



Legacy Fundraising 2.0

Key lessons from the first two years of research

08 August 2022

Briefing Report



Introduction

Over recent years we have seen growing interest in using digital and social media to raise awareness of legacy giving, acquire and steward legacy donors. The digital space is accessible to charities of all sizes, offering amazing tools for reaching new audiences, telling stories and stimulating conversations. In a fast-changing environment, we have seen innovations across the legacy sector, with teams re-imagining their physical activity in a virtual world.

There's no doubt that digital legacy fundraising is here to stay. According to our latest learning circle survey, digital activities now account for one fifth of legacy fundraising budgets and 1 hour in every 6 spent by the team. All our members expect to see more resource invested in digital legacy fundraising over the next five years; 60% expect to see a lot more.

But as digital legacy fundraising techniques evolve and mature, the big questions remain. How can we best use digital and social media to inspire and inform legacy donors? How can we build, deepen and enrich relationships with our supporters online, to increase the likelihood of a legacy gift? And how can we continue to innovate in an ever-evolving digital ecosystem?

Legacy Fundraising 2.0 aims to drive discussion on the value of digital legacy fundraising. It is funded by a learning circle of member charities – 38 over the past 2 years – who agree to pool their budgets, data and experiences to help build evidence and insight.

Since its launch in 2020, Legacy Fundraising 2.0 has collected evidence on the scale and shape of digital legacy fundraising today, conducted 'social listening' research into the legacy conversations taking place on social media, examined baby boomers' attitudes and behaviours when engaging with charities online and set up a pilot dashboard of digital legacy benchmarks.

This report covers key lessons from the first two years of research and highlights six digital challenges for legacy fundraisers in the years ahead. We are grateful to our learning circle for agreeing to share these findings with the sector.

Digital legacy fundraising today

In Autumn 2020 and Spring 2022 we asked our consortium members to complete a questionnaire on their digital and social legacy activities, both current and planned. This is what they told us:

- The overwhelming majority expect digital and social legacy fundraising to be a growth area in the future. 77% have committed more resource over the past five years; 97% expect to spend more in the next five.
- As yet, just one in four consortium members have a known documented digital legacy fundraising strategy; many more say “we’re working on it!”
- On average, legacy teams spend around 1 in every 6 hours (16%) on digital activities. In the 2022 survey the largest legacy charities spent more of their time on digital than smaller ones (19% vs 12%).
- In 2022 we saw an increase in the proportion of legacy fundraising budgets spent on digital. In 2020 it was a fairly consistent 18%; this increased to an average of 21% in 2022.
- The main target audiences are those aged 55+. 86% of consortium members are targeting 55-64s, dropping back to 83% for 65-74s and 69% for the harder to reach 75+ age group. In addition, almost half (48%) also target Generation X (aged 45-54); just one charity was aiming at those under 45.
- Overall, the digital audience profile is younger than conventional legacy fundraising – hoping to inspire and inform the next generations of potential legacy donors, using media that work for them.
- Legacy prospects – both cold and warm – are the primary audience for most. 93% of clients target these groups; 30% also target legacy pledgers. One client clarified “*Our social media activity is mainly for the purposes of acquiring new prospects, whilst our digital activity is stewarding existing prospects*”.
- While a wide range of activities are being trialled across the consortium, just a few activities are believed to generate legacy prospects effectively. These are: Facebook paid ads, direction to free wills – online and face to face – and paid search (Google Adwords).
- On other activities the view is far more mixed. The jury is out on the effectiveness of email campaigns and organic social media posts, while paid ads beyond Facebook are still relatively rare.
- At the start of the project our learning circle charities and fundraisers reported a wide range of competence in digital and social media. In 2020 only 3% of respondents rated themselves to be ‘very competent’, though a further 50% considered themselves ‘fairly competent’. By 2022, perceived personal competence had grown, with 80% of respondents scoring themselves as at least ‘competent enough’. In general, digital and social skills within their organisation were rated more highly: in 2022 83% rated their charity as ‘very’ or ‘fairly competent’; none as ‘not very competent’.
- When asked what was holding them back from using digital and social media in their legacy fundraising, the most common obstacle (cited by 63% of respondents in 2022) was *competing for digital air space against other fundraising and comms teams*. The relationship between legacy and digital teams is a common thread running through our group discussions, and one we plan to tackle in future cycles of the Legacy Fundraising 2.0 learning circle.

Year 1: Talking about legacies on social media

To provide fundamental insights into the digital legacy environment and to lay the foundations for future analysis, we commissioned 'social listening' research on the UK legacy sector. This is the process of monitoring social media and digital channels for mentions of a topic of interest. It tracks and analyses conversations in order to understand them and explore how they might be influenced.

This project was based on a series of key words related to legacy giving and will making. It analysed the top digital platforms, including social media channels, blogs, forums, news sites and online publications.

Here are five key messages from the social listening exercise:

1. **Digital and social media enable us to reach out to new audiences.** Social media can help to raise awareness, normalise behaviour, prompt legacy prospects to act, and inspire entirely new gifts. And online search is used to find relevant information and facilitate will-making.
2. **Volumes of social content around legacy giving are low.** Compared to other areas, overall volumes of online conversations on legacies are tiny. For example, our in-memory social listening research in 2016 identified 20 times as much content!
3. **Social media content is being driven by 'vested interests'.** Awareness and engagement around legacy giving is being driven by charities (and wider stakeholder groups), rather than by consumers. We are talking to each other. Because so much content is being driven by our sector, when charity posts drop back, so do overall volumes, making patterns highly volatile year on year.
4. **The level of genuine User Generated Content (UGC) is very low.** Individual users are passing on content, not generating it. When they do post content, it's ad hoc, and they are not consistently engaging with it.
5. **Most online information is practical, how-to guidance.** The search results in relation to 'legacy donation' themed search terms predominantly comprised charities, financial and legal bodies informing and educating on the benefits of legacy donations. Many focused on the benefits of reduced inheritance tax or free wills. Online forums (such as MumsNet and Money Saving Expert) are often popular destinations for people to source advice. However, only 0.3% of total online discussions around legacy related topics occurred on forums, again anchoring around practical advice and information requests.

Year 2: Understanding online boomers

In 2022 we commissioned original research to gain a deeper understanding of how British boomers use digital and social media to engage with organisations in general and charities in particular. It also aimed to understand what makes potential legacy donors feel connection to the charities they support and what role digital communications play in promoting long term relationships.

The research involved detailed desk research into boomers' digital usage, followed by qualitative research to explore their behaviour and attitudes in more depth. The qualitative research was carried out using an online community forum, comprising 20 people aged 55-74 who were all engaging with charities online. Over the course of two weeks, different tasks were revealed every few days to enable us to understand more about their digital lives, their attitudes to and engagement with companies and charities online and their responses to selected online charity content, including legacy communications.

These are some key headlines:

Boomers are resourceful and connected

- Online content keeps boomers informed and connected and helps them lead active, fulfilling lives.
- Our audience was confident and pragmatic and was highly engaged online, with more than half claiming to pay more attention to content online than offline.
- While they are active on social media, they tend to be followers rather than creators or sharers – where they do share things, they still prefer doing it offline.
- Post coronavirus, boomers have become used to hybrid ways of living and working, including interacting with companies and organisations online, and they generally find it quicker, easier and more convenient than face-to-face or phone.

Boomers want clear, straightforward communications

- Digital information needs to be easy to navigate, clearly laid out, succinct and visual. If it wasn't, it was quickly passed by, ignored or deleted.
- Tone was also extremely important with our audience; boomers appreciated and paid attention to communications with a friendly, warm, approachable tone of voice.

Their relationship with charities is 'purposeful'

- When it comes to interactions with commercial companies, our audience's online relationship was very transactional, with a focus on staying informed about relevant products and services
- However, when it came to online relationships with charities, the motivation was more than simply functional; it was 'purposeful'. As well as information, our audience was also interested in outcomes.
- Boomers didn't want to receive charity communications for communication's sake. They wanted to see the important work a charity is doing (*relevance*) and they wanted to feel a personal *connection* to that work. They also wished to see how the charity is making a difference (*credibility*).
- So to be noticed and keep supporters engaged, charity's digital comms need to show relevance, connection and credibility. Taken together, these three factors generate long term commitment.

The research also highlighted the ways that boomers respond to different types of content – including emails, video, audio, webpages, newsletters and interactive content – and it became clear that the various channels play different roles in communicating with and engaging supporters.

To help put the research learnings into practice, we have developed a checklist that can be used by our consortium members when planning, developing and designing future legacy communications.

Six digital challenges for legacy fundraisers

Our research over the past two years has highlighted six key areas that legacy fundraisers need to consider as part of their digital strategy development:

- **Innovative platforms and approaches.** Many charities are well versed in legacy web pages, Facebook adverts, paid search and email campaigns; some are exploring organic posts, YouTube and podcasts too. But where next? With the popular channels becoming more crowded, expensive – and arguably less effective – what new platforms and techniques should we be considering? Are there lessons we can apply from other sectors, and other countries?
- **Making more noise about legacies.** Our social listening research identified a public reticence to talk about gifts in wills. Currently, volumes of content are low compared to other topics such as in-memory giving. How can we encourage more original User Generated Content to drive peer-to-peer sharing? Which new influencers and intermediaries can we work with to inspire legacy giving? And what more can we be doing collectively through digital and social to raise awareness and normalise behaviour?
- **From practicality to emotion.** IHT and free wills are useful hooks, but they are transactional, rather than emotional or aspirational. How can we use our powers of storytelling to generate interest? To inspire action? Can we create warm, positive, even quirky legacy-related stories – bringing the people behind the gifts to life?
- **The shift to always on.** National campaigns such as Remember A Charity Week and Free Wills Month can be a jumping off point for digital and social activities; a useful focal point both externally and internally. But with so many charities participating and advertising costs rising, it can be hard to achieve cut-through. Many teams are shifting to year-round, always-on activities to ensure legacy messages reach potential donors at a time that's right for *them*. Do we have the capacity, clout and collateral to respond quickly and creatively to legacy stories as they arise?
- **Building digital skills and buy-in.** In a competitive internal arena, legacy managers talk of their struggles to get sufficient space online, or to engage effectively with their digital teams. In our latest survey 'competing for air space' was seen as the greatest obstacle by 63% of our members (up from just 50% the year before) – perhaps reflecting the growing demands on digital teams and the failure of capacity to keep pace. How can we build our skills, confidence and expertise to drive digital legacy momentum? How can we and our digital colleagues help each other achieve our goals?
- **Measuring success.** Legacy fundraisers need to prove the effectiveness of their digital activities. Benchmarks can help to track performance over time, to compare results across peer charities, to test and learn. There's an array of digital benchmarks to choose from, but many are not relevant to legacy fundraising. Given our specific objectives, the older audience and the desire to foster long-term relationships, which are the right measures to use?

Legacy Fundraising 2.0: what's new for 2022/23?

The third cycle of Legacy Fundraising 2.0 will start in October 2022. The programme will focus on three key elements:

- Reviewing best practice digital communication strategies aimed at a boomer audience
- Evaluating the content and tone of our member charities' legacy web pages
- Updating and refining the digital legacy benchmarks developed in the 2021/22 programme.

For more information contact Caroline Waters: c.waters@legacyforesight.co.uk

Legacy Fundraising 2.0 learning circle: the first two years

Action for Children	Alzheimer's Research UK
British Red Cross	Brooke
CAMFED	Cancer Research UK
Cat's Protection	Dementia UK
Guide Dogs	GOSH
IFAW	Leeds Hospital Charities
Macmillan	Marie Curie
National Deaf Children's Society	NSPCC
National Trust	Oxfam
Parkinson's UK	PDSA
Princess Alice Hospice	Prostate Cancer UK
RNIB	RNLI
Royal Marsden Cancer Charity	RSPB
RSPCA	St Gemma's Hospice
Scope	Shelter
Stroke Association	Sue Ryder
Thames Valley Air Ambulance	UNICEF
Versus Arthritis	Woodland Trust
World Vision	WWF

Legacy Futures

Legacy Futures is a specialist group of gifts in wills and in-memory giving consultancies, helping over 200 charities worldwide to harness the transformative power of legacy giving.

[Legacyfutures.com](https://legacyfutures.com) | [@talkinglegacies](https://twitter.com/talkinglegacies)

Legacy Foresight

Legacy Foresight specialise in insight. They are best known for their benchmarking, forecasting and research projects, often working with consortiums of charities who join forces to gain greater understanding of the legacy and in-memory giving markets.

legacyforesight.co.uk

Legacy Voice

Legacy Voice help charities improve their marketing strategies and develop effective communications. They provide dedicated support throughout the donor journey, to kick-start or reboot your legacy or in-memory programme.

legacyvoice.co.uk

Legacy Link

Legacy Link support charities throughout the estate administration process with the support of a skilled and experienced legacy management team.

legacy-link.co.uk
