



Cannibals! Run!

At a time when donor recruitment is harder than ever, charities are looking for ways to increase the value of existing supporters. That's why there's been a lot of talk about cannibals at Whitewater. It's not that Whitewater staff have developed a taste for human flesh – that's not happened, yet – it's that there's been a good deal of concern about cannibalisation of income.

The suspected cannibal was our old friend the virtual gift catalogue. 'Will sending a virtual gift catalogue to the database cannibalise income we would have got through the Christmas appeal?'

Anecdotal research suggested it wouldn't. But anecdotal evidence is not enough for us. We're used to dealing with the certainties of testing, analysis and rollout. So we tested it!

Our client The Brooke sent their brand new virtual gift catalogue, called The Brooke Shop, to half their warm base in October. The Christmas mailing was then sent to the full file in November.

Both activities beat targets – the November warm was their most successful appeal

ever. Importantly, donors that received the gift catalogue responded at a similar level to the November warm as those who had been excluded. Responders to the catalogue donated in their droves to the warm appeal that followed it.

Net income per name for those that received both catalogue and warm appeal was over 90% higher. So we need not fear the cannibal after all. Your warm appeal income will not suffer. Hooray!

Virtual giving offers a way of engaging with people on a different level – helping them out with the annual present – buying nightmare. We've made ourselves relevant and useful to their complex lives beyond just making a donation, and that's allowed us tap into a new stream of income that we didn't have access to before.

But why stop there? In what other areas of people's lives can charities become truly relevant and useful, what other pockets of consumer spend can we tap into? If we continue to find new ways to be relevant to the people we rely on, we can make truly substantial gains.

“Is it progress if a cannibal uses a fork?”

Stanislaw J Lec, author and satirist

Email me if you'd like to hear more.

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