

# A Fundraising Carol

# Christmas Past

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By Mark Phillips,  
MD and Founder,  
Bluefrog

## 'The Ghosts of Christmas Past are a Fundraiser's Best Friend'

Christmas is the time when fundraisers get excited about the sound of a man or woman trudging through the snow struggling under the weight of a sack full of gifts. Only for us, it's the post delivery that gets our hearts beating a little faster. Not the thought of Santa Claus.

That's because Christmas is the season of goodwill. It's a time when we can expect our donors to be at their most generous. CAF in the UK have found that as Christmas appeals start dropping through letterboxes, the number of people giving rises to over 57% of the population (and to almost 80% of the over 65s).

But why does Christmas have such a big impact on our attitudes to giving? Of course, the celebration of Christ's birth is hugely important, but in the secular society within which we live, is that explanation enough?

Not to my mind.

Christmas is far more than a religious festival. It is a multi-dimensional event that has happiness as a supreme goal – often defined by consumption. But to fully understand what constitutes a happy Christmas, we have to identify those factors that actually do make us happy.

Tim Kassler and Kennon Sheldon of the University of Missouri looked at this very subject in their 2002 paper, *What makes for a Merry Christmas*.

They found that *"Despite the fact that people spend relatively large portions of their income on gifts, as well as time shopping for and wrapping them, such*

*behaviour apparently contributes little to holiday joy"*.

What mattered most was celebrating with close friends and family. And the focus on materialism did nothing more than distract *"people from the true meaning of the season."*

This was particularly pronounced amongst older respondents who reported greater feelings of happiness largely explained by the opportunity of spiritual and physical reconnection.

And in my considered opinion, the chance to reconnect is why Christmas is such a powerful driver for giving to charity.

If you were brought up in a Christian country, you'll have many memories of Christmas. And when any of us think about Christmas, we think about traditions. Not just national traditions, but, more importantly, family ones. Where were your presents going to be on Christmas morning? Under the tree? In stockings by the fireplace? In a sack at the foot of your bed?

What time do you open presents?  
As soon as you wake up? After breakfast?  
After church? After lunch?

Do you have Christmas dinner or lunch?  
Do you make a toast before you eat?

The list of traditions that families adhere to is almost endless and it's very rare that any will be broken without good reason. Even though there's obviously nothing stopping us from changing the way that we celebrate Christmas other than that profound and deep link to the past.

And as fundraisers we should learn from ... continued

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this. This need for tradition can be a very powerful driver for giving.

Let me give you an example.

For several years at Bluefrog, we have included a sheet of sticky gift tags with a Christmas appeal produced for one particular client. Though the appeals differ, each year the stickers are the exactly same. They feature old fashioned, cheesy images of snowmen, reindeer and Santa Claus.

A few years back we were asked to bring them up to date. We created a modern set that many of the younger people involved in the project loved. Luckily we tested them alongside the traditional design. The new stickers suppressed response by a significant margin.

Why would a new set of Christmas stickers have such an impact?

The answer is simple. Many donors had incorporated the use of our stickers in their Christmas traditions for many years and by changing them we had broken a link with the past. The tags helped make the giving of presents a richer experience because they bridged the gap between the commercial and the charitable sides of the season. And the new design simply didn't have the same resonance as the original version.

By responding to this need to reconnect with the past, we can create far more powerful appeals than those that simply present a request for help. We can actually offer an antidote to the commercialisation of the season that so many donors (particularly older ones) dislike.

So my first piece of advice is to pull out your archives and guard books. And use them to build an appreciation of how your donors have previously engaged

with charities over the years. If you haven't got an archive of your own, visit SOFI or take a look at this Pinterest board which features hundreds of ads going back almost two centuries.

You'll see similar themes repeated decade after decade. Themes that when incorporated in your appeals, can significantly increase your income.

Take this advertisement from Barnardo's (top right) from 1927 asking donors to play the role of Santa Claus and buy Christmas food for an orphan or destitute child. Below it is an advertisement from the NSPCC produced in the 1990s that has a similar message. It might not be particularly innovative, it might even seem boring to some, but it's just what many donors – particularly older ones – find motivating.

Even now, the Salvation Army in the UK uses a similar technique. Each and every Christmas they ask their donors for exactly the same thing – to buy a Christmas meal or box full of food and toys for poor families. Just take a look at their annual report and you'll see that they generate an ROI from their donors that puts most (if not all) big British charities to shame.

As I've already said, there's nothing particularly clever about the technique. But it taps into, and helps satisfy, the donors fundamental need to reconnect to their past and the true meaning of Christmas. I am still surprised that it isn't more widely used. But I'd imagine that there are few organisations willing to stick with an approach for the necessary number of years to turn it in to a tradition in its own right.

And that's the problem.

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## DR. BARNARDO'S HOMES



WILL YOU BE SANTA CLAUS TO AN ORPHAN & DESTITUTE CHILD?

7,799

Children being supported.

Please send

A CHRISTMAS GIFT

of 10/-

to feed one child

for ten days at the Christmas Season. Cheques and Orders payable to Dr. Barnardo's Homes Food Fund and crosses, and Parcels of Toys, Clothing and Blankets, may be sent to Dr. Barnardo's Homes, 57, Barnardo House, Stepney Causeway, London, E. 1.

This Christmas the NSPCC will be helping many frightened, desperate children who are the victims of neglect. £25.00 can begin to protect a child from abuse. If you can send us that sum, using the coupon below we know of plenty of children who, for the first time in their lives would like to say 'Thanks, Santa.'

**For this lonely, neglected little boy Father Christmas exists. If you've got £25 to spare, it's you.**

I WANT TO HELP A CHILD RIGHT NOW:  
I enclose my Cheque/Postal Order for:  
 £15  £20  £25  £

I would like to donate by Access/Visa, expiry date: \_\_\_\_\_  
ACCOUNT NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Send your donation to: Christopher Brown: Ref 911341  
NSPCC FREEPOST, London EC1B 1QQ.  
Or call free on 0800 777696.  
NAME: Mr/Ms/Ms/Ms \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
POSTCODE \_\_\_\_\_ **NSPCC**

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There are many similar ideas just waiting to be rediscovered and developed. But your starting point when developing a new idea should be to reject the idea of producing different appeals each year. Instead I'd advise you to focus on developing a campaign that can underpin your Christmas appeals for a decade or two.

In my experience, the more you use an idea, the stronger it becomes. Yes, creative will need to be refreshed, but as long as the core approach and visual identity remain the same, it will grow and grow, year after year.

So as with shopping, start planning for Christmas 2015 early. As soon as you get back to work in the New Year, start to learn about what Christmas really means to your donors and find out what they feel it lacks. Then build a campaign aimed at giving them just what they want.

It won't be easy. It will certainly require a great deal of hard work. But if you can develop an idea that cements your charity into your donors' psyche as truly part of Christmas, you'll be repaid many times in terms of extra income and engagement in the coming years.

It seems apt to leave the final word on this matter to Charles Dickens, who helped invent so much of what we take for granted about the season. He summed up it's power quite neatly when he said, "Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childhood days, recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth, and transport the traveler back to his own fireside and quiet home!".



## About the author

**Mark Phillips** is founder and MD of Bluefrog, the longest established fundraising agency in private hands in the UK. He started out his career at ActionAid in 1988 before moving on to YMCA in 1990 where he became Head of Fundraising. He set up Bluefrog in 1997 with the goal of creating the agency he would want to employ. As well as managing Bluefrog, Mark blogs at

queerideas.co.uk, curates the pinterest board, Old Charity Ads and can be found on Twitter as @MarkyPhillips. He once thought he knew everything there was to know about fundraising, but now realises he knows next to nothing. His proudest moment in fundraising was being described as a Brand Grump by the managing director of another agency.

# Christmas Present

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By Tony Elischer,  
Founder, THINK  
Consulting Solutions

## 'Times are overtaking us and we should act now'

The biggest story around the Western World in December, is not the pleasure of the build up to Christmas, the expectation of connecting with family and friends or the joy of giving and being part of community, it is the unbelievable consumerism of Black Friday that has now stretched over a weekend and includes Black Monday. A new phenomenon that started in 2000 in America and follows Thanksgiving Day; this year in the US 133 million shoppers spent \$51 billion over the weekend. In the UK it was not just about the spending but the extra police required to control mob scenes as people practically fought for bargains.

Black Friday is the ultimate demonstration of how consumerism has literally consumed our society with people wanting more and often losing sight of what they really need. As countries tip into being developed, economically successful markets, we see this outlook arising all over the world, people pursuing the 'good life' regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender or religion. Christmas was always the key point in the year for giving and thinking of others but now it competes with a different mind-set and context, which is growing at a faster rate than the desire to give to others. At end of the Festive Season 2014 it will be time to reflect on results and ask if the same old mailing or telephone campaigns are keeping track with the market and truly delivering; in my view the same as the previous year plus 5% isn't really enough. Remember the old mantra, "if it ain't broke, why fix it?" but the point is, we need to fix it before it

breaks! especially with more than 30% of charitable giving happening in December.

If modern life accelerates at Christmas, we need to accelerate too and rethink how we 'carve out' mind and heart share and keep giving as an integral part of the DNA of Christmas. We need to invest in greater insight into the world around Christmas time. It is not just about big campaigns or initiatives it is about greater integration into everyday life at a busy but happy time of the year. Communication channels become saturated as commercial players fight for position, many people are busier with less time to think and plan, and the weather changes the mood and outlook of people.

**#Givingtuesday** has been a great example of cross sector co-operation, encouraging giving and harnessing the power of social networks to reach further and deeper. But as a global day for giving is it a destination or should we think of it as a start to a month where charities raise their game and push harder to keep a strong presence in different communities, segments and audiences.

So where should you focus? What should you look for? The future is not simply looking inside at your donors and current strategy, it is about looking outside and trying to map what people are doing, how people are thinking, where people are and what they are likely to be responsive to:

- Think through the different age groups – millennials are more responsive at Christmas and more willing to take action and to reach out to their networks.



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- Think of how to engage people in fun, news, challenges or thought without necessarily making an ask – multi channels means more opportunities to engage and not just solicit.
- We've been talking about channel mixing and integration for years but now it has to be reality; in 2015 the UK will be the first country to spend over 50% of total advertising online.
- When people do give early for Christmas think about fresh ways to thank people to bring them true joy in their giving. Surprise people with your thanks; try over thanking.
- Ask people to reach out to others and share your message and vision – in the world of social networks donor get donor/ member get member are back in the mix of marketing options/asks.
- Think CHRISTMAS, think creativity; a time of imagination so find space to unleash that imagination to inspire and delight people.

Philanthropy has to shine at Christmas, it is an integral part of Christmas, but I do feel that times are overtaking us and we should act now while 'things are not broken' and reinvent the position of every cause and every vision we represent. Christmas is a time of joy and joy is at the centre of giving, so this is one partnership worth fighting to retain.



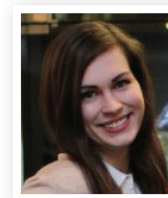
## About the author

**Tony Elischer** has over 30 years hands on experience in the not for profit sector. He has been a consultant for the last fourteen years working at the highest level across a wide range of causes and organisations and is the founder of the leading international consultancy THINK Consulting Solutions. He is an

internationally regarded expert on fundraising and marketing, having extensive experience of helping charities worldwide with strategy, fundraising, management and troubleshooting. In the last 12 months he has worked in over 20 countries.

# Christmas Future

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By Rory Green,  
Associate Director,  
Advancement for the  
Faculty of Applied  
Science at Simon  
Fraser University

'Do you think, growing up, you could have imagined the kind of Christmas we have today?'

Think back to Christmas when you were a kid. What did that look like? How did you celebrate?

How much of your Christmas shopping was done online?

How many relatives did you Skype with on Christmas morning?

How many friends send you Holiday wishes on Facebook or Twitter?

How many Christmas dinners were instagramed?

How many iPhones were wrapped and put under the tree?

How many e-appeals did you get from charity?

Like me, you probably answered: **"none"**.

Do you think, growing up, you could have imagined the kind of Christmas we have today? I certainly couldn't. Whether the Christmases of your childhood happened 20, or 50 years ago, back then we couldn't have conceived of what I mentioned above.

So I am not going to pretend to tell you what Christmas will look like in 2064. It's impossible to predict the future, but there are some emerging trends I think we need to take note of:

## The Rise of Wearable Tech:

Google glass, the Apple Watch, fit bits – these are just the beginning. Advances in nano technology will see greater integration of fashion and technology in the growing wearable tech industry. Just as the rise of the

mobile device changed how we communicate, so too will this new wave of technology.

## Big Data and Machine Learning:

big-data Big data, simply put, means data from different sources and databases can be stored in one location and analysed. Machine learning means computers are getting better at thinking critically about that data and making sophisticated theories and recommendations. This allows for the creation of incredibly customized and personalized communications for thousands of people at once. Imagine websites that evolve and adapt based on who was using it. That's where this trend is taking us.

Change, and the rate at which it happens, will continue to accelerate. And as that happens, the amount of time we spend interacting with technology will increase. The two trends mentioned above will mean we can carry technology around with us, on our bodies, on our clothes, on our faces, all the time – collecting huge amounts of real time information which will be collected and analyzed in ways we never thought possible. Charities who are smart, and pay attention to things like data and testing will have more information at their disposal than ever before.

I suspect in 25 years, the internet as we know it will be fundamentally different. I don't think Facebook and Twitter will be around anymore. New platforms for commutation will come and go – and we as non-profits will need to find ways



# Christmas Future ..continued

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to be adaptable and adjust. The need to break down silos and have integrated multi-channel communications will be increasingly important.

So, am I telling you that the future is digital? Well, not quite.

Let's go back to your childhood Christmas, or even the Christmas of your parents and grandparents.

Did they send and receive Christmas cards in the mail?

Did they give gifts to loved ones and friends?

Of course they did. And I am sure those things aren't going away any time soon.

I am not sure what the future will bring – but I am certain the importance of relationships will still be key. Donor retention will still matter, and so will our donor's desire to feel like they are making a difference in the world.

The future in many ways belongs to those who can be adaptable enough to change with new technologies while mastering the basics of good fundraising that have been around for hundreds of years.

So, what do you think Christmas Future will bring?

**P.S.** Another change we need to be aware of is that more and more not all of your donors will celebrate Christmas. Think about all of the effort we put into Christmas greetings and messages – how much time do you focus on Lunar New Year? Diwali? Hanukkah? If you want to embrace diversity and donors from other cultures, it's time to start thinking beyond the fat man in the red suit.



## About the author

**Rory Green** has been fundraising since the age of 10, when she volunteered to help run her school's annual Bike-A-Thon for juvenile cancer research. Fundraising became her vocation at 14, when she lost a friend to Leukemia. Rory Green has been in the philanthropic sector for over eight years and is currently the Associate Director, Advancement for the Faculty of Applied Science at Simon Fraser

University. Rory has also worked in major and corporate giving at BCIT and the Canadian Cancer Society. Her passion is donors. How to listen to them. How to talk to them. How to help them feel better about themselves through philanthropy than they ever thought possible. In her spare time Rory is the founder and editor of Fundraiser Grrl, the fundraising community's go-to source for comic relief.