

Small is big

By Richard Radcliffe FInstF Cert

It was the sight of a cheese roll that got me going. I was at the Legacy Marketing Group conference which was focusing on legacy events.

A lovely slide came up from the Bible Society about catering at these events: the photo was of a cheese roll.

Cheese rolls are dangerous at legacy events; truly. Imagine yourself at an event predominantly full of old people. A roll is usually quite hard to bite through. When you do bite your teeth hit a hard cheese like cheddar. Cheddar has the top rating for “glue effect”. So all these old people will take a bite and their dentures will end up on the end of the cheese roll. A crispy cheese roll is hell a hard crust can hurt gums.

One set of dentures out and the focus is on gums and not legacies. Crisps are not good either – they get stuck between teeth and you start your presentation with a load of people either sucking to get the crisps out or putting their fingers in their mouths trying to extricate the crisp.

It is one small detail which can make all the difference to the success of an event.

Whilst on events: chairs. Hard chairs will be incredibly hard on the bum and stop circulation. Too comfy chairs will induce sleep.

So please think: Bums and Gums

And if there is fruit put on tables please avoid any fruit with stones – it can be embarrassing for people to find and get the stone out.

So please think plums bums and gums.

Apples are dangerous unless peeled with a knife. Grapes and bananas are really good and the latter keep up energy levels so the prospects do not go to sleep.

And please test the PA system before the event. A sudden blast by the opening speaker can induce a heart attack.

Expectations

Every time I set out on my travels to focus groups I know when I expect to arrive – sat nav is ace (even the voice is rather soothing and reassuring. But whenever I am directed onto the M25 That horrible motorway around London) I hit an expectation which destroys my day. Invariably the rush hour has started and traffic builds up and I see overhead signs saying the maximum speed is 40. What really gets to me is this: I have been travelling for an hour at 10MPH.

My expectations have been totally ruined and I go into panic mode. My client expects me to arrive at 9.30am, the focus group starts at 10am and my ETA is 10.15am. It is, however, slightly less awful than meeting the expectations of your trustees. Legacy income forecasts often rely on one big

legacy. You are one legacy short of your target, it just happens to be the one bl**dy enormous one you normally get.

You only have to look at the detailed analysis of any charity's legacy income to see this. So, the day comes when you will be at a horrendous SMT meeting or Board meeting to explain a variance in income of £500,000 (which is NOT rare) because of one stupid person who has not enabled you to meet your target. And there just is not any solution at all.

Interestingly when I compared the income of just six random hospices there was an annual variance of almost £1 million from year to year for three of them. One legacy, one massive disaster, no solution.

Relationship development

I have arrived at my client (a small minute late but small enough not to matter) in north east England. Donors arrive – it is always, for me, a moment of apprehension and fascination. When we get to the question about current legacies in their Will one donor decides to really open up. In the last two weeks she has had two calls from “big cancer charities” (she names them but I feel it is wrong to name them in this article). Both charities asked one small question to their “pledger”: could you tell me the size of your legacy pledge? She says no and finished the calls really upset. She has decided to take both charities out of her Will and put in a local hospice because she knows they will never ask. She is still listed as a pledger with the “big ones”. Small question, big action.

Small words

Family versus loved ones. I don't know whether it is me asking more questions in focus groups about language but blow me down with a feather donors are getting so fussy about language. Oral explosions are really frequent about the word “family” (when the person does not have one and the charity is saying a family comes first) versus “loved ones” (“oh that is so yuck and sentimental”) to quote another donor. These words and others such as “those nearest and dearest to you” are becoming incredibly hated or loved (!) by donors depending on the cause and the quality of the relationship they have with “their charity”.

Is this donor fatigue getting just more open as charities ask more and more for legacies in ways which re increasingly hated or just increasingly regular.

Pledge - another small word

Pledge. One sign of asking people to pledge and your best prospects will say nothing but take one small action: reduce their giving or just boil internally and be REALLY unhappy. Unhappy enough to hold back from making a decision to leave a legacy.

Pledge = a polish, abstinence from alcohol, enrolment of an American President, legally binding even if you say it is not!

Time

In the UK one person dies every hour of every day and night in every week. One small moment and one big opportunity lost or gained. Every hour of every day and night someone will be losing

someone. Virtually every day of every week legacy prospect will be looking at legacy messages in newsletters or your website on in your dm programme . Do you look at your legacy communications thinking is this a good moment for everyone? Do you put a small little sentence which emphasises that your communication might have arrived at a bad moment. Just think, around 10,000 people die every week which is likely to affect at least 40,000 severely. How many got your legacy communication which made them angry and bitter. One small sentence, one big effect. Each hour your target for legacy income can be made or lost. Scary or what?

Grammar

An apostrophe in the wrong place. A sentence without a verb in it. Phrases in brochures such as “people leaving us a gift in their Wills”. All these drive older people over the edge of despair or in their words “drive us to distraction” (how many young people say this?). How often have I heard the phrase “that just isn’t good English” from frustrated donors. And if you start a sentence with the word “And” you are dead in the water.

When silver surfers visit your website and see bad English (but they use the word sloppy) their temperatures rise and trust in the charity is destroyed. Suddenly you are not like them and do not share the same values.

One small grammatical error – one unhappy donor.

When will we ever learn?

I might sound, and not for the first time, a grumpy older person but I am only reflecting the views I hear from Grumpy Old Donors – or GODS and maybe we should be better at listening to our GODS. And (sic) anyway I failed English Language O level. OK I admit it I failed twice, but even I am getting more grammatically pedantic as I grow older – or is it “as I age” or does it really matter?

Yes it does. As the recession bites into the pockets of supporters they are making BIG choices in a small second of their day: “I have to cut back my giving”; and the first charities to go are the ones which have irritated them: trust and confidence has been destroyed by the bad use of a small number of words.

Timing

Being on time is very important for the older generation and I am running late so I must