a company I am on the mission to connect the world". Microsoft's mission was "a computer on every desk in every home". It achieved this and then in the 90's it lost the plot. It started three social networks no one can remember. It started to play "And me". They completely lost their focus - because they achieved their mission - and had no reason to exist. Now they seem to be getting it back - they are a business platform (for example buying LinkedIn makes sense in this context).

Charities probably don't need to reengineer your mission. I think you **just need to be bolder in articulating your mission**. That's scary. In a digital world we need to do that.

We live in world of information overload because everyone has a channel. We can't cope. So, we are creating digital ecosystems around ourselves to cope with volume on information. Spam filters, even getting rid of tracks on an album, or even a bespoke Times newspaper. All of us are creating our own ecosystems. Birds of feather flock together and mix with people with similar views and aspirations. So, similar views reinforce my own ideals and view of the world. If you only get the stuff you want to listen to - the world becomes more polarised. If you don't have a strong position - a cut through - people won't filter you in. You just become part of the general noise. So, you need to know who your WHO is. Trump knew who he had to get out to vote.

Our own ecosystems we build around us prevent us from seeing the reality

As marketers, and fundraisers, you now have to be in touch with your audience. You need to educate yourself as what is going on in the wider population. So, you should read the SUN because it's the most read newspaper in the country even though you may not enjoy it. You should watch the biggest TV shows such as Strictly Come Dancing for the same reason. And

you also need to be in touch with your WHO as well because your WHO might not be the wider population. You used to, not to, have to, do that!

We are in great danger to dismiss BREXIT and Trump supporters as dumb. It misses the point. A leading behavioural psychologist Antonio Damasio said “*Human beings are feeling machines that think we’re not thinking machines that feel*”.

Take an election (donations too) a lot of people don’t vote on facts - even intelligent people don’t vote on facts. For example, how many of us have ever read a party manifesto? We don’t download manifestos. Generally, we vote on our belief system and values. It becomes fairly emotive, and then on gut feel. When people vote for Trump you have to ask what is the underlying emotional stuff that is going on? From a marketing and comms view these things are based on authenticity (never a complete lie). So, when Trump says “Washington is corrupt” and ‘the politicians have let you down’ and ‘a lot of America has been left behind”, there is a lot we can all agree with there. He tapped into an emotion that is real. It is dangerous to ignore it. People are angry and Trump tapped into that. And this is how people make decisions. To ignore it is very dangerous.

From a communications point of view you need to have a really clear idea of what your emotional proposition to your customer is? Do you sell candles or romance? If you sell romance what colour is your logo? What language do you use on your website?

When you think about your mission, your WHY, and your WHO, the other thing to think about is your emotional proposition, because that is how people make decisions, including donating to charity.’

Grant Leboff, 17 November 2016, London, UK.

With thanks to Flow Caritas for organising and hosting the event.