

In Memoriam fundraising –

if treated sensitively, can deliver excellent returns – **Kevin Kibble** explains

Just what is it about in memoriam fundraising that charities have so much trouble with? It's a reliable source of income (people continue dying), and since the beginning of time people have wanted to mark the death of someone they care for with a tribute of some description.

It is increasingly common in the UK to make charitable gifts to mark the death of someone close to us, with gifts in lieu of flowers at funerals or a more considered gift relevant to the deceased – maybe a life passion or cause of death (donation to a sports club or to a cancer charity, for example) – or maybe a more permanent memorial. So if people want to give to us in this way, why is it still under-developed in so many charities?

In memoriam (in mem) is of course a sensitive area of fundraising and trustees and service-delivery colleagues can be very sceptical, if not hostile, to something that can be seen as intrusive, and in many organisations there are explicit guidelines preventing fundraisers contacting the bereaved for an extended period following a death.

However, all experience shows that it is perfectly OK to contact the bereaved as long as it is done sensitively and appropriately. Fundraisers will need to convince colleagues that the programme they are proposing conforms to a set of guiding principles that everyone can see, believe

in and accept. If a programme is developed within a defined communication plan, using appropriate language and reflecting the donor's need for their gift to be valued, then it should reassure colleagues that there is a supportive element in the communications but that it can still deliver a cost-effective income stream. It is essential that the programme starts off on the right foot and that the in mem strategy has clear goals and objectives.

Getting buy-in across different fundraising departments is also essential, and colleagues in other departments such as events and community will need to understand how developing in memoriam income might impact on their areas. Often with cause-of-death charities for example, much of the event income from sponsored events will be in mem-motivated some of this may need to be for soft-credited between income streams.

Another challenge for fundraisers is how to make sure their charities are the ones chosen for in mem gifts in the first place – not always as obvious as it might seem. Often of course there will be a causal link such as cancer or heart disease, but the deceased may also have had their own favourite cause or a life passion, so how do you present your cause as an appropriate one to support through an in mem gift?

And how do you develop the income stream through future gifts? Research

evidence suggests that in mem donors who give more than once are much more likely to leave the charity a legacy, and that that legacy will be twice the value of a standard legacy pledge. So it really is worth the effort to identify and support in mem donors and this is where there may be crossover with other fundraising departments. Many charities see the development of secondary in mem gifts as a real barrier to the potential of in mem as a substantial income stream because its not easy to do. But with creativity, care and attention it is certainly a worthwhile exercise. Again, it's essential that appropriate communications and engagement opportunities are used for follow-up approaches to develop in mem donors into longer-term supporters.

This is where something like tribute funds can come into play. These funds serve a number of functions, not least as a focus point for the bereaved. Fund-holders have a special relationship with the tribute fund and with the charity, they know the fundraised income goes to general funds and yet the fund acts almost as their own charity. It's certainly a powerful motivator for peer-to-peer fundraising and testimonials from fund-holders have shown how helpful these funds can be in the months and years following a bereavement. It gives people a connection to the person they've lost and a purpose in raising funds to remember them.

"I can't express just how much this Tribute Fund has meant to me. It has helped me to get through the most difficult 12 months of my life," said one fund-holder. "The Tribute Fund is great, it's such a personal thing to do," another commented.

So we can be sure that Tribute Funds, when donors take to them, are a real support and can be seen as a part of the healing/ grieving process. Many quote 'focus' and 'giving something back' as real motivators in their support for the funds that remember a loved one. Tribute Funds can also be set up by non-family. The NSPCC for example has a successful fund set up by a member of the public for Baby P, and without encouragement from the charity, the Baby P Tribute Fund is taking on a life of its own as a place where those who felt deeply about the young boy's tragic death can focus their need of 'wanting to do something'.

Many charities have introduced different versions of a tribute fund scheme and others have tried different versions with memorial pages, but not all with much success. Tribute funds, and in mem in general, need to be treated in the same way as any other income stream. If there is no clear strategy, marketing and objectives, nothing much will happen. One member of the fundraising team needs to take ownership of the programme, nurture, develop and monitor the performance and be a

champion for the programme.

The rise in popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook has coincided with the introduction of online versions of tribute funds and is transforming their performance. Early adopter charities have benefited hugely from their success. The opportunity for fund-holders to have almost complete control of their fund, place photographs, write memories, have friends and family leave messages, and see their funds grow through donations is inspiring donors to really get behind their funds. The sense of ownership that a fund-holder has ticks all the right boxes of supporter engagement. They feel that this is 'their' charity, it's personal, they can see their support levels growing, they are proud of it, and they can involve friends and family in supporting 'their fund', rather than the charity as a whole.

The opportunity to support funds through online fundraising sub-funds and events has delivered some exceptional returns. One fund for Breakthrough Breast Cancer has delivered over £250,000 through a family and friends organised sponsored bike ride. The family is now really motivated and looking to do something bigger still next year.

Being able to remember somebody on special dates is also a great fundraising opportunity, one fund for the Meningitis Trust has had

over 80 memorial candles lit - mostly in memory on a birthday.

You may not feel that tribute funds and in mem fundraising are particularly appropriate for your cause, but tribute funds can be celebration funds and not just remembrance funds. People will always want to remember loved ones and may well want to do so if attracted to, or supportive of your cause, so at the very least a simple online Book of Remembrance should not be beyond you.

Kevin Kibble is development director of **The Supporter Development Team**. With over 30 years' experience in communications and marketing, 13 of which have been in fundraising, Kevin is passionate about raising money from individuals. With special strategic interests in donor motivations, donor retention, online and new media, tribute, in memoriam and legacies, Kevin is a regular presenter at conferences where individual giving is an important element. Kevin is also an executive coach and mentor with team and individual performance his major interests, and also has the misfortune of being a long-standing member of Saracens Rugby Football Club.

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