

Mobile giving: THE SUPPORTER PERSPECTIVE

Research findings



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Looking forwards from the original (2013) research

Introduction

Mobile giving is now well over 15 years old. Bluefrog ran the first text responsive advertisements for charities in the UK back in 2001 and ever since, donors have been giving donations via their mobile phone – then being converted to monthly giving via the telephone.

However, during the past decade, new technology has enabled the mobile to offer something different. Charities have begun to use smart phones to provide donor feedback. Regular donations given via the phone (RGPSMS) provide the option for monthly giving through a mobile phone bill, and for the first time donors can stop or skip donations with a simple text.

By mid 2012, train panel advertising in the UK was dominated by charities asking donors to text “just £3” and though this surge soon diminished, text-giving options are still seen on fundraising materials in the UK.

Will the future of fundraising be mobile?

The early days of mobile fundraising were very exciting. It seemed there might be a myriad of possibilities for donor engagement and development via the mobile phone.

However, there were also voices of concern. Perhaps the mobile channel was being over-hyped. Perhaps it would lead to charities fighting for share of voice to recruit low value donors that would become increasingly difficult to convert to monthly gifts.

In many cases it did. With high attrition, falling returns and the fallout following the 2015 UK fundraising crisis, many charities that had invested heavily in the approach cut back and stopped their mobile campaigns.

Understanding the needs of the mobile donor

To make the mobile experience as good as it possibly can be, we have to understand the needs of mobile donors, and look at how charities can meet them via the mobile channel and any subsequent communications.

In an effort to understand the growing mobile phenomenon, Bluefrog conducted this study in 2013 to find out what donors thought of the technique.

This paper comprises a synopsis of our findings. Its recommendations incorporate learning from subsequent Bluefrog donor insight research and fundraising programmes.

We publish it now because mobile fundraising is currently taking off in new countries. The hope is that this insight will help fundraisers avoid the mistakes that their UK counterparts made in the early days of the medium.

WHAT WE DID

Conversations with mobile donors

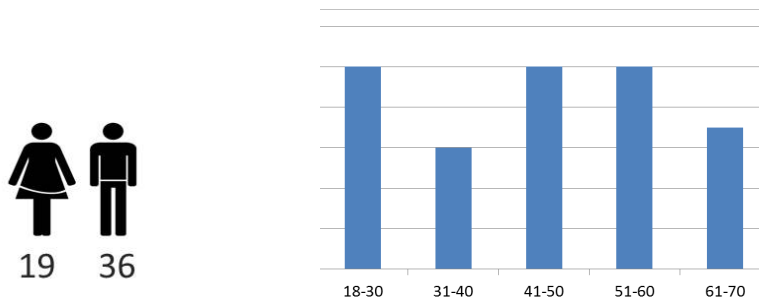
We conducted 55 telephone interviews with donors who were recruited via mobile to three UK charities between December 2012 and March 2013:



Respondents were asked to talk about:

- Their recruitment and conversion experiences: what motivated their responses; how they felt about them; their expectations versus outcomes.
- Subsequent communications from the charity: what they have or haven't enjoyed and why; their impact on attitudes to a continued relationship with the charity.
- How could the experience be improved?

Who we spoke to

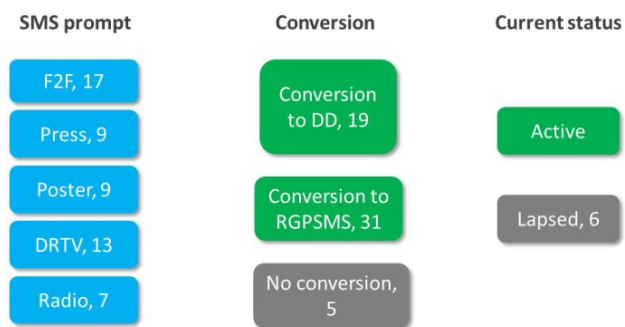


Mobile recruitment sources included street conversations, posters, press, TV and radio ads. Then donors received a call from the charity to convert them to a committed gift.

Twenty converted to a Direct Debit. Thirty converted to RGPSMS – usually as a result of drop ask (a low-value final request for support when other prompts were declined).

Five declined to convert after their first gift. At the time of the research, a further six had lapsed from any form of monthly gift.

A number had made text gifts to more than one charity.



WHAT DID WE DISCOVER?

Many people gave by text because it was new and easy

People described how they would frequently bypass other opportunities to give to charity – but they sent the text gift because it was novel, and comparatively quick and easy. There were no obstacles nor commitments perceived. It was a low risk on-the-spot decision.

A number of respondents described how they had been intending to do more for charity, but had never quite got around to it. Quick text gifts made them feel better about this.

A small number described a previous intention to donate to a particular cause or charity – because of a personal connection. The text opportunity conveniently met that need.

This is an audience polarised. A minority have a connection. But the majority did not plan to engage

The majority of the sample said that they did not want further engagement with the charity they had given to. The gift was intended to be a one-off. Over half the sample said that they hadn't given any thought about further contact with the charity. The phone gave them a feeling of anonymity where they could give without the expectation of subsequent follow-up requests for further support.

For the minority who had a previous intention to donate to a particular cause, the follow-up call asking for a monthly gift was welcomed as it saved them time and effort in contacting the charity.

Those who rejected a monthly gift did so because the conversion call was not welcomed. They hoped their text gift would be seen as a single gift. They had been moved by the original ad but did not want to do more – even if they had funds available. The gift was the equivalent of dropping a few coins in a collecting tin on a street corner. Because the sum requested was so small, it did not require too much consideration.

Some people were affronted by the follow-up call. For some it felt “cheeky”. But for others it was worse. It felt like an underhand use of their telephone number. Some saw the RGPSMS drop ask as a means of applying to pressure to force them to say yes when they had already said no.

“You think that all you are doing is a little bit to help out and then you start getting calls asking you to set up a direct debit. It makes you feel like you’ve been tricked.” (Female, 50s)

Monthly donors said yes, because it's what they knew

For those donors that agreed to a monthly gift via direct debit payment, their decision was influenced by the fact this was an easy familiar route. Many already had an experience of a direct debit to charity. They could afford the commitment. There wasn't a good reason to say no. Those who had sent the text during the face-to-face street recruitment process had been told to expect the call – so there was little or no resentment when it came.

RGPSMS promised something different

For most, a monthly gift through RGPSMS payments promised something different. People liked the sound of it. It addressed their barriers to a monthly gift leaving their bank account.

Unlike a Direct Debit, it was a commitment, but it allowed them to stay in control.

People liked the fact that the charity would confirm on a monthly basis before taking a gift. The opportunity to skip a donation was important to anyone wary of a financial commitment or on a tight budget. It wasn't another bank account item to keep your eye on for fear of a bank charge for getting overdrawn. For those that had previously felt guilty about cancelling a Direct Debit, RGPSMS provided an alternative that offered a high degree of control.

"Sometimes you set up a donation via direct debit – and sometimes you don't have the money and then if there is no money they will charge you £30." (Male, 40s)

"I think that all charities should offer this because then you can decide and you don't feel tied in. I can say in January, I won't do it, then if you felt bad, you could do more in February or March" (Male, 50s)

They imagined a modern feedback experience.

They envisaged photos and videos that could be closer to real time, to show them what the charity was up to. They could ignore it, or read it when it suited. They could share it with friends. They liked that a paperless experience meant no unwanted mailings, and less wastage.

"I don't go in for all that tweeting but you think what if, I don't know, they could give them (beneficiaries) something to say, look at this or, like on Facebook for the kids." (Female, 40s)

Overall – the whole package sounded clever – which they liked.

"I thought 'brilliant' why has no one done this before?" (Male, 40s)

A minority found problems with the mobile as a vehicle for giving.

For some this was because it was another place to manage your money. Others wanted to keep their text message inboxes a social space – not a space for financial or charitable transactions.

For most, there was no engagement

The donors who actively wanted a regular commitment were happy enough. They were receiving the sorts of hard copy materials they expected. As far as they are concerned, the mobile recruitment route has become largely irrelevant.

A minority displayed a degree of engagement, describing hard copy materials received from the charity. But the vast majority had glanced at the communications they had received, or had not opened anything since the initial correspondence was received.

There was a mixture of opinion regarding feedback via the mobile. For those who had not converted to a monthly gift, some said were interested in the idea of feedback via their phone, but they did not have smart phones or they were concerned about data consumption. Some didn't want charities to contact them via yet another channel. Some didn't see the point: why not email?

For those already giving via RGPSMS, most described disappointment with their mobile experience. Some had only received text messages. Others had received photographs or links to videos on the charity website. Only two had followed the links.

They liked the idea – but they were not engaging with the content. On the whole, they were unable to tell us what the charity is doing.

“Actually now you’ve got me there... I don’t know.” (Female, 60s)

“Do they do waterholes and things like that? To make a better life for people?” (Female, 60s)

They had stopped reading the texts.

“Sometimes they put ‘it’s going towards water stuff’, I’m sure they say it in their texts, I can’t remember, aren’t I terrible?” (Female, 50s)

“I think there is a link but I can’t say for sure. Maybe on the last one I got. But I have such a busy life” (Male, 30s)

“I know you shouldn’t expect much but they (videos) are pretty dull. I don’t watch them.” (Male 40s)

Mobile failed to keep its promise to be different

Donors didn't see it as better than what they got from charities before

“What is it going to be though? I can go online and see that. I don’t want them to spend the money but if, well, if it wasn’t an issue if it was a sponsor or something then I suppose make it good. Something new.” (Female, 40s)

They avoided clicking through links through fear it would be depressing

“I had a look before – and there is a link... it says meet someone, I think one of the kids. I’m not being out of order but you think it will be another sad tale and I would prefer – they should say, ‘look at this, you saved this life’, or something, so then you can say, yeah, that’s amazing” (Female, 50s)

In its current format they didn't want to share it

“I don’t think so... unless they were already into it, or if, maybe if it was going to be interesting to them” (Female, 40s)

“You share, I think it’s when it’s a deal or an offer from a shop and then it’s lovely because they think oh that’s lovely, they thought of me, that you might use this... it’s not the same” (Female, 60s)

"I don't know with companies, or if your friend is fundraising, it's to be supportive. I would do it if it was really cool, to show people" (Female, 40s)

For those close to the cause and hoping for a different experience, they were deeply disappointed. They talked about how it could be a better experience.

"One thing, they were going to do... tell you what they're going to do, about the work. Maybe Some little factoid, for every £3 we raise, little Johnny gets time with the specialist" (Male, 50s)

"Yes – I would be interested in getting more information from them. I would like to know about their house programmes" (Female, 60s)

"I say I will go and look on the internet but I know I won't. If they could find a way to [make it interesting]" (Female, 50s)

WHAT SHOULD CHARITIES DO NOW?

Consider donors' level of connection to the cause

Meeting the needs of transaction donors

Donor needs depend on the *level* of connection to the cause. For causes where people are unlikely to have a strong and direct personal emotional connection (such as international charities or those offering broad welfare provision) most donors are likely to be more transactional, and not looking for a commitment.

It is essential that discussing commitment is a major part of the recruitment process. Text respondents should be actively warned that there will be a telephone call to discuss a monthly commitment – so that they're not annoyed when the call is received. Ideally they should be given a chance to opt-out of any call before it is made. In the UK, the donor must be given the chance to opt-in to a follow-up call. If converting to RGPSMS, perhaps the angle needs to be one of convenience, not a better feedback experience, because they are not looking for the latter.

Meeting the needs of those already connected to the cause

If it's an end-of-life cause, or something quite niche, the chances are that there will be more recruits with a personal emotional connection. Find a way to identify that early in the relationship. Perhaps ask them what their connection is during the conversion call. Then you can decide if/how it is worth investing more in their development as donors.

However, be very careful if you begin the relationship by offering any sort of 'value-exchange' whereby you provide something useful (for example, a booklet about an illness). Any fundraising follow-up (especially a telephone call) can make the donor feel uncomfortable, particularly if the fundraising element wasn't addressed in previous conversations.

"I got the leaflet which wasn't of much use anyway and then asked for money. I couldn't believe it. Aren't they supposed to be helping people with cancer?" (Female, 50s)

Be careful to manage expectations

You must manage the expectations of your mobile recruits. Don't promise them the earth if they will receive generic thank you texts and internet links to need-based case study appeals. However, if you've got great content, such as exciting achievements to share, or genuinely new ways to display it via the mobile platform, then tell them it's going to be different, and why they'll enjoy it.

Consider asking donors if they want feedback rather than sending a series of unlinked images or videos. By recognising that you need to distinguish who actually cares about your work from those who gave you a few pounds on the spur of the moment, you can develop different communications programmes based on choice rather than ease of automation. It may be that the mobile becomes a means to identify donors who want hard copy communications. Those that do are likely to be worth considerably more than those who don't.

Think about the mobile experience itself

Don't presume that because someone has constant access to a mobile phone it means that they will always be happy to hear from a charity. Donors spoke about the disappointment of mobile charity communications in the same way that they spoke about email spam. Donors hoped a vibrating phone would herald a message from a friend. A message from a charity would therefore be a disappointment, particularly if the information was generic. Over time, this feedback (and the charity) is seen less positively. Poor quality feedback (and sometimes) skip messages can trigger cancellations and may well hinder re-engagement of lapsed donors in subsequent years.

To make the mobile experience better you have to focus on what donors really want to see and hear. So much of the problem with mobile fundraising is that it recruits donors who aren't particularly interested in a charity's work, then it offers them poor quality points of interaction that reinforce their perceptions about why giving to "charity" is not particularly rewarding.

Mobile donors are no different to any other donor recruited through a low-engagement medium. So use any research available that sheds light on why donors choose to support you: why are your loyal donors loyal? What truly connects them to your cause? How can a mobile platform best bring this to life in the case of what your particular donors need?

Remember, mobile offers a means to give – not a reason

Much UK mobile fundraising has been conducted with the aim of gaining a telephone number as quickly and cheaply as possible and then calling to ask the donor to give a monthly gift. This is a mistake. It has reduced the experience of giving to a simple transaction.

Instead, the mobile should be looked at as another type of response device. A quick and simple means to allow someone to show they are interested in a cause or to resolve a problem.

So, don't start thinking, "How can we use mobile?" Instead, ask the question, "Is mobile suitable for my fundraising campaign?"

To be successful, the case for support for any mobile activity needs to be strong. But far more importantly, it should have a focus on securing long-term support.

Paying a few dollars to inoculate a child is great. But before the first ad is run, you need to come up with a compelling reason why a donor might want to engage with you over the long-term. That is the number one driver for any successful mobile fundraising campaign.

Otherwise you'll be left with a file full of people who might only text you a few dollars once every few years – and trying to work out what to do with them could cost you far more than any mobile specific campaign might raise.

Please get in touch with Mark at mark@bluefroglondon.com or Amber at amber@bluefroglondon.com if you have further questions about this research or if you would like a presentation of the full study (charities only).

Thank you

Thank you to Christian Aid, Marie Curie Cancer Care and Sense who made this research possible by allowing us to speak with their supporters

Bluefrog Fundraising is the UK's foremost charity marketing specialist.

Everything we do is aimed at making your organisation special to the people who are special to you - your donors.

We don't chase each new fad or trademarked targeting system.

We simply concentrate on making a lasting emotional connection between the organisations we work for and the people who support them.

Should you be interested in learning more about us, visit www.bluefroglondon.com or e-mail john@bluefroglondon.com.