

GIVING IT 1 large

Changes to the Big Give match-funding Christmas Challenge campaign helped it raise £11.3m last year. Charity relationship manager **RACHEL EARNSHAW** explains how charities can make the most of the new model

Last year marked 10 years of the Big Give, and the week-long Christmas Challenge raised over £11.3m for 528 participating charities. The campaign also received the highest number of donations, hitting 29,500 over three times the number in 2015.

The Christmas Challenge provides an opportunity for charities to raise substantial funds, but it has not been without growing pains. Until 2015, the campaign ran on a competitive model where match funds were allocated to groups of charities and used up on a first-come-first served basis. From customer feedback, we knew that there were several pain points in this process:

was start-stop in nature.

To rectify this, we started adopting agile methodologies (a practice from the tech industry) in the way that we work in 2014.

Opportunity cost

Following extensive consultation with our customers, we launched a new model in 2016. This marked a shift to a non-competitive model where funds were ring fenced for each charity. The new model means that we have been able to improve customer satisfaction for charities and donors, from 62 per cent in 2015 to 98 per cent in 2016.

“Charities raise anything from £4,000 to £100,000, so the model can be scaled up or down to suit the needs of the charity”

The competitive nature of the match funds created a stressful and frustrating experience; charities cited examples where match funds had run out in minutes, meaning months of preparation and communications to donors was in vain; and there was too much of an element of chance to the success of the campaign.

The campaign was also disjointed. It was run over several days with match funding “released” on each day, which meant the campaign

However, it comes with its own set of challenges. Ring fencing funds means that if a charity doesn’t hit its target, then match funds are left over at the end of the campaign. One of the Big Give’s priorities has been to ensure that any funds remaining are kept at a minimum because it is funding which might have been used by another charity.

In 2016 and 2017, 92 per cent of the match funds were used thanks to the success of participating charities

hitting or nearly hitting their targets. However, it’s not just a case of good luck; there is a lot of hard work that goes into ensuring this outcome.

Keys to success

A successful Christmas Challenge campaign is no longer down to an element of chance, relying on the respective success of competing charities, it’s now all down to planning and strategy. The most successful charities took a strategic approach to the Christmas Challenge 2017 from the beginning – setting an appropriate target and planning how to promote the campaign and to whom. This can apply to charities large and small. Here are some hints to run a successful campaign:

1. Make the most of the opportunity to bring together fundraising streams into one campaign

The Christmas Challenge campaign combines major donor fundraising, trusts and foundations and individual giving, and provides an opportunity for a smart charity to align these three areas and get significant bang for its buck over the course of a week. Charities raise anything from £4,000 to £100,000, so the model can be scaled up or down to suit the needs of the charity involved. A distinct benefit of the new model is that it allows charities to market the campaign to a range of donors, building their experience of crowdfunding alongside major donor fundraising.

The matching pot used to double donations is made up of two parts. Part of the matching pot is funding that the charity secures in the run up to the campaign. The other part of the pot is funding from external “champions”, which are sourced by the Big Give. Champions can be trusts, foundations, corporations or philanthropists. Pledgers are key supporters of participating charities. They contribute to the matching pots by providing promises of funding. Pledgers can be major donors, trustees, or any other significant supporter of the charity.

All of this funding is then used to double donations from the public when the campaign goes live on

#GivingTuesday on 28 November. It is no mean feat to bring together these elements, but it enables charities to build multiple funding streams in one go. The match-funding offer makes it an easier ask for a major donor or individual supporter. In 2016, 95 per cent of charities said they received donations from new supporters.

Many charities also use the campaign as their main Christmas appeal so that they capitalise on the momentum and the fact that it launches on #GivingTuesday.

2. Set a realistic target

When matching opens at the start of the campaign, donations are doubled by “pledge” funds until these are exhausted. At this point, the matching comes from champion funds. It is therefore important that charities set ambitious, but realistic targets in order to get their hands on the champion funds that have been allocated to them. Charities are encouraged to think carefully about this and to base their target on projections made for the campaign.

3. Understand your supporter base

Charities know all too well that supporters don’t materialise out of thin air, so it is important that a charity recognises from whom it is going to get donations. This doesn’t mean that a charity shouldn’t set out to recruit new donors, but it needs to understand its starting point. This will help with setting a realistic and calculated target, as well as writing a fundraising communications plan to spread the word when the time comes.

4. Make the most of the campaign support

This year the Big Give provided increased levels of support through a marketing webinar series for participating charities, a wide range of written resources and one-to-one support phone calls and guidance. Experts from the Foundation for Social Impact and other organisations lent their advice to charities to help them market the Christmas Challenge to supporters, offering support on planning their campaign, understanding their audiences, and choosing and making the most of their communications channels.

5. Set a strategy

There are lots of routes to success for charities in the Christmas Challenge. For instance, Be Child Cancer Aware hit its target in a matter of minutes by securing several large donations of £5,000 – the maximum matched donation. Some charities choose this approach to ensure they fully exhaust their matching pot as quickly as possible.

Other charities take a different approach and aim to achieve their target through lots of smaller donations. The Somerset Wildlife Trust took part for the first time in 2017, exceeding its target by receiving over 360 donations of an average of around £30 each.

Case study

The Family Trust, a small children’s charity in Kent, took an approach somewhere in between these two and saw an incredible uplift of 1,082 per cent on its own annual appeal in 2016. Typically the charity had done little fundraising in the past, relying on an ongoing annual grant award, and 2016 was the first time it held the appeal, raising £725 from 13 donors. In 2017, it took part in the Christmas Challenge for the first time, hit its £4,000 target by day two and eventually doubled that amount, raising a total of £8,500 from 24 donors. Each donation via the Christmas Challenge was worth over £346 to the charity, compared with around £40 per donor in the 2016 appeal.

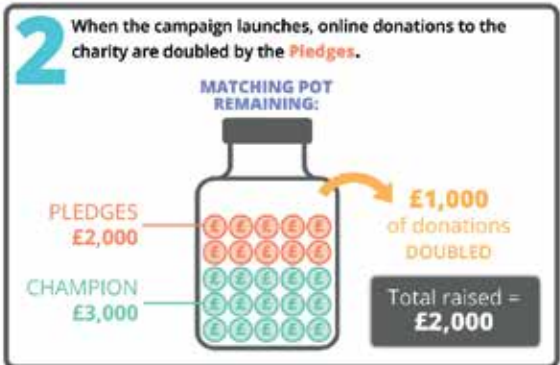
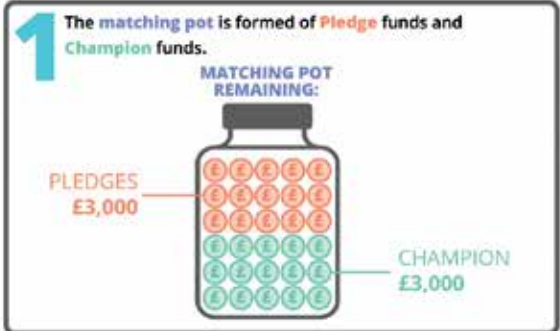
The success was down to a number of factors. In its autumn newsletter, the charity gave its readers advance notice of the Christmas Challenge. It promoted the campaign via a number of channels including direct mail, customised email campaigns, website updates and social media. The charity focused on the key “doubling of donations” campaign message. And it provided regular updates to charity workers both before, during and after the campaign to keep up the excitement and to encourage staff to pass on news about the campaign.

Once The Family Trust hit its target, it urged supporters to continue to help so it could win a Christmas Challenge Award, which

MATCH FUNDING HOW DOES IT WORK FOR CHARITIES?

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Champions are partners of the Big Give. These are external funders who contribute to the **matching funds** and can be Trusts, Foundations, Corporations or Philanthropists.



theBigGive.org.uk

is given to top performing charities by Big Give. A third of its 24 donors did, demonstrating the value in encouraging donations right until the end of the campaign even once match funds are exhausted. ■



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