

# USING SIMPLE DIGITAL TOOLS TO DRIVE POWERFUL FUNDRAISING

## CANCER RESEARCH SOCIETY: YEAR-END CASE STUDY

In 2018 the Cancer Research Society/Société de recherche sur le cancer engaged Blakely to enhance their fundraising results by both shifting their organizational outreach to a digitally-led fundraising model and shifting their donor behaviour from transactional, offline giving (heavily premium-focused) to high-value, mission-based giving. In order to achieve these longer-term, overarching business objectives, we began by founding CRS' new model of fundraising in a pillar campaign at year-end, which included email, digital ad assets in-market, and video. This campaign was first launched in 2018 and then refreshed in 2019, maximizing CRS' investment over 2 years. The result of the new approach in year-end drove 53% more gross revenue than projected in year 1, with a 200% higher average gift than seen across CRS' offline channels. Refreshing the original campaign in year 2 saw a 40% growth in revenue year-over-year (57% growth in email revenue, 17% growth in digital media revenue) with a 7.2% conversion rate across digital ads in-market and a 24.55% conversion rate in email. Over 2018 and 2019, CRS realized an approximately 4x return on investment (ROI).

### BACKGROUND:

The Cancer Research Society/Société de recherche sur le cancer (CRS), is a charitable organization based in Montreal, Quebec and has been active for over 75 years, since 1945. CRS' prime differentiator is that they are 100% research. That is, every dollar donated to CRS is used to fund select Canadian research projects that show significant potential to improve the prevention, detection, and/or treatment of cancer.

By 2018, CRS had built a large donor file; however, it was also a file that was older, exclusively direct mail responsive, and heavily premium responsive – with a more transactional relationship between CRS and their donors. Moreover, CRS' reach within Canada was relatively limited. While CRS was well known in Quebec, awareness of CRS was significantly less in English-speaking Canada (rest-of-Can, ROC).

When CRS engaged Blakely in 2018, it was to fulfill two overarching business objectives:

1. Shift fundraising (and, by extension, marcomm) outreach to be digitally-led
2. Shift CRS' donor file from transactional to more high-value, mission-based giving

This began with the development and execution of a 2018 year-end campaign, which was then refreshed and re-deployed in 2019, maximizing the investment with significant, positive results in both years.

### BLAKELY'S ROLE:

- Complete strategic development of the 2018/2019 year-end campaign
- Strategic oversight and inter-agency management
- Complete project management from ideation through execution and reporting
- Creative/copy development of all assets, including campaign video, email journey, ad assets, and campaign landing page
- Campaign management and in-market optimization
- Results analysis and reporting



## THE SOLUTION:

To meet CRS' longer term business objectives, we needed to develop a fundraising strategy that would empower CRS to enter the digital market with a compelling, competitive fundraising offer optimized to inspire donors to give a one-time-gift (OTG) online in support of CRS in both the French-speaking market in Quebec where they were well known, and the English-speaking ROC market where there was less awareness. To achieve this, there were three critical considerations:

1. **Timing:** This would be CRS' first foray into market under a new model of fundraising; to set ourselves up for success, we needed to tap into major "seasons of giving".
2. **Fundraising Proposition:** Both because CRS was elevating their presence in the digital market and because we needed to speak to a market where they weren't as well-known, we had an awareness barrier to overcome – a strong case for support, or reason to give, would be critical to converting new donors.
3. **Story:** People give to people; to be successful, we needed to express CRS' fundraising proposition through a highly compelling story that would validate through testimony the urgent need to donate to CRS today.

Taking these considerations into account, we developed a pillar campaign positioned at the most generous season of giving in the calendar year — year-end, which intersects Giving Tuesday. The case for support was rooted in CRS' core value proposition, and expressed through the emotional story of a mother and children who had lost her husband and their father, respectively, to cancer — demonstrating the importance of cancer research, and the need to donate to CRS today in order to fund more research and help outsmart cancer.

This digital-first campaign was designed to access the untapped potential of CRS' message online, across channels, and was highly successful (see *Results* below).

On a tactical level, this campaign was expressed across a number of channels, selected to optimize a carefully developed balance of awareness, conversion-focused messaging, and remarketing, and included:

- CRS' owned email audience
- Paid social media, specifically Facebook & Instagram
- Google Display & Responsive advertising
- Paid search advertising, across the Google & Bing networks
- YouTube advertising

In 2018, the results of this campaign were so successful that in 2019 we focused on amortizing the investment further by refreshing and redeploying the 2018 campaign in 2019, including updating video assets with French-language versions designed to amplify the connection of the campaign with CRS' engaged French-speaking audience, both owned and public.

Results from the 2018 and 2019 year-end campaigns can be seen in the below *Results* section.

# RESULTS:

## 2018

Original assets — first CRS campaign of its kind in partnership with Blakely

- 38,000 new visitors to CRS' primary website
- Exceeded projections on gross revenue by 53%
- \$85 average gift (over 200% higher than avg. gift in direct mail)
- Media spend saw a 3:1 return

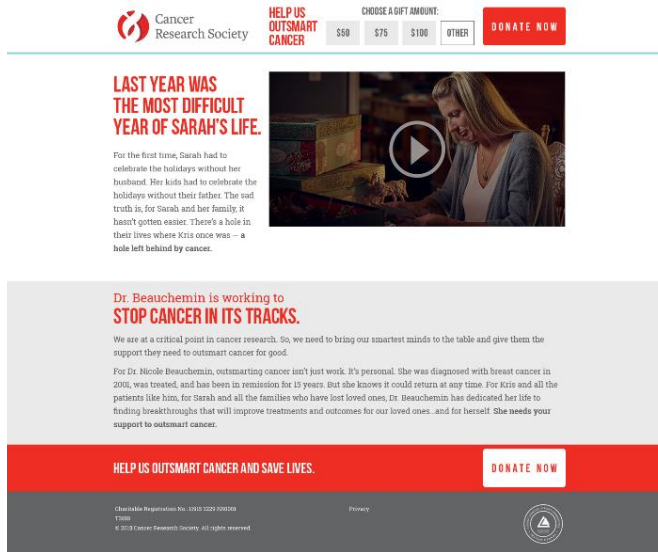
## 2019

Refreshed assets — all results are growth over 2018's campaign

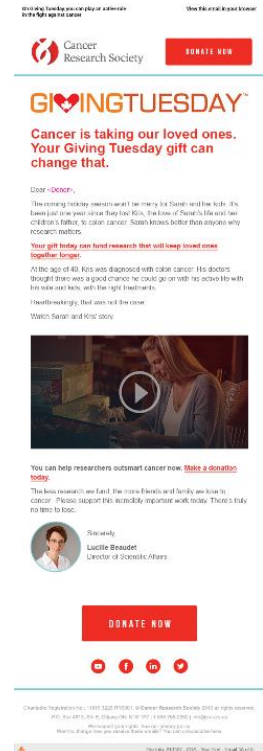
- 5% increase in new visitors to CRS' primary website
- 40% growth in revenue
  - 57% growth in email revenue
  - 17% growth in digital media revenue



Ads



Landing Page



Email

### Additionally

- 7.2% conversion rate in digital media
- 24.55% conversion rate in email
- Approximately 4x ROI over 2018 and 2019

One notable aspect here is that the year 2 refreshed year-end campaign outperformed year 1, a clear indicator of the significant opportunity in maximizing the investment in campaign assets.

## 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS:

### 1. Powerful fundraising comes down to strategy, not channel:

When it comes to digital campaigning, channels have become fairly standardized as connected to the outcomes you want to achieve (e.g. Google Display builds awareness, Facebook drives conversions, LinkedIn generates registrations). Moving the needle on your digital campaigning isn't about discovering a "new" channel, because the competitive field of digital fundraising (as it stands today) has been thoroughly mapped. Of course, it is possible that as new channels do emerge (e.g. virtual reality) there will be a transient opportunity to "own" a channel, but with the global pandemic's disruption of offline channels having, as a consequence, created significant focus on the online opportunity for fundraising, it's safe to say that any opportunity to own a new channel will be fleeting at best.

Instead, to move the needle on your fundraising results your investment needs to be in building or partnering for the best possible strategic use of channels, in order to place the most compelling content in front of the right audience, with the right balance of touchpoints to move them to give.

**Where to begin:** It frequently takes more than one touch to move a donor to give, often across multiple touchpoints, particularly if they're a new prospective donor. Begin by assessing your campaign audiences (who are they? where do they live?), then map out the touchpoints your campaign will connect with them on in order to move them to make a gift. As you'll find, and as you can see in the case of CRS, the tools and channels are simple, how they interact effectively is where the real work begins.

### 2. Your strongest content starts with your value proposition:

Content plays a significant role in every campaign. Your content — including the stories you tell, the positioning of need, and the way you deliver your ask — is absolutely essential to moving donors to make a gift. The question is, how do you develop your strongest content? The answer to this question comes back to your value proposition — which answers the critical question of: *why should donors give to your organization?*

By taking your mission's core value proposition down a level to a specific campaigning proposition, you can speak to the fundamental motivations that drive donors to give, and position it as a specific problem your donors can solve through your organization. Your strongest content is content that clearly answers the questions: Why give? Why now? And why [insert your organization here]?

**Where to begin:** If this approach to content development is completely new, start by building out a broad model expressing why donors choose to take action and give to your organization. Blakely has a model which has been very successful — to learn more reach out to Amy Pawluk at amy@blakelyjourney.com.

Once you have this broad model expressing your donors' reason to give, use the model as the standard to measure your stories, your asks, creative assets (images, video), and any additional content up against. All content should connect back to and reinforce your value proposition. In the context of our work with CRS, that meant that our video had to demonstrate that the loss suffered by the family could be avoided, for others in future, through advances in research. It also meant that every ask had to connect the donor's taking action to improvements in the prevention, detection, and treatment of cancer through world class research by world class Canadian scientists.

### 3. Optimizing investment means maximizing results:

A common missed opportunity across both offline and online channels is the premature retirement of valuable content that can continue to deliver a compelling case for support. One reason for this is the misconception that when a story is told once it becomes “old news” and your audience will both remember it completely and, as a consequence, will not respond to it again. Now, of course, there should be a degree of padding between the initial use and then reuse of a piece of content, but that period of time should be a strategic rest – with an identified reuse timeline. This timeline should be guided by a few factors:

- a. **Freshness:** How recent is the content? Will the content go out of date (e.g. in the case of research)?
- b. **Your pipeline:** How much new content is coming down the pipe? How long do you need this content to work for you before you have something new (if you're at a content deficit)? Do you have a surplus of content (not a bad problem to have) that will force this content into retirement early?
- c. **The conversation in-market:** Particularly if your content is related in some way to current events (e.g. COVID-19), has the conversation shifted in a way that makes your content less relevant?

The benefits of maximizing the use of your content can be significant. In the case of the CRS year-end campaign, the year 2 refreshed campaign in 2019 outperformed the original 2018 campaign (driving 40% higher revenue, year-over-year). At the same time, refreshing assets amortizes the investment in those assets over multiple campaigns while reducing new expenses incurred. This means that when organizations miss the opportunity to re-use and refresh content, they are in a very real way leaving money on the table.

**Where to begin:** Take a look at your most recent content assets (particularly your stories) and check them against the above three factors. If none of these dictate a specific expiry date for your content, the next step is to determine your rest period before reusing the content. The most straightforward place to start when determining your rest period is at 1-year (you can see that margin used in our approach to CRS' 2019 year-end campaign). After that, it becomes nuanced based upon what you know about your audience. One example of audience as a consideration is audience size; if your audience is larger and broader, you may be able to shorten your rest period based on the projection that a larger/broader audience has likely been served more and varied content between your last usage of content and your intended reuse of content, and so your content will feel newer. Alternatively, if you have a smaller or more niche audience, it's possible that their memory will be longer and your content more recognizable/identifiable as something they've seen already and so will feel stale.

To connect with one of our strategists and learn more about how you can use digital tools and channels to improve and enhance your fundraising results reach out to Amy Pawluk at [amy@blakelyjourney.com](mailto:amy@blakelyjourney.com)