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The Royal British Legion: The IDM Business Performance Awards 2006, Bronze Award Winner Campaign: 60th anniversary appeals

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Received: 10 August 2007

Keywords: digital marketing, event management, database, membership recruitment, charity fundraising, marketing research, PR, mass customisation

Abstract

The Royal British Legion case demonstrates that a well coordinated and sensitive approach to an emotionally charged event can reap impressive long term rewards. The Legion balanced their need to fundraise with their objective to activate diverse target groups in a series of commemorative events and fundraising activities. The Legion's existing knowledge of their target market was supported by customer and prospect research. Their understanding of their market enabled The Legion to manage risk and make a considerable one off investment. The campaign coordinated a range of communications channels and created several imaginative, mass-customisation involvement devices that engaged a record number of new and existing supporters.

Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice (2007) **9**, 179–190.

doi:10.1057/palgrave.dddmp.4350085

An idea that galvanised public support

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Introduction

The Royal British Legion and their agency, Target Direct, succeeded in creating and delivering an effective integrated marketing campaign based around two highly emotive events commemorating the anniversaries of D-Day and V-Day.

The Legion and Target Direct achieved outstanding success. The Legion's profile was raised, their long-term supporter base was expanded and a substantial amount of revenue was generated to support The Legion's ongoing work helping war veterans and their families.

Marketing success was achieved in spite of a number of obstacles, including a lack of government support, an ageing donor base, the need to be extremely sensitive and an inability to pre-test the campaign. The campaign had at its heart a simple but extremely effective idea that galvanised public and media support and proved invaluable in consolidating the far-reaching campaign.

A voice for the ex-service community

Background

The Royal British Legion was founded in 1921 as a voice for the ex-service community. The Legion exists to safeguard the evolving needs of ex-service people regarding their welfare, interests and memory. Currently, there are nearly 11 million people who are eligible for support from The Legion. The charity receives around 300,000 calls for help every year.

The Legion's main marketing effort is traditionally focused upon the annual Poppy Day appeal in November. Each year the appeal is supported by a major direct marketing campaign. Whereas lapel poppies are 'purchases' for donations of £1–£2, the direct marketing appeals generally seek donations of £15–£20. Communications illustrate the need for The Legion's work and how The Legion helps so many ex-service people and their families.

Low public awareness

While public recognition of the poppy and the Poppy Day appeal is very high, there is little awareness of what the charity actually does. The direct marketing appeal (along with above-the-line advertising) aims to address this issue. Typically, The Legion's November direct marketing campaigns include a 3 million cold direct mailing, ca. 2–3 million door drops, inserts and online, and direct mail appeals to existing supporters. The charity's website links with both direct marketing and above-the-line messaging. The charity also holds a Christmas raffle that is sent to ca. 1 million cold prospects and existing raffle supporters.

The Poppy Day appeal raises approximately half of the annual income required to meet the cost of The Legion's work commitments. Every other opportunity is taken to raise money and to ensure that ex-service people receive the recognition, affection and respect that they deserve from the nation.

Two major fundraising opportunities

The 60th anniversary of the D-Day¹ landings in Normandy, due to take place on 4 June 2004, and the V-celebrations² a year later represented two major fund-raising opportunities. It was likely that these events would be the last to be attended by active World War II veterans, as most veterans were already well into their 80s.

To make the most of these events, for both fund-raising and the fulfilment of The Legion's main aims to support the ex-service community, presented several major challenges.

Lack of Government support

One of the major issues facing The Legion was a complete lack of support from the British Government. The Royal British Legion was dismayed by an early UK Government announcement that the Government would not be celebrating or marking the 60th anniversary of the D-Day Normandy landings in 2004. The Government also announced that the 2005 V-Day celebrations would not feature the actual dates, 8 May (VE-Day³) or 15 August (VJ-Day⁴). The Government invented an entirely new construct, V-Day, a national commemoration day to take place on 10 July. The one-off nature of the events meant that forecasting the likely media coverage and the associated response levels for the campaigns was fraught with difficulty.

BBC coverage

In the early days of campaign planning, the BBC stated that they were not interested in supporting The Legion's D-Day commemoration. The BBC did eventually feature programming linked to the anniversary and covered the official remembrance ceremonies. However, during the early days of planning this coverage could not have been predicted, making planning and forecasting difficult. In the end, the campaign was far bigger than the agency or The Legion had anticipated.

Jingoistic celebration was considered to be inappropriate and it was unclear what appetite, if any, the country would have for commemoration or expressing gratitude. Getting the tone wrong would lead to severe criticism. Overplaying the marketing effort could lead to severe financial loss.

Test opportunity

The D-Day commemoration in 2004 was regarded as an opportunity to test an otherwise unpredictable approach, given the one-off nature of the commemoration. It was planned to use the knowledge acquired from the D-Day campaign to assist with the organisation of the V-Day commemorations in 2005.

The 60th anniversary appeals presented a huge marketing opportunity for The Legion. However, the one-off nature of the commemorations also added a huge element of risk, of The Legion's reputation and of the £1.2m marketing budget.

Objectives

Ambitious campaign objectives

The objectives for the D-Day campaign were to achieve:

- A return on investment (ROI) of 0.7:1 for cold recruitment.
- An ROI of 3.5:1 for a warm, supporter mailing.

The objectives for the V-Day campaign were to:

- Get people involved in the commemorations.
- Recruit 100,000 new supporters.
- Raise the profile of the charity's work in caring for veterans (both from World War II and from contemporary conflicts).
- Refresh the supporter database by recruiting younger supporters from the 45 to 60 age group.

Marketing strategies

Targeting strategy

The Royal British Legion planned two major fund-raising campaigns: the first based on the 60th commemoration of D-Day in 2004 and the second based on the 2005 V-Day celebrations.

The likely reaction of the British public to the D-Day commemoration in 2004 was far from predictable. The war in Iraq, ongoing since March 2003, was becoming increasingly unpopular in Britain.

Engaging a younger audience

The primary audience for both campaigns was the pre-war and war generations, all of whom had experienced the conflict. This audience is

well known to The Legion. However, because of the relatively limited numbers of pre-war and war supporters, the campaign also needed to engage a younger target group (45–60). The post-war generation would most certainly not warm to celebrations of victory and associated flag-waving.

In line with many charities, The Legion's supporter base tends towards the elderly and therefore it is always important for the charity to try to reach a slightly younger audience. The V-Day campaign specifically aimed to reach this younger audience by making use of other media channels (television and online in particular) and by ensuring that the campaign raised as much awareness as possible. Cold lists with a younger age profile were targeted and the scale of the campaign and utilisation of multiple channels ensured maximum reach.

Research-based insights

Communications strategy

The communications strategy was founded on the research-based insight that the campaign needed to honour veterans without vilifying the enemy. The campaign therefore focused on the veterans rather than 'the enemy'. The commemoration became a unique opportunity for the British people to thank the veterans for fighting for democracy and freedom.

Customer research at the initial planning stage was fundamental to the success of the campaign. D-Day research was undertaken in two stages. The first stage of the research process took the form of telephone interviews across a sample of the core audience aged 60 plus. This research established how a Legion-led D-Day fund-raising campaign would resonate. From this, a number of fund-raising propositions were created for focus group research, resulting in the final D-Day Dozen heroes concept.

Campaign execution

Straightforward proposition

Campaign execution: The 2004 D-Day appeal

The appeal's message was based on a straightforward proposition, 'Giant deeds by D-Day heroes'. The communications featured a dozen men representing everyone who had made the journey 60 years before (Figure 1).

This simple concept provided a focal point to enable people to express their thanks. 'Thank You' flags, to be carried across the sea to France from Britain's shores 60 years later by D-Day veterans, provided the means.

The D-Day appeal combined communications to the whole supporter database and recruitment activity, consisting of a cold list mailing, a door drop and PR activity.

Around 2.3 million cold names were mailed, allowing for prompt testing. A £12 ask (linked to the 'dozen' concept) and a mid-level ask of £19.44 (linked to the year 60 years ago) formed the bulk of the appeal.

Targeting 'ask' value

Cold list targeting was based on The Legion's existing knowledge of cold lists, built up from the annual Poppy Day appeals. Cold lists that reliably provided lower or higher than average gifts and affluent lists

Figure 1: The cold mailing, featuring the 'D-Day Dozen', 2004

were identified and targeted using an appropriate 'ask' level. For example, the affluent lists were asked for a gift of £60 (representative of the 60th anniversary year). Large lifestyle database selections were based on a profile created from looking at best supporters (most valuable, active and recent givers).

A test cell within the £12 segment also received a pre-mailer postcard, which drew attention to the pending commemoration and asked the recipient to look out for the 'Thank You' flag arriving soon. The test was cost effective in spite of the additional costs it incurred.

Communications took the form of direct mail and magazine wrap-arounds and a door drop to 2.5 million, accompanied by some spin-off PR activity. A 'Thank You' flag was included in each mailing and the magazine wrap-around sent to supporters and cold lists. The names of the 1,520 British servicemen who died on D-Day were featured in a *Poppy Press* special edition wrap-around, sent to 170,000 current supporters.

Reminder mailing

The mailing schedule was constructed to allow time for a reminder mailing to prompt further response and to make sure that all 'flags' were received by the fulfilment house in time to make them up into flags proper and transport them to France.

Integrated approach

The fund-raising approach was completely integrated. The VE-Day campaign included all direct marketing channels, including DRTV and radio, direct mail, door drops and inserts. The campaign messaging ran

across above-the-line advertising and the website and for corporate fund-raising activity. All direct marketing materials included the web address. The charity's website featured the 'Thank You' campaign on their homepage. Door drops included a prominent message to drive people to the site to complete their 'virtual' flag.

A tie-in was performed with a pub chain, promoting Victory Parties to support the fund-raising campaign. These parties were also promoted to Legion members and clubs across the country. Many other regional events around this time also incorporated the campaign identity. The Legion included the campaign within promotions to schools.

Heartfelt response

Tight event coordination was crucial to control costs. Target Direct's Creative Director and photographer accompanied the 90,000 returned 'Thank You' flags to France. Most of the messages received were heartfelt and incredibly poignant, confirming the depth of the nation's gratitude and interest in the event.

Early on the morning of 6 June the two agency personnel planted 1,520 flags on Sword beach to create a memorial, each flag representing a serviceman who died on D-Day 60 years before. The remaining 'Thank You' flags were also taken to the beach so that all the messages formed part of the commemoration and could be viewed by the D-Day veterans and other visitors.

Vital feedback

It was vital to provide feedback to everyone who had sent a personal message on their flag.

The Legion's press office dispatched press releases and liaised with the national press prior to the commemoration. It was pre-planned that Target's creative team would meet up with a tour of veterans and The Legion's fund-raising staff to record the event. The aim was to show supporters that their words had played a valuable part in the commemoration and to capture the moment.

Iconic image

The photograph of one of the D-Day heroes accompanied by his son and grandson shown in Figure 2 became an iconic image of the commemoration day. The photograph appeared throughout the national press and on the 'thank you' postcard sent to over 70,000 campaign supporters.

The Legion's D-Day commemoration featured in most of the national press (Figure 3) and considerable spin-off PR resulted from all the media coverage. *The Sun* recognised the campaign's potential for generating public support and endorsed the appeal in its 17 May edition.

Figure 2: 'Thank you' postcard sent to all campaign supporters, 2004

Figure 3: Wide media coverage on the day after the commemoration, 2004

Campaign results: The 2004 D-Day appeal

A memorable day

‘It was a memorable day for thousands of war veterans from fourteen nations which played a part in D-Day or the Battle of Normandy. Dozens of memorial services, fly-pasts and gatherings on famous battlefields turned it into a huge festival of commemoration on the beaches and towns of Normandy. The veterans had pride of place as they honoured their fallen comrades in the war cemeteries’ (Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/newsenglish/witn/2004/06/040607_d_day.shtml).

Lasting results

This campaign could only ever be a one-off. The Legion took a calculated risk that paid off, in terms of both lasting impact and the immediate results:

- The overall campaign returned £1,933,093. This campaign’s ROI was over 70 per cent higher than any previous, non-poppy, Legion appeal.

- Cold recruitment achieved an ROI of 1.13:1. This is a significant result in the charity sector, where achieving immediate breakeven is nearly impossible. The cold mailing response rate reached 2.06 per cent and door drops achieved 0.84 per cent. The average gift was £18.57.
- The Legion's existing supporters responded warmly to the D-Day newsletter mailing with a rate that was almost 150 per cent higher than the previous year's campaign. The D-Day mailing response rate was 36 per cent higher than the usual response rate achieved from November warm mailings. The ROIs achieved exceeded targets: 1.13:1 for cold and 11.3:1 for warm activity.
- Over 70,000 new donors were recruited.
- The Legion's profile was significantly raised as a result of the planned marketing activity and the spontaneous media coverage that appeared on the following day.

Campaign execution: The 2005 V-Day appeal

The 60th anniversary of the end of World War II represented a final opportunity for the nation to thank hundreds of thousands of ordinary men and women who accomplished extraordinary things to support the war effort at home, as well as those serving on the front line.

The Royal British Legion approached the V-Day campaign with confidence, after the D-Day campaign's success. They decided to organise 'The Nation's Biggest Thank You' to honour everyone who had played a part in defending British and European freedom 60 years before.

Marketing research

Marketing research was carried out to determine the best approach for the campaign. Those interviewed were selected from the agency's panel of >50-year-olds. This group is representative of The Legion's main supporter base and is the age group with whom the VE-Day commemoration resonates the most. In addition to The Legion's core supporter group, a slightly younger and slightly older group were also interviewed.

Focus groups

Focus groups were held to:

- Investigate and understand the meaning of VE- and VJ-Day for this audience.
- Ascertain the groups' expectations regarding the nature and suitability of the celebrations.
- Gauge reactions to the campaign proposition and provide creative guidance for campaign development to support these anniversaries.

Additional direct marketing research from D-Day and the November Poppy Appeal were also useful in the development of the campaign creative.

Creative proposition

The central creative proposition for the campaign was '6 years of sacrifice for 60 years of freedom'. In keeping with the positive

campaign message, images of weapons or firearms were deliberately avoided. Case studies were used, providing a touching testimony of how men and women relinquished home comforts for the uncertainty and hardship of service life. All the material that was used was rigorously checked to ensure that it was militarily and historically accurate.

Cold campaign

The cold campaign included a three and a half million mailing. Some data were purchased on a dual-use basis to allow for a reminder mailing. The reminder mailing was only dispatched to the best performing lists. The 'ask' value in the direct mail pack was targeted, based on the known quality of the list from previous appeal response quality. The campaign was principally targeted at war babies and baby boomers, but also included the smaller number of core supporters who had lived through the war.

Trafalgar Square concert

The proposition and tone of the campaign allowed Britain's national identity to be expressed and celebrated. The nation was invited to commemorate the VE- and VJ-Day anniversaries by writing messages of thanks on Victory flags. The Union Flag was reclaimed for the day as an uncomplicated symbol of a free society worth fighting for. The flags were made into bunting to decorate Trafalgar Square, allowing supporters to be present, at least in spirit, at the V-Day celebrations on 10 July.

'Thank You' for democracy and freedom

The 60th anniversary concert in Trafalgar Square was a BBC event staged in close collaboration with The Royal British Legion's events department. BBC representatives had regular planning meetings with The Legion. The concert broadcast live on BBC Radio 1 and The Legion invited World War II veterans to attend. The Mayor of London was closely involved, helpfully permitting The Legion to erect a special structure in Trafalgar Square to display the 'Thank You' Victory bunting. The Legion also liaised with politicians, particularly in connection with the remembrance events.

The campaign's communications were timed to coincide with the Trafalgar Square concert. The concert was not a charity event *per se*. However, the presence of the 'V Thanks logo' and other strongly branded elements at the concert strongly identified The Legion with the event. The Legion's volunteers at the event sold flags, commemorative programmes and V badges, worn by most of the attending celebrities.

Elevated public awareness

The concert raised public awareness of 'The Nation's Biggest Thank You' and provided a timely reminder that there are still British servicemen and women involved in conflicts and peace-keeping missions around the world, some of whom may well require The Legion's help in the future.

Direct mail

Direct mail was timed to land on the public peaks of awareness over VE-Day and V-Day. The 'ask' value in the cold recruitment mailings was split between £12 and £60 depending on the quality of the lists, on the basis of the D-Day campaign results and the annual Poppy appeals. Six million unaddressed door drops (Figure 4) were dispatched, targeted according to supporter profiles. There were also 125,000 inserts, straight adaptations of the door drop.

Figure 4: Cold mailing and door drop for V-Day, 2005

Results exceeded expectations

A special edition of *Poppy Press*, The Legion's supporter magazine, featured in the donor mailing. Data selection was based on previous performance and segmented according to gift level. Responders received a 'thank you' mailing that included a postcard showing the bunting in Trafalgar Square and a request for a monthly direct debit to support The Legion's ongoing work.

Campaign results: The 2005 V-Day appeal

'The Royal British Legion, the Mayor of London and the BBC hosted a spectacular concert, free to the public, in Trafalgar Square to celebrate the 60th anniversary of VE Day. The concert was the cornerstone of a programme of VE and VJ 60th celebrations and welfare awareness-raising activities organised by The Royal British Legion, under the banner 'The Nation's Biggest Thank You'. (Source: www.bbc.co.uk/london/yourlondon/veday/).

- A total of £2,991,189 was raised to support the charity's work.
- Nearly 130,000 new donors were recruited at 0.96:1. A good result from a 5.2 million mailing and a 6 million door drop.
- The cold mailing split 'ask' value (£12 and £60) generated new donors at higher than average gift levels (£43.23 average).
- Supporters in the younger 45–60 age group were successfully recruited.
- There was extensive media coverage of the Victory flags. The press coverage, even in papers such as *The Guardian*, was considerable and frequently featured the flags (Figure 5).
- Over 115,000 Victory flags were received, creating over four miles of bunting which flew proudly over Trafalgar Square. The messages of thanks were deeply felt, expressing heart-warming gratitude for those who had served (Figure 6).

The Guardian Monday July 11 2005 9

am, veterans enjoy hour and courage

Crowds watch second world war planes fly over Buckingham Palace, left. Anniversary events around the country were joined by veterans, above, and serving soldiers, right. Main photograph: Tom Hevez/EPA

...of youngsters from all British Isles, escorted by ... services, including a fireman and a railwayman, carrying seven books of remembrance, the names of all who died in the war. ... Canterbury's address ... bombings – "To ... need no reminder that ... and humiliation is

As the congregation streamed out the bells overhead were fired – struck simultaneously – in bursts of explosive sound, a technique used only on occasions of great celebration, as 60 years ago on VE and VJ days.

Those heading for lunch at the Queen's invitation in the palace garden boarded coaches, the rest made for the shade to eat their sandwiches.

Royals

The Queen spoke last: "We cannot claim the world has been freed from war or terror but in Europe we have been faithful ... I am sure this commemoration will encourage all those who have lived through the years since to reflect on the debt we owe to the wartime generation." She spoke of their resilience, humour and sustained courage and offered them the nation's thanks and respect.

The British Legion, proud in their blazons and regimental uniforms, accompanied the

Figure 5: Media coverage of the Victory flags, 2005

Lessons learned

These two campaigns were based around events that were of great significance to the British people. The campaign communications engaged the public in a way that direct marketing seldom achieves. Two simple propositions, 'The D-Day Dozen heroes' and 'Six years of sacrifice for 60 years of freedom', led into 'The Nation's Biggest Thank You'. The well-judged simplicity and resonance of The Legion's communications proved to be irresistible to the >40 age groups.

The campaigns have provided a springboard for The Legion's future work. Public awareness of The Legion was significantly raised by the extensive media coverage of both events and a new, active supporter base has been recruited.

Figure 6: Two of the 115,000 messages; on the right a message from Vera Lynn, 2005

Supporters recruited from these campaigns are still proving to be better than average donors, demonstrating an enduring emotional engagement. Nearly £5m has been raised for The Legion's charitable work.

Notes

1. D-Day was the day that the Allied invasion of Normandy began on 6 June 1944. D-Day was the first phase of Operation Overlord, marking the beginning of the end of World War II, eventually leading to the liberation of Europe.
2. The V-Day celebrations included Victory in Europe day and Victory in Japan day.
3. 'Victory in Europe' day marks the end of World War II with Germany on Tuesday 8 May 1945.
4. 'Victory in Japan' day marks the day that Japan surrendered to the Allies after almost six years of war.