

Communications and Fundraising: **a great divide or a beautiful partnership?**

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Picture the scene. You are a well-known, successful charity. You have two teams – one focused on communications and the other fundraising. Both are working to an overarching goal to improve life for your organisation’s beneficiaries. Each team has an appreciation and understanding of the other’s strengths and skills. They both understand that they can achieve more by working together in an integrated way. They support each other at all times.

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Sound familiar?

Well, according to a study of 115 fundraising and communications professionals commissioned by CharityComms, the answer is probably no.

Just 14% of respondents felt that fundraising and communications departments always worked towards shared goals. 77% felt this is sometimes the case, and 1% felt the teams never worked towards shared goals (Fig 1).

The study also revealed significant gaps around collaboration, with only 22% of charities always involving both fundraising and communications teams in brand decisions, and 16% admitting they never do (Fig 2).

“We don’t talk to each other,” said one respondent of the relationship between communications and fundraising teams. “The communications team doesn’t know enough about fundraising expertise, and vice versa, so both get frustrated. We don’t know what the other team is working on, so brand frequently vetoes projects that fundraising may have spent considerable time working on. It causes real negativity between us.”

Fig 1

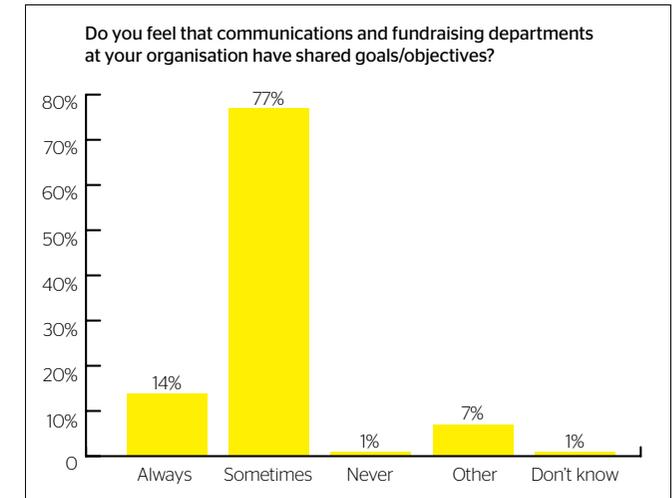
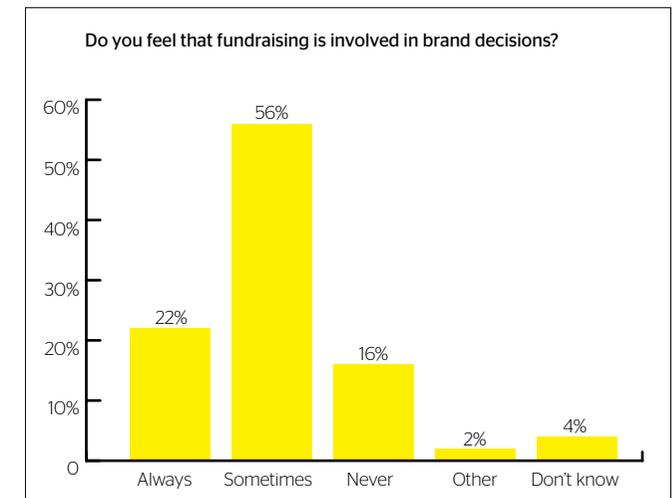


Fig 2



Sources of friction

Frustrations were also expressed around the flexibility of charity brands, with only 25% of respondents feeling their brand was consistently flexible enough to meet fundraising needs and 60% of respondents feeling this was only sometimes the case. 4% of those surveyed felt the brand was never flexible enough to meet fundraising needs (Fig 3).

"I feel that the fundraising team weren't involved enough when the brand was originally developed and hence have a lack of commitment to it," explains one voluntary sector staffer who took part in the survey. "We are evolving the brand and things are improving, though."

Whilst many charities have used communications to strengthen their fundraising work, it seems that they are still in the minority. Only 8% of charity staff said that communications campaigns were always used to generate fundraising leads, with almost two in ten charities never using communications in this way.

Surely this is a missed opportunity? It seems as if many agree but aren't sure how to put it right. "It shouldn't be this hard," explains one. "We're all communications specialists." But with 68% sometimes using communications campaigns to generate fundraising leads, it shows an interest and willingness to maximise mutually beneficial working practices, which is a good foundation to build on (Fig 4).

Forster and CharityComms shared the main findings of the research with an audience of charity communications and fundraising professionals at a recent workshop held in central London. It struck a chord with those attending, particularly around fundraising feeling separated from brand and marketing, and the continuing issue of silo working.

Fig 3

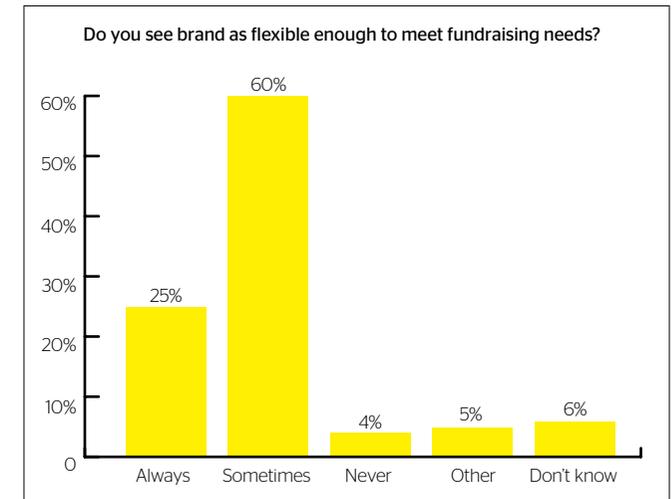
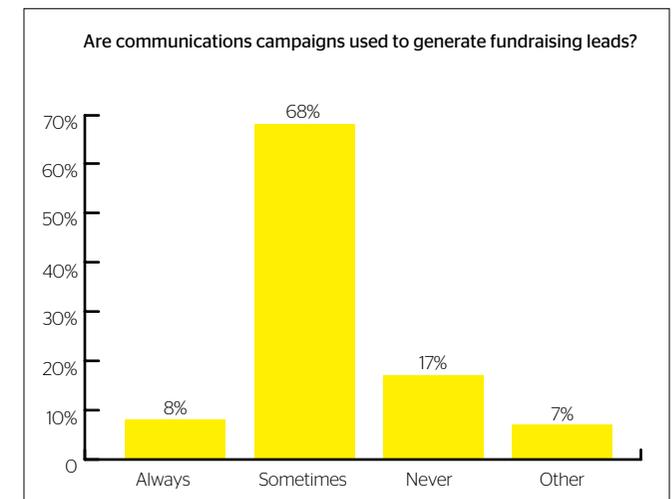


Fig 4



So what's the problem?

For some, could it be a case of office politics at work? “There’s plenty of politics and territorialism here,” explained one charity worker. “Senior managers don’t respect each other. And that filters down.”

A culture of mutual suspicion was also conveyed by some staff. “Fundraising think they know best about communications,” said one respondent. “There’s a lack of understanding about other important agendas.”

So could mutual understanding, collaboration and tolerance be the answer? And if so, how can it be achieved?

For many, the starting point is setting shared goals, strengthening working relationships and appreciating the value each team adds. “We have a shared understanding now of the role fundraising partnerships play in helping the organisation deliver on its awareness raising targets,” explains one communications specialist.

Digital communications is also emerging as another area where the two departments can work and collaborate together. “We’ve developed new work around optimising online donations and both communications and fundraising teams have worked on this from the start together,” says one digital specialist.

And this is key – developing the strategy and plans together. “We now discuss plans and agree objectives early enough in the process, so that expectations are explored and agreed by both areas,” adds one fundraising head.

Once the plans are signed off, it’s important to respect each other’s skills and time. “Fundraising seem to think there is limitless resource,” complained one comms staffer. “They go to external suppliers if we can’t do all they want. There’s a lack of appreciation.”

And for highly collaborative teams, where does the line between responsibilities get drawn? “Fundraisers often have a crossover in skills with comms colleagues, particularly in Direct Marketing,” commented one respondent. “This can create difficulties around responsibilities and ultimately who has final sign off on copy and design. Fundraisers are obviously closer to their audience, but comms have an overall understanding of the charity brand and the most effective channels for communicating particular messages.”

For high performing teams, collaboration must be supported with clear areas of responsibility so that teams feel empowered to deliver. Setting and managing internal expectations can also help keep projects on track.

“On the media and PR side, there can often be unrealistic expectations around the level of celebrity support obtainable for events,” adds one respondent. Timing is also cited as an area of conflict between the teams. “There are different lead times for something like political campaigning vs. fundraising, so while you may try to find ways to work more closely together, it’s almost impossible.”

With shared understanding, bridges can be rebuilt. And when teams share ideas and resources, real results can happen. More than a third of charities are already ensuring they share their audience data and research across both fundraising and communications teams, and with a greater understanding of one another’s needs, this can only grow.

Who's responsible?

Conflicting priorities and a lack of joint targets were cited as a key cause of conflict, along with confusion over roles and responsibilities. The problem is often embedded in the way organisations are set up: nearly one in four survey respondents (23%) blamed rigid organisational structures for ensuring that comms and fundraising operate in silos within their charity.

So who needs to take charge of solving this issue? Organisational restructure to create fully integrated teams is one option being undertaken by several major charities and considered by others. Obviously this isn't feasible for everyone, but strong leadership is essential whether that's coming down from the most senior management or up from within one or both of the teams themselves.

Organisations can move from silo thinking to an attitude of "one team, one target". This involves taking a co-production or co-creation approach that gets people to work together. It needs passionate ambassadors for change who are prepared to break the existing cycle and really focus on effecting change.

One place to start the process is to stop talking about the theory of integration and simply go through an integrated process together, learning by action what works, where difficulties lie and working together to find solutions. Form small, informal project teams that meet at the beginning of the process and regularly throughout. Find areas to develop jointly. Focus on what unites, not divides. Presenting a united front is powerful and persuasive, and demonstrating that you respect each other's ideas, priorities and achievements sends an important signal to other members of staff.

Charities' beneficiaries deserve close co-operation within the organisation to achieve better results and better use of resources. But while co-operation is key, it's important to know when it's OK to go it alone. There is a role for conflict: it can raise questions that need answering, as long as the two sides are aware that they're disagreeing, not just competing. So it's fine to agree that a particular campaign or project is just about raising brand awareness, or focused almost exclusively on fundraising, as long as both sides have previously discussed and agreed the rationale behind the decision. You need a shared goal and objective, but not everyone needs to be involved in everything.

Finally, nothing will sell integration better than results, so make sure you plan and evaluate together.

Time to get started

Following on from the research, the recent workshop and the experience we have had helping charities run integrated campaigns and get fundraising and communications working better together, Forster and CharityComms have put together some simple pointers to get organisations started:

1. Go back to basics - interrogate your corporate objectives and be clear they are translating into plans and approaches for both fundraising and communications
2. Get a shared understanding of your audience. Pool together all existing research from the communications and fundraising teams
3. Do your strategic and tactical planning together
4. Develop a unifying brand platform that has the focus and flexibility to inform, unite and support communications and fundraising
5. Find a common language. Avoid either team using jargon which just adds barriers
6. Put the audience first - make them the central focus of all communications from all sources within your organisation and use their needs to drive the approach each team takes, not the other way around
7. Apply the 80 / 20 principle - to reduce conflict between different teams, be realistic and aim for ensuring that 80% of activity is focused around core objectives and working more closely together, and let the other 20% take care of itself
8. Go from the inside out - consider your own teams as the first audience to be convinced, engaged and involved in better integration. Move from silos to a philosophy of "one team, one target"
9. Create a cross discipline team to manage the development of a unifying brand platform, and that doesn't just mean communications and fundraising. To get real buy-in across your organisation, involve operational teams as well
10. Do less but better - easy to say but harder to do. Concentrate less on sound and fury with little impact, and use the unifying platform as a yardstick for ensuring that everything you do has been considered carefully against objectives
11. Review the resource and team structure and ask the simple but difficult question - are you set up to deliver against your objectives?
12. Think about how you measure the success of integration between teams and evaluate projects together. Don't forget to celebrate success together too!

Forster specialises in developing integrated fundraising and communications campaigns. Using a collaborative model, we work with both teams to set goals and build on these with an innovative range of workshops designed to connect people with different skills together. Our 360 degree approach has delivered results for clients including Age UK, MS Society and RSPCA.

CharityComms is the professional membership body for charity communicators, led by the sector, for the sector. We aim to improve the standard of communications and champion its role in the sector. We seek to represent, support, inspire, connect and inform our members and the wider charity communications community.

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Want to hear more about how Forster and CharityComms can help your organisation develop shared goals?

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If you would like to see all results of the survey,
please contact joanna@forster.co.uk

Copies of the presentations shared at the workshop can be found here:
www.charitycomms.org.uk/integrating_comms_and_fundraising_resources

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