

tdp agency

DATA SO CLEAN YOU COULD LICK IT

THE PLAYBOOK

The **Quiet Levers** in Charity Marketing.

How to turn supporters into donors, donors into regulars, and regulars into advocates - without burning your list or your budget.

FOREWORD

Before we start.

A few honest words on what's in here and what isn't, so you know whether it's worth your hour.

This playbook came out of a pattern we noticed. Charity marketing leads kept calling us with variations of the same problem - open rates softening, donor file ageing, the last appeal underperformed and the board wants to know why.

When you go looking, the answer is rarely the campaign itself. Nine times out of ten it sits underneath - in the data, the segmentation, or the story the campaign was trying to tell. Get those three right and the surface numbers tend to follow on their own.

What's on the next pages is what we've picked up working with charities across food redistribution, cancer support, animal welfare and hospice care over the last few years. It's the same thinking we apply to our own client work, written down for once.

Who this is for

Marketing and fundraising leads who want a clear, sector-aware framework they can apply tomorrow.

CEOs, trustees and senior leaders who want to understand what good charity marketing actually looks like and what to ask of their team or agency.

What's in it

Six chapters. Two case studies. A benchmark table you can hold your own numbers up against. A 90-day checklist at the end.

Most charity campaigns don't fail at the send button. They fail **long before it – in the list, the segment, or the story.**

— THE VIEW FROM OUR SIDE OF THE DESK

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CHAPTER ONE

The state of charity marketing.

Charity is one of the strongest-performing sectors in email - and one of the most under-segmented. That gap is the opportunity.

The good news first. Charity email outperforms almost every commercial sector for open rates. Supporters opt in because they care, and they stay engaged longer than most consumer audiences. The trust is there.

The harder news: most charities are still emailing their full list with the same message, the same ask, on the same cadence - and watching engagement decay quietly in the background. The data tells the story.

28.6%

Sector average open rate (charity email)

3.29%

Sector average click-through rate

£58-66

Average return per 1,000 fundraising emails

Sources: Neon One Nonprofit Email Report 2024, M+R Benchmarks 2025.

The benchmarks that actually matter

If you're being asked to report on email, these are the numbers we'd hold ourselves and any agency to. Anything significantly below sector average warrants a conversation. Anything significantly above is worth understanding so you can do it again.

METRIC	SECTOR AVERAGE	WHAT "GOOD" LOOKS LIKE
Open rate	28.6%	32-38%
Click-through rate	3.29%	5-7%
Click-to-open rate	10.2%	15-20%
Donation page conversion	16%	20-25%
Unsubscribe rate	0.20%	Under 0.15%

What this means for you

If your numbers are below the sector average, the problem usually isn't reach. It's targeting, message, or both. The next chapter is how we fix that.

CHAPTER TWO

The TDP Framework.

Six steps, taken in order. They aren't sophisticated. Most charities stumble because they skip one, not because they don't understand it.

01**Audit before you act**

Look at your list before you plan your campaign. How fresh is the data? How segmented? When did each supporter last engage? You can't market to a list you don't understand. Most charities skip this and pay for it later.

02**Segment by behaviour, not just demographics**

A first-time donor needs a different email to a ten-year regular giver. A lapsed supporter needs a different email again. Demographic data helps; behavioural data (recency, frequency, value, engagement) matters more.

03**Educate before you ask**

Donors don't give because they're asked. They give because they understand the need, feel something, and know exactly what to do. Build that sequence into every campaign - context, then story, then ask.

04**Tell real stories, not statistics**

Numbers explain. People persuade. One named beneficiary will outperform any infographic. Every email should have a human at the centre of it.

05**Make the ask easy and specific**

"Donate now" is a button, not a strategy. "£12 feeds a family for a week" is a strategy. Tie the ask to a tangible outcome and remove every barrier between intent and action.

06**Nurture the donor, not just the campaign**

The first donation is the easy part. The second, third and fourth are where the value sits. Thank well, report back honestly, and treat every donor like the start of a relationship - not the end of a transaction.

CHAPTER THREE • CASE STUDY

Raising Hope.

How two very different causes - food redistribution and cancer support - both grew engagement and donations through better targeting and storytelling.

The brief

Two charities. Two audiences. Same job: turn awareness into action. Both clients had strong missions and engaged subscriber bases. What they needed was structure, story, and signal.

What we did

Segmented the audience by previous interaction - engaged, lapsed, newer signups. Built each campaign as a sequence - educational opener, story-led middle, urgent ask at the close. Wrote for the reader, not the brand - named beneficiaries, real outcomes, concrete amounts.

The results

30%**AVG OPEN RATE**

Charity A — above sector average.

12%**CLICK-THROUGH**

Charity A — 3.6x sector benchmark.

+25%**DONATION UPLIFT**

Charity B — vs previous campaigns.

What worked

- **Emotional storytelling.** Charity A's "Young Families" series put real people at the centre. That carried the click-through rate.
- **Timing tied to a moment.** The "End of Summer" appeal worked because it linked the ask to a specific period of need, not a generic call for support.
- **Behavioural personalisation.** Dynamic content reflected previous engagement, so each subscriber felt recognised rather than blasted.
- **One ask per email.** Clear, specific, and tied to a tangible outcome. No competing CTAs.

CHAPTER THREE • CONTINUED

What we **learned.**

The lessons that travelled across both campaigns - and the ones we now apply everywhere.

Urgency converts - when it's real

"Limited time" appeals in the closing stages of each campaign drove the steepest conversion lifts. The caveat: the urgency has to be genuine. A real deadline, a real moment, a real reason to act now. Manufactured countdowns get spotted instantly and damage trust on the next send.

Consistency builds trust faster than volume does

Both campaigns succeeded because they showed up reliably without overwhelming the inbox. Three considered emails will always beat seven rushed ones. Cadence is a brand signal in its own right.

The donor journey doesn't end at the donation

The biggest miss most charities make isn't acquisition - it's what happens after the first gift. Charity B's increase wasn't just about the campaign emails. It was reinforced by what came next: timely thank-yous, honest reporting, and a clear path to becoming a regular giver. The campaigns earned the donation. The post-campaign nurture earned the second one.

The first donation is the easy part. The **second one is where the value sits.**

— CHAPTER 3 • KEY TAKEAWAY

What we'd do differently next time

Two things, honestly. First, we'd build the SMS layer in earlier - one well-timed message at the close of a campaign window can lift donation page conversion materially, and it's still under-used in the sector. Second, we'd push harder on the lapsed-supporter segment. There's nearly always a 10-15% lift sitting in there that gets overlooked in favour of chasing new signups.

CHAPTER FOUR • CASE STUDY

From **lead magnet** to **lifetime donor**.

How a free first-aid guide for pet owners built a 4,200-strong supporter pipeline - and a credible route to regular giving.

The brief

An animal welfare charity needed to grow its supporter base outside of its existing donor file. Cold donation appeals weren't going to land - the audience didn't know the brand well enough yet. We needed a softer first ask that built relevance before money entered the conversation.

The approach

We led with value, not need. A free downloadable first-aid guide for cat and dog owners - genuinely useful content, professionally produced, designed to be shared. Promoted through targeted paid social and a small partner-list email push. Once a supporter downloaded the guide, they entered a nurture sequence: education, story, then a graduated ask.

CAMPAIGN SNAPSHOT

Free First-Aid Guide → Donor Pipeline

Four-stage nurture sequence over six weeks. Educational welcome, behind-the-scenes story, "what your donation does" explainer, then a tangible single ask tied to a specific cost.

4,200+

SUPPORTERS ADDED

32%

OPEN RATE

5.4%

CTR

23%

CLICK-TO-LEAD

The economics

The headline number was £4.10 returned for every £1 spent on the campaign - measured across acquisition cost and first-year donor value combined. That's well above sector blended ROI for cold-prospect work, and it's because the lead magnet shifted the relationship from "stranger asking for money" to "trusted source you already engage with" before the donation ask came.

The audience insight

The strongest-converting segment turned out to be women aged 35-55 with at least one pet in the household, opening on weekday mornings between 7-9am. Knowing that reshaped the rest of the year's send schedule.

CHAPTER FOUR • CONTINUED

Why the lead magnet model works.

The lead-magnet model isn't new, but it's still surprisingly rare in charity acquisition - which is partly why it tends to work when applied properly.

The shift in mindset

Most charity acquisition spend goes on appeals - "give now, here's why." That works on a warm audience. On a cold audience, it loses every time to a marketer who turned up with something useful in their hand.

A first-aid guide for pet owners. A grief support pack for a hospice. A weekly recipe email from a food redistribution charity. The format changes; the principle doesn't. Lead with value, earn the right to ask.

How to know if a lead magnet is right for you

- **Your cause has a natural information gap** the public would benefit from filling. (Almost every cause does.)
- **You have the in-house knowledge** to produce something genuinely authoritative. Re-skinned generic content gets spotted.
- **You can commit to a nurture sequence afterwards.** A lead magnet without follow-up is just a list-build. The value is in what happens next.
- **You have the data discipline** to track from download to first donation. Without that, you're guessing at ROI.

What it doesn't replace

Lead-magnet acquisition is one channel in a portfolio. It doesn't replace your warm-donor appeals, your major-donor work, or your legacy programme. It's how you keep the top of the funnel filled with people who could become any of those things in time.

CHAPTER FIVE

The five most common mistakes.

After enough projects, the same patterns start showing up. The ones below are the most common - and the most worth checking against your own setup.

01. Treating the list as one audience

The biggest single mistake. A new supporter, a five-year regular giver, and a lapsed donor are three different people. The day you stop sending them the same email is the day your numbers move.

02. Confusing activity with results

"We sent twelve emails last quarter" is not a result. Donations, reactivations, regular giving signups, average gift value - those are results. If your reporting leans heavily on send volume and open rate alone, you're measuring the boat, not the destination.

03. Asking before educating

Cold lists converted with a donation ask in email one will perform a fraction of what they would after two or three value-led touches. The temptation to ask immediately is understandable. The data on it is clear.

04. Underestimating the thank-you

The thank-you email is, statistically, one of the highest-opened pieces of communication you'll ever send. Most charities treat it as a transactional receipt. Treat it as the start of the next conversation instead.

05. Ignoring the data hygiene problem

Stale records, duplicates, bounced addresses left in the file, unsubscribes not honoured cleanly. None of this is glamorous. All of it pulls down your deliverability, your open rate, and ultimately your sender reputation. Fix the plumbing before you redesign the kitchen.

If any of these sound **uncomfortably familiar – good. That's the easiest fix you'll make this quarter.**

— CHAPTER 5 · THE HONEST BIT

CHAPTER SIX

Your next 90 days.

A practical checklist for the quarter ahead. Each task is half a day or less to scope - get them done before the next appeal cycle and the campaign itself runs cleaner.

Days 1-30 • Audit and benchmark

- ☐ Pull a full export of your supporter list and tag by recency, frequency, value, and last engagement.
- ☐ Run your last four campaigns against the benchmark table in Chapter 1. Note where you're above and below.
- ☐ Identify your lapsed-supporter segment (no engagement in 12+ months). Note the size. This is your reactivation pool.
- ☐ Check your unsubscribe rate, bounce rate, and spam complaint rate. Anything trending upwards needs attention before the next send.

Days 31-60 • Segment and structure

- ☐ Build three core segments: engaged, casual, lapsed. Start there. Add complexity once the basics are working.
- ☐ Map your next campaign as a sequence rather than a one-off. Educate, story, ask - even if it's only three emails.
- ☐ Identify one real beneficiary story to anchor the next campaign. Get permission early.
- ☐ Write one clear, specific call to action tied to a tangible outcome. Test it against your default "donate now".

Days 61-90 • Test, measure, refine

- ☐ Run the campaign. Track to the benchmarks in Chapter 1, not against your own historical average alone.
- ☐ Set up a proper thank-you sequence. Three emails minimum. Treat it as a campaign in its own right.
- ☐ Review the lapsed-supporter segment with a tailored reactivation email. Even a 5% recovery rate funds itself.
- ☐ Book in a quarterly data hygiene review. Not glamorous, materially important.

If you only do one thing

Pick the audit. Everything else builds on knowing what you've actually got in your list. You can't fix what you haven't measured.

Want a hand **applying** it?

If something in here resonated, or if it raised a question about your own setup, we'd be glad to talk it through. No pitch deck, no obligation, no follow-up unless you want one.

FREE FOR PLAYBOOK READERS

A 30-minute data and campaign review

Bring us one recent campaign and one segment of your list. We'll spend half an hour with you and tell you where we think the biggest gains sit. That's it.

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