

How to ... Become an environmentally friendly fundraiser

By Emma Rigby, Third Sector, 21 November 2007

Being a green fundraiser means more than having a clean conscience. It involves being cost-effective and relevant.

"The most environmentally sound thing you can do is be effective," says Robert Keitch, director of media channel development and environmental affairs at the Direct Marketing Association. "Being environmentally unfriendly means you have something that results in a low response rate."

Sophia Smith, direct marketing officer at Friends of the Earth, adds: "Running our fundraising campaigns in an environmentally sustainable way does not mean that we compromise quality or that it results in higher costs."

Resources are available, such as Green Matters, the first in a series of green guides from the DMA (www.dma.org.uk). Envirowise, a programme funded by the Government (www.envirowise.gov.uk) also helps organisations to reduce their environmental impact, and www.WRAP.org.uk helps businesses recycle. But here are some tips on becoming environmentally friendly.

1. Avoid waste

"The starting point is: don't send materials to people who aren't interested," says Keitch. "Keep supporter lists clean and updated. Remove opt-outs."

Keitch challenges charities to try to save 10 per cent of mail materials used and check that formats fit into Royal Mail's 'pricing in proportion' system.

A digital response cuts paperwork. Mailings could encourage people to donate online or by text message. The WWF tries not to send out letters with blank sides. So does Friends of the Earth.

Becki Jupp, senior campaign manager, retention and development, at WWF-UK, says: "All our work is printed on post-consumer waste paper. A lot of our packs are printed digitally on demand to avoid stock wastage, and we are looking into sending more communications out via email."

Green event company Seventeen is trialling a new British Standard for sustainable event management, BS8901. Director Andrew Williams suggests using technical solutions and reusing materials. "Rather than building a wooden stage set, can you use projections and lighting to create atmosphere?" he asks. "Do you really need the date of your event on your banners and branding? Leaving it off lets you use materials at future events."

Smith agrees: "We keep forms and standard print as generic as possible to avoid dating them."

2. Recycle

Think carefully about the materials being sent out, says Keitch. "Do they contain an appropriate level of recycled paper material?"

There is a range of different qualities and grades, so is it necessary for your material to go out on high-gloss paper? Friends of the Earth uses only ISO 14001 environmentally accredited printers, and sources its own print through a dedicated print buyer. Envelope windows are non-plastic and biodegradable. Inks and dyes are vegetable-based where possible. The charity limits the production of promotional items and aims to make them recyclable and biodegradable.

Smith says: "We have produced promotional globes made from potato starch, and wristbands from ethically sourced and naturally dyed cottons."

Williams says that agencies can do your recycling for you. Useful websites include: www.alocalprinter.com; www.mobiusgreenprint.com or www.kap.co.uk; www.bywaters.co.uk; and www.thefirstmile.co.uk.

3. Check contractors' suppliers

Ask suppliers to explain what environmental credentials they have; for example, the ISO14001, which monitors environmental impact. Charities should ask which environmental accreditation schemes they belong to and if they have corporate social responsibility policies.

Print suppliers should say what production methods they use - for example, whether their machines run on vegetable dye. WWF's Jupp says: "All our suppliers have to fill in a stringent environmental questionnaire. If they don't score highly enough, we won't use them. The questionnaire covers all of their policies, including purchasing of paper and supply chains."

4. Educate supporters

If you have done something environmentally sensitive tell everybody, advises Keitch. You can also add logos to remind consumers to recycle items.

5. Develop a green culture

Williams comments: "It's vital that you ensure your own internal way of working is in harmony with your event's green credentials. It will save you money."