

Why should we use an agency?

Introduction

This document provides a brief outline of the reasons for using a professional fundraising agency, and explores the particular benefits of ChangeStar's experience and approach to fundraising. Should you have any questions after reading these notes, please feel free to call us to chat them through on 07968 227 029.

Our experience

We have over 10 years' experience and success in helping large and small charities to maximise their income from supporters and the public. We have witnessed many occasions on which smaller charities have taken the step of employing us as professional fundraisers to develop their appeal packs and advise them on strategy, and as a result have considerably increased their net income – not just from one appeal but on a regular basis.

Indeed, we have always surprised and delighted clients with the results we have gained for the first appeal we develop for them, as they tend to produce such a marked improvement on performance on their previous appeals. This is particularly the case for smaller clients who have previously developed appeals in house.

Take, for example, the Green Party – our first appeal for them last year exceeded the income of an appeal in the previous year by £90,000 – not bad for an additional investment of just over £5,000 in using us and our approach!

The value of an agency

Although it can seem like a major investment and risk to spend money on an agency for your appeals, it can be a very worthwhile investment in terms of building both the long-term funding stability of your organisation and the short term cashflow.

As professional fundraisers, we have worked on hundreds of fundraising campaigns and have a wealth of experience and knowledge as to what will gain the best results. One of the great advantages of direct response fundraising is that one can test every aspect of an appeal – from ask levels in the letter to whether to use a real stamp or a franked post mark on the outer envelope (out of interest – a stamp works better!). We have spent years testing each element of appeals and have a great knowledge of what works – not based on instinct, but on evidence.

Not only do we have knowledge of what works on specific appeals, but we also have vast experience in writing successful fundraising strategies that are appropriate to the needs of the individual charity. Making an investment in a well-informed strategy and programme of fundraising can help you to build a secure source of income, and ensure the stability of your organisation.

When we get involved with smaller charities, there is often an initial process of making various members of the organisation comfortable with the investment, and we have found that the best way to do this is to run a one-off donor appeal in the first instance, which not only proves the success of our approach but also the value of working with professional fundraisers.

Once this appeal has been successful, we then discuss how we can help the charity on a longer term basis – and we are always careful to ensure that our level of involvement is appropriate to the client's needs and budget. At ChangeStar, we have years of experience of working with smaller clients and are acutely aware of budget constraints, so we aim to save you costs wherever we can – for example by suggesting you develop certain communications where we feel our input will make less difference to income levels.

The ChangeStar approach

The ChangeStar approach to direct fundraising from individuals is based on highly personalised mailings that are 'authentic' and therefore unlike other advertising that is sent through the post.

By 'highly personalised' we mean:

- Each person is asked to give according to their previous giving history. This means that each person gets an individual ask rather than a generic ask. Generic asks can often be wildly inaccurate and depress response.
- Details such as the last appeal that an individual responded to may be referred to. There may also be reference to a topic that an individual has expressed an interest in – such as nuclear power or renewable energy. There are also a series of other ways in which we personalise mailings.

'Authentic' means that we try to produce mailings that are not like typical direct mail, which is a turn off to so many people. From our perspective, direct mail is not about advertising through the post but a communication between one person and another person. So much direct mail is based around gimmicks and 'clever' advertising concepts – for instance, coins attached to letters or a teasing slogan on the outer envelope. But direct mail is not like billboard or TV advertising, it about a communication between two people.

We have found that an information-led approach gets the best response – people want to make informed decisions when they give to organisations. Many charity mailings actually lack real information and are based around superficial advertising concepts.

We have found that our personalised approach, which was pioneered by us some 15 years ago here in the UK through another agency, TW CAT, gives a dramatic uplift to income. Typically we have seen our approach give an uplift in income of between 25% and 250% over a year.

Further evidence

For one charity we did a year long split test. They split their donor base into two randomly distributed halves, and one half of their donors received our mailings, whilst the other half received mailings from another agency.

After a year the donors we had mailed had given more than twice the amount of money than those who had received mailings from the other agency.

During a ten year period of working with thirty or more clients, our results for donor mailings were never bettered.

To have a (no pressure or obligation) chat about how we might be able to help your organisation – call us on 07968 227 029.

**ChangeStar
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