



Rule 1: Identify Your unique selling point (USP)

In a perfect world charities shouldn't have to ask for money. Everyone recognises good work, and in a world where pigs could fly, then charities would be rich and supporting their causes admirably. In an ever changing world, where corporations are decreasing at an alarming rate the charity sector is finding itself fighting more and more with others for the same pot of money. To be successful, you need to think outside of the proverbial box, and ask yourself why the corporation you want money from, would **want** to support your organisation. They receive **at least** 50 letters a week from charities wanting help. Ask yourself what it is about your organisation that would make them want to donate to it, rather than your greatest competitor. This should leave you in no doubt as to what your **Unique Selling Point** is (USP). Once you have worked out the USP, the next task is to work out how donating to your organisation will benefit the company donor; this is your selling tool to secure that deal.

The corporate-led charity I managed has a USP: it raises money for other local charities and is entirely funded by the corporate sector. The idea is still somewhat novel, and there is no other charity nationwide that solely exists to promote and raise money for other charities, and which is entirely financed by businesses. Even the current government has recognised the value of such a blue print; nevertheless it is very difficult to maintain and needs an annual service looking at its strategy to keep abreast of its priorities. In the 6 years I managed the charity, we raised over £500,000 for charities (some of that being part of a Trust that has been set up for local charities) and also organised staff volunteering activities over the value of over £1,000,000 plus corporate social responsibilities opportunities (christmas hampers, mentoring etc). When business people listened to me as I outlined our achievements (hand in hand with the fact that a large group of company members funded us), they liked what they heard and were often compelled to join up. It was empowering, fun, creative and it was **this** that was our USP, coupled with the fact that we were an efficient organisation running on the basis of 1.4 staff.

Rule 2: Do your homework before meeting the potential sponsor

When I first visited companies, asking them to contribute to the charity, I decided to buy a good suit as I was asking each company in turn to contribute £10,000 to the running of the organisation. If you look the part, it goes a long way to getting your audience to listen to you and let's face it, I was asking for a serious amount of cash...the curlers really did have to come out.

In requesting a meeting, I sent them a letter enclosing a document outlining the strategic aims and objectives of the charity for the next couple of years. I was inviting companies to become a part of that vision, and additionally, it set the tone for the meeting as well as illustrate our professionalism.

In addition, I researched each of the companies and the kinds of charitable concerns they had contributed to in the past and made this part of my script when discussing their requirements. Similarly, I was accompanied by one of the supporting company managing directors at all the meetings; in fact, he was a very influential figure and I guessed that if no one wanted to have a meeting with me, then at least they would be persuaded to see me if he came along too. After 13





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meetings, and yours truly being £800 lighter in the pocket for a hellishly expensive suit, it paid off; nine companies agreed to contribute and we were £90,000 better off.

Rule 3: What can you offer your corporate sponsor?

If you are successful in persuading a company to make a charitable donation, think about what you are able to offer, as a charity, in return. If you are being seen to consider the benefits for the donor company, you are already lifting yourself out of the crowd by being original, for companies are expected to give, in return for nothing. Alter your argument, consider their position and this will make you a genuine front runner. In my dealings with the corporate world, no two companies are alike; it wasn't an easy job keeping them all happy and the trick was identifying early on in the meetings what each company wanted from their involvement.

Some companies want to donate because they **believe in the concept** of supporting the local community at grassroots level; other companies want to **increase their profile** in the local community, some want to **boost their corporate social responsibility credentials** and others want to increase staff morale and retention and employ volunteering activities in ways to do this. Whatever the reason, rarely did anyone write a cheque for nothing. There is always a reason for what they do and it is your task to discover what that is.

What did we offer companies who contributed to the cause? Our calendar of fundraising activities was varied including:

- annual high profile comedy benefit featuring Jo Brand, Arthur Smith and Kevin Day
- annual charity ball at Crystal Palace FC
- corporate dinners
- The Apprentice-style competition
- christmas hamper collection.

All these activities offer a variety of opportunities for promoting the work of the companies, assisting them achieve their charitable goals in the following ways:

- branding of company logos in promotional material for events
- sponsorship deals for main events
- newspaper articles to promote events and publicise good work.

Rule 4: Success has many fathers

"Success has many fathers, failure is an orphan" is a wise saying I won't forget. Successful corporate sponsorship is not about writing a cheque, instead the more you layer the returns for the company the better your chances of success. The recipe for success is to involve them on as many levels as possible: donations, events, mentoring etc. The greater range of people involved, the greater the impact. The charity had regular breakfast meetings held early in the morning and everyone was encouraged to attend by a tray of sizzling bacon butties - far more attractive than the thought of listening to me so early in the morning. Such opportunities to "get involved" and make a difference were powerful attractions in themselves.



Somerset Fundraisers Group
c/o ViSTA, The Town Hall, Bow Street, Langport TA10 9PR
www.vistaproject.org.uk Tel: 08453 580372



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The meetings offer the chance to talk, do a little B2B, make decisions about the future of the charity and empower them to own the charity. Equally, a trusted group of people are on hand whom I can talk to and fling ideas onto them, testing the waters for a more public showing.

These "groupies" have opposing skills and different backgrounds but all very successful in their own fields.

Companies really do care about what happens to the cheque they write, and the better the feedback from the charity, the greater involvement and better the relationship you will build with them. After all, I believe we only work with people we like and if you surround yourself with people you like, then as the quote says, you will never be an orphan.

Top tips for corporate fundraising

1. Research the company you are targeting
2. Dress the part at the first meeting
3. Provide a professional presentation, offering opportunities for involvement on a number of levels
4. Listen to advice from your groupies
5. Don't give up

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