

How to fundraise effectively in recession

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Recently I did a presentation for a client's team who are battling with the worst effects of the current recession. Here are some ideas I shared with them to help them get back on track with their fundraising. Hope you find them helpful too.

1. Regain your passion and enthusiasm for your charity's cause.

Ask God to give you a fresh lease of hope and joy so you can respond with a new attitude to the challenges you might be facing. The best fundraisers I know are enthusiastic, passionate and upbeat people. And, their enthusiasm and passion is 'infectious.' Staff and donors 'catch' their optimism and they respond.

Before you sit down to write your next appeal or prepare for a meeting with a major donor or a legacy prospect take some time to reflect on how you are feeling about your role. If you have doubts or are struggling, the donors will notice and they will not respond generously.

2. Think strategically

Do you know which fundraising activities work best for your charity? How many donors have stopped supporting your work in the last quarter and what are you going to do about it?

Use fundraising reports or take our **Fundraising Fitness Test** to find out how your fundraising programmes and activities are performing, who are your most profitable donors, how long does it take for a contact to become a donor, which are your most powerful fundraising messages and much more. Once you get the insights you need from the fundraising reports you can adjust your future plans and spending accordingly so that you stop wasting money and valuable staff time on the least efficient activities.

If you want to find out more about our Fundraising Fitness Test drop me a line at: redina@mocconkey-johnston.co.uk

3. Keep Asking

Don't shy away from asking for support. At the end of the day, your charity's donors are adults and a number of them are probably committed to your cause. Remember the story of the widow's mite and the fact that Jesus did not tell the poor widow to take her money back because she had nothing left. In fact, he praised the widow for her generosity.

Your job is to tell your charity's stories, to show donors how your initiatives are changing beneficiaries lives and keep inviting them to partner with you in this task. Let your donors make the decision about whether this is a good time for them to give or not.

4. Acknowledge to donors that we are ALL going through tough times

Being an enthusiastic fundraiser in recession doesn't mean that you should use '*positive thinking*' as a magic wand to make current challenges disappear. (They wouldn't!) It means being honest and open about the difficulties your charity might be facing.

It means letting donors know how much their support means to you especially now. Also, it means showing sensitivity towards some donors' situations, people who might have lost their jobs or, donors who are unable to give as generously as they have done in the past.

Our '*Why Christians give*' report showed that the number one reason for donors to stop supporting a charity is *because they were not listened to when they told the charity that they couldn't afford to give more or were unable to give*. Listen to your donors' and respond in the right way – by doing these things you will actually strengthen relationships with them.

5. Show accountability and good stewardship

Make sure that your next fundraising appeal, newsletter or e-mail update informs donors that you are a good steward of their money. Let them know what you are doing to cut costs where you can, ensure them that you are evaluating your activities and running fundraising reports to help you make better decisions about investing your money in things that deliver good returns, in terms of money and ministry impact.

6. Keep your donors close – and your major donors even closer!

Many charities fail to keep their donors from one year to the next because their fundraising is 'activity' focused rather than 'retention' focused. So in these hard times focus on keeping your donors. *Securing repeat gifts from previous donors is always more cost-effective than finding new ones.*

So, analyse your database to identify the recently lapsed donors (*those who have not given in the last 14 months*) and send out some reactivation mailings. Show appreciation to multi-year donors and ask them to renew their support this year.

The same is true of major donors. Don't ignore your major donors at this time. Their giving might have decreased but they are still interested in what you are doing. Keep talking to them and keep cultivating those relationships. When their financial situation changes many of these donors would be likely to renew their support to your work.

7. Don't put all your eggs in one basket

Now it is not the time to retreat into inactivity and hope that one or two major donors will rescue your charity or that a good response to the latest appeal will solve your financial problems.

Start looking at ways to diversify your income sources by exploring new avenues of financial support. If you have had a lot of statutory funding or have benefited from some large trust grants in the past start thinking about developing your direct mail programme. If you send out some appeals for one-off gifts in the course of the year start thinking about a low level regular giving initiative.

What about online giving or text giving options? Sponsored events? E-bay auctions for your cause? The expansion of online media is giving us all opportunities to connect with a lot more people for less money so learn how to use social media tools in your favour to generate support online.

8. Show flexibility

Recently I was asked by a potential client to help them with a capital campaign. They wanted to raise £1 million in the next 12 months. They had no major donor leads and had never raised this much money before. I said 'No'.

Why? Because going to their current donors with such big, bold campaign is not going to work. When the economy is down most people tend to be cautious and think twice about whether they want to take on new giving commitments. Also, in this case wanting to raise £1 million in the next 12 months without a list of cultivated major donors would be an impossible task. Even if they had a list the timing wasn't realistic. In the current climate it is likely to take a lot longer than 12 months to secure lead gifts for a big campaign.

However, if your charity is in the middle of a capital campaign you shouldn't stop. But, you might need to slow down and be flexible with people. Some donors might take longer to fulfil their giving pledges. So, you need to be patient and don't push to hard.

9. Keep promoting your charity's work

Creating 'buzz' about the difference your charity is making to people's lives is crucial for keeping your cause present in front of current and prospective donors. The more your donors know and see your name about in various printed publications or online, the more likely they are to give to your cause.

The same is true of prospects. If they keep reading your stories, seeing your brand in different places they are more likely to engage with you in the future.

Get your ministry stories and news in the Christian press or local press. Tweet about them, post your stories, photos or videos on *facebook*, *youtube*, *vimeo* and other places. Place small adverts online to increase traffic to your website or social networking pages.

10. Keep investing in fundraising and marketing training

Your charity needs well trained fundraisers and marketers who are aware of the latest thinking, trends and tools in fundraising. So, don't cut the training budgets in these hard times – if you are a team leader, a CEO or a fundraising director make sure you and your staff have opportunities and time to learn new things and apply them in your charity's work.

What's more, there are plenty of great fundraising resources, podcasts and blogs out there. Most of them are free so use them.