



COVID-19: sustaining hope in challenging times

Recommendations on
how to act quickly



At the start of 2020, charities and not-for-profits were already facing a tough time.

As Covid-19 changes the climate, things are set to become even more challenging. With a serious risk of income decline at a time when organisations are already concerned about sustainable income generation, the sector has been forced into crisis mode.

In a time of heightened sensitivity, how can charities identify new and relevant opportunities?

Organisations that take a proactive, leadership-focussed stance will weather the storm.

In this paper, GOOD Agency provides recommendations and thought-starters on how best to adapt your strategy in these uncertain times.

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THE CHALLENGES: THEN AND NOW

The existing challenges are well known.

The third sector has been grappling with how to address the decline in regular giving. With shifting demographics, declining trust and a very new and different set of generational groups to contend with, capturing new audiences has been testing.

As many charities have just overcome the effects of GDPR and have finally started to play 'digital catch up', more challenges have arisen such as economic and political uncertainty, regulatory pressures and issues around the sector's lack of diversity.

With Covid-19, existing challenges have not lessened. They are heightened. And now, new challenges are appearing that require careful navigation and attention.

Not only are we facing organisational challenges that affect every sector as we all adapt to remote working. We are also seeing projects stalled as investment becomes de-prioritised.

Charities face greater channel fragmentation and barriers in reaching audiences, and a bun fight for attention spans amidst the noise. The pressure to balance clear asks in a sensitive manner (particularly in legacy communications) is now significant.

THE OPPORTUNITY

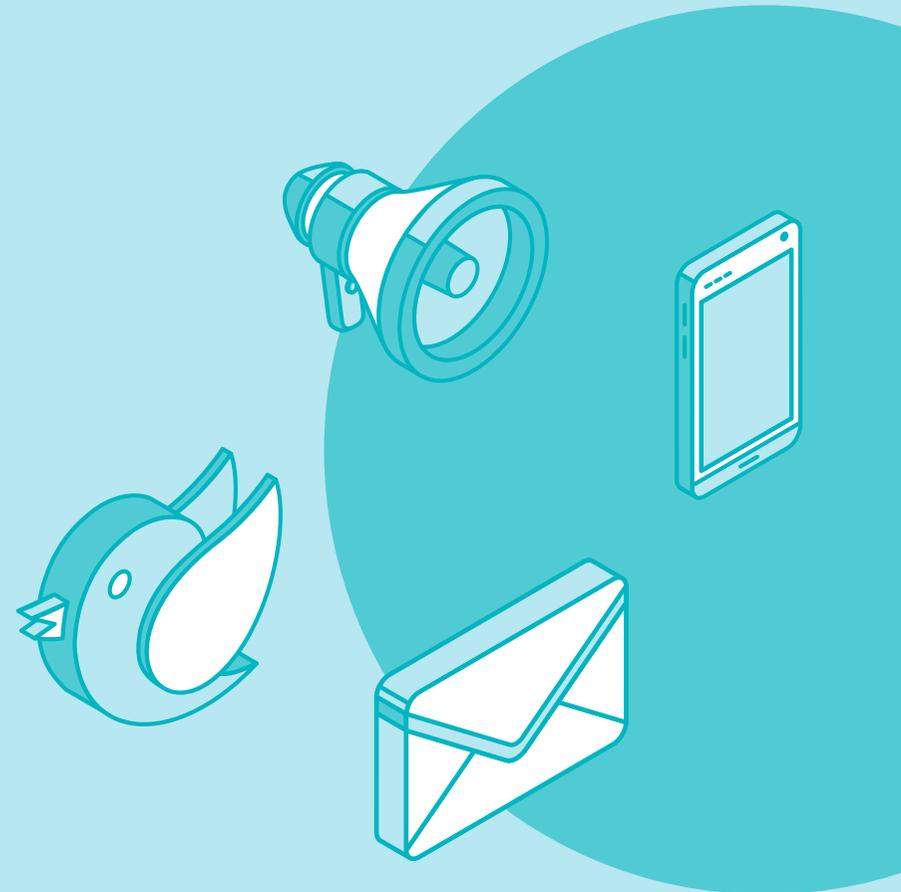
Covid-19 is a tipping point for both the commercial and charitable sectors. It is affecting individuals and organisations in different ways – and we must face the crisis head-on. How we act now will have immediate and long-term impact and it is no longer possible (or acceptable) to act as we normally would.

Long-term planning and short-term activity need to be revisited, now.

For charities and NFPs, integration across broader income generation pillars – from regular giving to legacy to retail – and across a wider spectrum of channels, has the potential to bring causes to the fore.



SHORT-TERM RESPONSE



Re-think priorities and be relevant

Some appeals and campaigns should rightly be de-prioritised or postponed. They may feel insensitive or simply irrelevant. However, rather than completely disregarding campaigns that are currently in development, we should be asking 'how can this be repurposed?' There could be ways of revising your campaign's messaging to reflect what's happening and increase relevancy.

Organisations that are set up to help tackle the impact of Covid-19 against the most vulnerable groups in society may actually see an increase in fundraising with the right messaging. People are generally open to 'asks' in a time of heightened sensitivity – more may give at a lower value. Getting emergency appeals out of the door should be prioritised in the short-term.

It is essential that appeals are not, and do not appear, exploitative or opportunistic – brand trust is tested in times of crisis and the effects may be felt in the longer term. An external view might help.

Some organisations will have the opportunity to drive mission over fundraising. Pushing services, offering people skills and learning opportunities may become more relevant – especially as there is an increased willingness to volunteer.



Re-think priorities and be relevant

Recommendations

BAU

Make 're-calibration' of projects a first consideration, stalling or cancelling projects, second. Ask yourself whether messaging can be re-purposed. It's important to continue to communicate regularly. Compassion and regular communication builds bonds. Failing to communicate will break them.

Ask

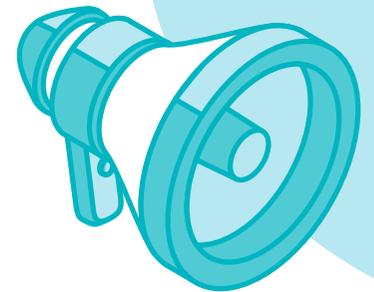
Prioritise emergency appeals. Be bold enough to make a direct ask – but with greater sensitivity. Your audience is looking for evidence of immediate actions taken. The more local, the more relevant. Avoid risk-aversion (particularly in legacy comms where the propensity to do nothing is higher). Getting the tone right is key.

Talk

Opportunistic, empathy-building opportunities should be prioritised. Speak about what your organisation is doing. This might not lift income in the short-term, but there's still a strong opportunity to grow the donor database and steward them, later. Broader engagement with the cause is important.

Volunteer base

A heightened desire for volunteering can be used to deliver impact. Real demonstrations of impact will attract donors – particularly high value, major gifts and philanthropic interest where the need to feel central to the cause and a part of the story is paramount.



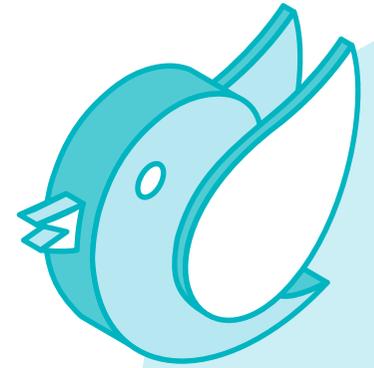
Reconsider channels

Now is the time to improve your digital delivery capabilities. With major fundraising events being cancelled, it will become critical to search for new ways of doing things. It might be possible to turn your cancelled events into engaging online moments. Could a cancelled gala dinner become an online auction? Can closed charity shops make a switch to sell online?

Digital technology and platforms can also be used to perform some of the tasks that are usually face-to-face or in-person, such as volunteering and fundraising experiences. Don't be scared to think differently and innovate. There have already been examples of individuals using fitness apps to track distances for sponsored runs. Could your organisation host a sponsored e-gaming tournament or start a TikTok challenge? Digital offers an opportunity to reach an even wider audience, as people actively look for things to do and ways to help. Embrace it.

Social media usage has risen in the last few days. With potential downtime for the nation at an all-time high, long-form content could be worth considering. Taking an audience-first approach to this will be key for standout and engagement. For those feeling isolated, what mental health tips and advice could we offer? For those with families and children, are there any online resources we could provide to keep children entertained? Or tips to avoid relationships getting strained? For those who are simply bored, how could we teach them new skills or connect them with others?

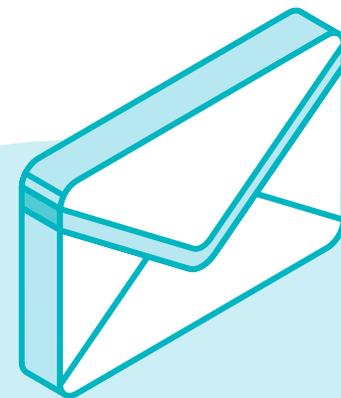
Consider recruiting and redeploying volunteers as social or community outreach teams – reaching people in the platforms and places where they're currently spending time (or are confined to). And, as older users start to use video calling and messaging apps to stay in touch with loved ones, is there an opportunity to use this adoption of new technology to offer your services virtually?



Reconsider channels

We shouldn't ignore traditional offline touchpoints. With so many of us working from home, the direct mail opportunity is now very powerful. Households only receive an average of 1.3 pieces of mail a day so it's a great way to stand out from the crowd.

The cost of media is likely to change over the coming weeks. We've already seen bargain prices for OOH; TV spots are likely to become a lot more affordable as big advertisers freeze spend and pull irrelevant ads (think of all of the travel sector ads alone and the gap that creates). Having your ads ready to go could fill that void, especially if they are relevant (or adapted to be).



Reconsider channels

Recommendations

Digital first

If your organisation doesn't tend to be digital first with an idea, now is the time to apply this lens to all communications. This approach can potentially transform and optimise your existing campaigns.

Social

Leverage existing networks across your social channels. Transforming offline fundraising campaigns into online events provides an opportunity to reach an even wider audience, especially when you tap into existing supporters with strong social followings.

Thought Leadership

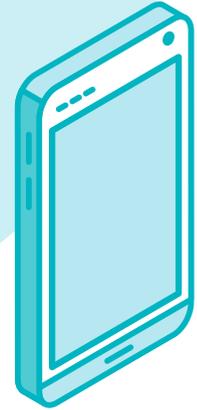
Now is the time for intelligent thought leadership. Consumption of information and long-form copy is heightened when people are stuck indoors. This is a fertile time to educate and communicate about your cause and organisation. Be sure to make the content relevant to your audience.

DM

The opportunity for DM is strong. But even stronger is the opportunity to do this in partnership with other charities that share your cause. This is a great demonstration of responsibility and commitment to the cause.

Be asset-ready

Create an integrated fundraising bank of ready-to-go assets to take advantage of bargain-price media channels.



Make agility a reality

Now more than ever we need to work at speed and collaboratively. That means across channel, across departments, across budgets, across territories. A DM pack in artwork might become an email campaign at a moment's notice. Or a Facebook ad. We need to be developing concepts that are channel agnostic.

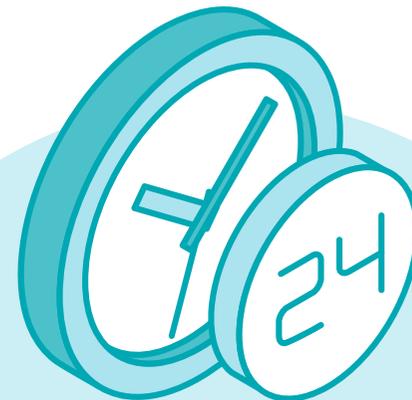
To take advantage of cut-price media slots, ads need to be turned around at breakneck speed. DM packs need to be out and through letterboxes before post, mailing houses and printers are affected.

Identify existing content you can repackage quickly and easily for social channels and don't be afraid to experiment with new formats. Facebook Live and IGTV offer instant ways to create compelling video. When people are isolated, genuine, human content has even greater value.

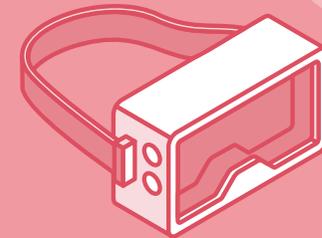
Recommendations

Act

Now is the time to re-think the campaign development process and to inject agility into the phases. If it takes too long to get to the answer, it's already too late.



MEDIUM-TERM CONSIDERATIONS



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Think wider than your own organisation

Further down the line, we're likely to see cross-organisational and cross-sector collaborations happening to help solve the problems created by Covid-19. This could be people rallying together to create grassroots initiatives, charities working together to help solve mass problems, brands partnering with other brands to alleviate some of the pressures on infrastructure or even social channels tying up to create more noise and awareness to support causes.

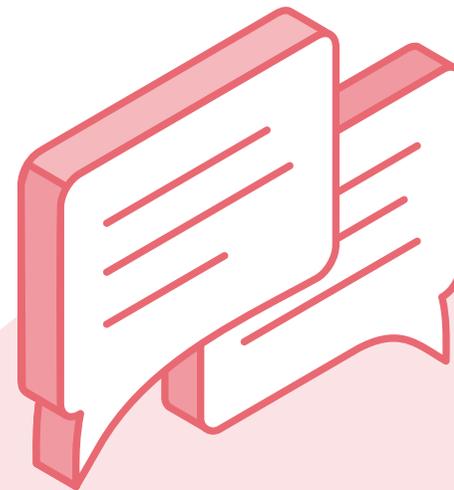
The global nature of the conversation will help fuel this collaboration further with localised initiatives becoming relevant internationally. There will be increased empathy amongst audiences globally and better cooperation on social issues.

Where there is an opportunity for organisations to be generous with their resources (opening for free, partnering with local communities etc) the impact for long-term loyalty amongst existing supporters, and engagement with new, hard-to-reach audiences can be significant.

Recommendations

Collaborate

Be part of the conversation – either by partnering with another organisation (such as another charity, grassroots initiative or commercial brand) or on social media.



MEDIUM-TERM CONSIDERATIONS

Prepare to innovate

If you haven't already considered NPD around a Regular Giving subscription service, now could be the time. As we enter into peak isolation and boredom over the next few months, people will be looking for new ways to entertain themselves, learn, engage, try new things.

Recommendations

Innovate

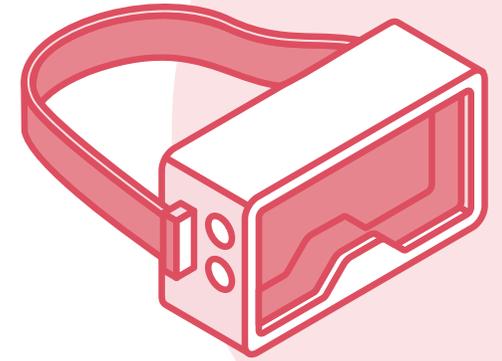
Don't let fear and risk-aversion hold you back. Innovate to mitigate the risk of becoming irrelevant. Now is the time to look at charity products and to re-think them. Start with existing products and optimise. Then think of new ones.

Fun

Products that engage, entertain and are fun will stand out. This is also a good time to add a new spin to gaming and lotteries.

Digitise

Consider digital and virtual products, too. Could you partner with a virtual fashion house and offer virtual charity t-shirts and badges? For those with archive content such as charity concerts and documentary content, can you offer these on a digital pay-to-view model?



MEDIUM-TERM CONSIDERATIONS

Be real, be transparent

Just as the UK has stepped up to defend hospitality and cultural sectors, there will be growing awareness of the need to support other non-frontline causes who need to continue to raise funds and deliver vital services. Being more transparent with current and potential supporters about the impact of this new reality will help to keep causes front of mind and will help maintain income and awareness through the next few months.

Recommendations

Openness

Make transparency a key objective in your comms. This will be particularly relevant when there is heightened opportunity for longer forms of content.



SO, WHAT'S NEXT?

After the storm, comes re-adjustment and calm.

There's much to be positive about, still.

The current climate affords us the opportunity to drive real long-term change – in policies as well as attitudes and behaviours. We're seeing demonstrations of increasing pro-social behaviours, concern for the most vulnerable, empathy and solidarity in the face of uncertainty and hardship.

Now is the time for your organisation to be bold, brave and passionate.

That can only have a positive impact on society and the sector.

If you'd like to find out more,
send us a question or just
have a chat, contact:

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