

SHOUT DIGITAL WHITE PAPER

---

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD DIGITAL EXPERIENCE FOR CHARITIES?

---

Shout

## What makes a good digital experience for charities?

With digital advancements, evolving consumer habits and behaviour and increased competition, how do charities adapt to changes and create meaningful relationships with first-time donors?

In their Tech for the Common Good report, New Philanthropy Capital warned that if charities don't adapt to digital, they will become obsolete. According to Lloyds Bank UK Business Digital Index, 58% of charities are without basic digital skills compared to 23% of SMEs.

New donors are hard to get. So when they do make a donation, it's in the charity's interest to keep in touch with a warm welcome and personalised communication. However, in the last year alone, changing regulations to fundraising have caused a stir in the charity world. Aggressive fundraising tactics to past donors have led the most vulnerable to feel overwhelmed. Tragic incidents have influenced charities to revisit their tactics to protect their donors, and the government to reinforce the law on fundraising activities. In today's world, consumers are bombarded by advertising. Promotional e-mails have soared along with stress experienced by the receivers. Further, charities struggle with keeping donors. 3 in 4 donors leave and never come back. Despite the difficult decision to choose a cause and a charity to support, it seems donors are less likely to maintain a relationship with a charity, compared to a for-profit organisation.

So how can charities improve post donation communication to still appeal to past donors? And how are they using email marketing trends to be relevant?

Shout has undertaken a study to better understand the digital donor experience. We made a mystery single donation to the Top 25 UK charities (based on voluntary income) and recorded our experience: we analysed the charities' websites, the donor journey, the welcomes and the communication post-welcome.

## Trends

### Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing is the art of creating a meaningful long-term relationship with customers to drive stronger loyalty and engagement. Rather than focusing on short-term customer acquisition relationship marketing puts more attention on existing customers to retain them. Charities have been using this form of marketing for decades but do they use it effectively? Regular mail and e-mails might be the preferred tools to use for charities but the content should be tailored. A "one size fits all" approach is not enough to keep in touch with donors. Increased expectations from consumers to receive personalised communication have put pressure on organisations to adapt and get to know them better. So how can relationship marketing for charities be enhanced in 2016?

### UX

User experience is a key component to retaining users/visitors. A website has to be optimised, responsive and in line with digital trends to better appeal to new visitors and keep existing ones. Growing online payments require an improvement of the online payment process to create a seamless digital experience. With ever increasing mobile phone traffic on the web, UX and UI advancements and consumers' expectations, how are charities optimising the online donation process and communication?

### Skepticism

There was growing skepticism among consumers following controversy about certain charities. Last year, the FTC reported that four American cancer charities invested most of their funds to support the organiser's lavish lifestyle. Although this is not the case for the vast majority of charities, it has raised concerns. Consumers are increasingly wondering if their donations will make a difference, where charities invest donations on or how effective their efforts are. How can potential donors trust a charity?

Transparency is important to recruit supporters. It is expected from any charity and should be a long-term commitment. Although there are risks to being completely transparent, it certainly builds trust - a quality every charity should seek. Raising concerns about charities' executives' salaries have influenced donors to switch from large to smaller organisations to support. This put pressure on the Top Charities to be open on their funding sources, financial statements and achievements. Achievements, however small, should be highlighted. Consumers research extensively and use their intuition before donating.

### Email Marketing

E-mail marketing can be a force of good to nurture long term relationships with new donors. That's why upon making the donation, donors are asked whether they'd like to receive e-mails for updates. But how effectively are they using this method? Trends in email marketing are shifting every year. Personalisation, subscriber psychology or embedded content are expected to improve in 2016. Are the top 25 charities currently adapting to these trends?

## First impressions

Upon searching for a specific charity on Google, 12 charities do not have a donation link straight on Google search results. Having a call to action visible and accessible from the search page enhances convenience and the aim of the website.

A well-optimised homepage is key to retaining visitors and increase time spent on the website. In its simplest form, it should highlight the cause, the achievements and a call to action. The homepages' main messages were educating about the cause and inspire action and support. Although a few charities' achievements need to be searched on other sections of the website, all charities are optimised for mobile, include multiple calls to action and diversified content.

### NEPAL 1 YEAR ON



**HOPE RISES FROM THE RUBBLE FOR WIDOW THULI**

21 April 2016 - Tearfund is among the first development agencies to rebuild permanent...

[READ MORE](#)



**MAKING LIFE FLOW A LOT EASIER**

21 April 2016 - Kalpana is a teacher and a mum of two, so she knows about stress...

[READ MORE](#)



**HOW A LITTLE TLC IS HELPING EDUCATION IN NEPAL**

21 April 2016 - The Nepal earthquake left headmaster Ram Bahadur Rawal Chhetri...

[READ MORE](#)

**“We live in the networked age. To make real progress we need to focus on connecting the different pieces of the puzzle ”**

Baroness Martha Lane Fox, CBE for services to the digital economy and charity

**“Charitable giving is a form of investment, and people need to perform due diligence on the groups they give to ”**

Ben Pierce, former president of Vanguard Charitable, a U.S. nonprofit organization that makes donations on behalf of individual account holders

E-commerce stores are a great way to donate with the feeling of getting something back. Many charities use online stores to sell products and raise money. Only 2 of the top 25 do not have one, however they partner with online stores who give donations for every purchase at no extra cost.

## The Donor Journey

Most charities' donation pages are easy to find. 10 out of 25 charities also have a donation shortcut on their homepage. These shortcuts are a convenient way to ease the donation process and is usually accompanied by an explanation of how a certain amount of the donation – whether single or monthly - will help. Text donation is only available on 4 of charities studied. All have the option to make a single or monthly donation and, in some cases, to adopt or sponsor.

### Donate

**Monthly**      ▶ **Just once**

We receive no government funding for our research. Our life-saving work relies on the money you give us.

- £2** could help us find a cancer causing gene.
- £8** could help us develop a new screening technique to detect cancer earlier.

**Donate**

£  **Give**

**Monthly**     **Once**

-  **Sponsor a Puppy**
-  **Volunteer Time**
-  **Dogs Unite**

Ways to donate or support the charity are generally the same. From event and fundraising activities to major gifts, there is a sense of community that the visitor could get into. Macmillan cancer, for example, has an active online community with a forum, group, Q&A, and blogs created by users. It also has a Learn Zone with free resources, online learning, and personal development tools as well as a Be.Macmillan page where supporters can create their own merchandise.

Asking the motive behind the donation is a great way to identify how to connect, create meaningful relationships and personalise communication with donors. Only 5 charities - Cancer Research, Macmillan Cancer, British Heart Foundation, Marie Curie and Tearfund - asked this question on the donation page.

The minimum donation for single and monthly donation is usually £1 but all charities advertise higher amounts to increase the likelihood of greater donations by inserting the amount directly into the donation box. A donor could be asked what advertising medium prompted the donation. The answer enables to charities to identify what works and invest more into a particular medium. Yet only 11 charities asked the question.

The donation steps are clearly outlined with a step by step guide with 10 charities offering a donation FAQ/Online help section. The donation process on a few charities was slower than usual including unresponsive pages when clicking to the next step, a lack of confirmed secured page in the address bar and many steps to follow and pages to load.

## The Welcome

### First Email

Welcome e-mails can make a break a relationship with charities. How do they thank donors? How warm is the e-mail? Do they highlight how the donation will help or include achievements? Is there a high-level of personalisation?

The e-mail proposition is usually standard, with no benefits from signing up clarified except receiving regular updates.

The degrees of warmth of these e-mails were rated on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being very warm. Five charities scored a 10/10 with examples typically including heartfelt letters of appreciation, the sender's name, signature, job title, and many thank you's.

In some cases, welcome e-mails were merely an automated e-mail confirmation of the online payment. For example, one charity thanks donors with a "Thank you for your order" note which is similar to any automatic e-mail confirmation from e-commerce websites. Achievements were barely highlighted. Welcome e-mails usually include a confirmation of the payment but rarely include achievements. World Vision reminds donors how the donation will help.

Achievements were barely highlighted. Welcome e-mails usually include a confirmation of the payment but rarely include achievements. World Vision reminds donors how the donation will help.



In comparison, the Royal National Institute Of Blind People had a formatting problem and was very simple.

```
Dear Miss [REDACTED]
<p>+++Thank you
</p>
<p>
Thank you for your donation of &pound;10.00.
</p>
<p>
We are delighted that you have supported us.
</p>
<p>
Every day 100 people start losing their sight.
</p>
<p>
RNIB is here to provide emotional support, expert advice and practical products to everyone who needs us. We also provide training to help people adapt to living with sight loss, and enable them to get on with and enjoy everyday life.
</p>
<p>Thanks to your wonderful support, we will continue to improve the lives of more blind and partially sighted people.</p>
++We confirm we have received the following:
```

Charities – and any company – looking to build meaningful relationships, stay relevant and increase engagement and click through rates should include a high level of personalisation. Signing the e-mail with a contact, their job title, and a signature can go a long way in establishing connections with donors. 15 charities signed their welcomes –whether it was from a CEO, Head of Fundraising or a Nurse.

Although Tearfund's usual e-mail format is very elaborate and aligned with its website visual identity, the welcome e-mail looked like a personal one, with no particular formatting. It seemed like one from an actual contact thanking us and telling how donations like these helped a particular scheme.

01 February 2016

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you so much for your gift of £10.00.

Your generosity will help bring vital practical help and hope to those suffering as a result of conflicts and natural disasters across the world.

A year ago, subsistence farmer Vivianne ran for her life when gunmen arrived in her village in the Central African Republic (CAR). Civil conflict there has made 890,000 people homeless.

It was two months before it was safe again for Vivianne to return and when she did she discovered her home had been ransacked and vital farming tools and seeds had been looted.

Support like yours for our work responding to disasters meant we were able to help Vivianne avoid starvation.

We gave Vivianne and other members of the agricultural cooperative she belongs to the seeds, tools and technical support they needed to restart growing crops.

Not only does Vivianne have food but income can be made by selling surplus produce. We've been able to help 15,000 people in CAR this way thanks to generous support like yours which is enabling us to show God's love in life-saving ways.

Please join us in praying for Vivienne and for peace in CAR – it's still a long journey ahead. So we would like to offer you our heartfelt thanks. Your support will help us to bring hope to people living in desperate circumstances. Thank you.

Yours in Christ

Helen Harris  
Head of Supporter Services

Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, Middlesex TW11 8QE  
Tel: 0208 977 9144  
Email: [giving@tearfund.org](mailto:giving@tearfund.org)  
Website: [www.tearfund.org](http://www.tearfund.org)

During the donation process, we ticked the option to receive mail by post from all charities. Only two sent a physical welcome. WWF welcomed us in the form of a personal letter, thanking us while highlighting the need for donors; while the Royal National Lifeboat Institution sent a welcome pack with lots of information and leaflets. We received mail respectively 4 and 7 days after the donation.

## Ongoing Touchpoints

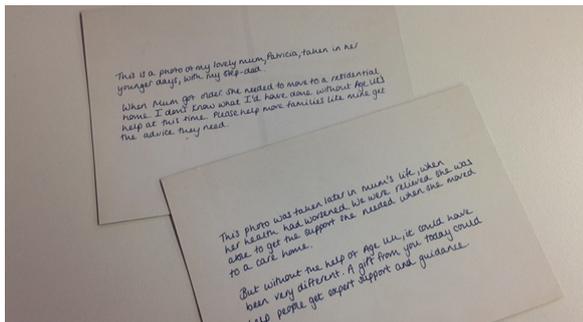
To understand how charities keep in touch with donors, we made sure we accepted their invitation to regular e-mails when donating. 8 charities followed up communications during the first 30 days. The content included newsletters, appeals, letters or ways to support: newsletters were asking for either further donation in specific areas, engagement through events, an online shop or signing pledges. Christian charities encouraged donors to make prayers for Lent.

**“ 15 charities did not include the sender’s name in the “from” field. ”**

Using a sender’s name helps:

- Establish a relationship with the organisation
- Differentiate the e-mail in the donors’ inbox
- Avoid the e-mail ending up in spam or promotions folders.

Five charities got in touch by mail two months post-donation to ask for further help. Two of them used personalised letters with a very personal touch. Age UK accompanied its letter with personal photos of patients with a handwritten note attached. Marie Curie used the courier font on parchment paper for its letter signed by a Nurse.



Barnardo’s is the only charity that attempted to get to know the donor better. They sent a questionnaire through the post with personal questions to further understand the motivation behind the donation and how to communicate effectively in the future. Cancer Research had the following message in one of their e-mail campaigns:

“And we’re looking at ways we can give you more control over things like your donations online and would love to hear what you’d like to be able to do with a Cancer Research UK online account. Please take our 5-minute survey to have your say.”

## Analysis

### Charities in the digital age

The top 25 charities' websites are all mobile optimised, responsive and current with design trends. The charities use sponsored ads on Google to drive visitors to the appeals and donation page. All charities have a call to action on their homepage, with multiple donation buttons, repeated words and images of people.

The donation process can be simplified on most charities, with fewer steps to follow through to minimise the amount of pages that need to be loaded. 56% do not have the option to share the activity on social media. This represents a missed opportunity to create word of mouth and limits the charity's reach.

Of the 7 charities that offer the option to create an account on the website, none highlight the benefits of doing it.

As online users create accounts in multiple websites, charities need to be offering benefits and highlighting them to deepen the visitor's involvement with the charity. Even after donating, the websites do not remember when they return to the website. The landing pages are no different at each visit. Personalising visits will become standard in the future and charities should attempt to do so with first-time donors to maximise retention.

When it comes to thanking first-time donors, promptness is important and all charities responded automatically. However, the way these automated e-mails are formatted could be improved and personalised to provide a more human interaction, as opposed to simply confirming a "payment". Terminology could also be modified to differentiate the donation from other online transactions. The sender's name is an important feature to include, even in automated e-mails. It establishes a relationship post-donation and humanises the charity.

Although some welcome e-mails were truly welcoming, warm and personalised, others seriously lacked these qualities.

Furthermore, charities should follow the lead of Save the Children by accepting digital currency Bitcoin in partnership with BitGive Foundation. The foundation helped the charity raise \$1000 in one minute for its Stop Ebola Campaign.

Although there is no specific explanation of how my donation helped, all charities use a graph to explain how much money is spent on their activities (ie. "For every £1 donated, 91p goes to the cause. UK charities should embrace Virtual Reality to recruit donors at experiential events or design a website for an immersive experience into the cause.

## Warmth and appreciation

Some organisations sent heartfelt letters and warm thanks following the confirmation of the donation. However, most charities only sent a newsletter every month and occasional appeals. Charities should believe that every single donor matter and that a donation is more than a simple transaction. It's an act of appreciation for the charity's work and values, an act of philanthropy that deserves to be thanked with warmest regards. E-mails, in general, can easily be overlooked or discarded, so the first impression of that initial e-mail, the first one to appear in the donor's inbox, the very onset of a string of on-going communication is crucial in the creation of a fruitful relationship. Maintaining it requires authentic communication that resonates with the donor's values in the first place.

## Adapting to evolving consumer behaviour

Charities should also target the younger generation. According to Action for Children, 54% of 18-24-year-olds said that being able to use text / online donations had encouraged them to give. Gen Z donors are called "philantroTeens" or "philantroKids". There is growing evidence that they are more likely to get involved in charitable activities because they believe they can make the world a better place. They increasingly choose products based on a company's CSR and values. Sensitising consumers at a young age helps to build long-term relationships. Gen Z will expect more personalisation and digital communication and activities. They have shorter attention spans and favour visual content rather than plain text. Learning the cause through gamification or living it through VR, there are ever-growing opportunities for charities to personalise their communication across different age gaps.

## Transparency

As people grow more sceptical in charitable activities, charities should make it a point to show their endeavors and achievements on their homepage with visual content. Most people wonder how their money will make a difference and charities should focus on answering just that. Transparency can be enhanced through digital. For instance, Tearfund uses an interactive map to allow visitors to see the communities the charity aims to help.

### WATCH IN REAL TIME AS A COMMUNITY TRANSFORMS ITSELF

The local church is helping poor communities rebuild themselves, with love, support and practical training. Villages are striking out on a journey towards a different future, where they will have enough food, clean water, education and health. Step aboard...



### FOLLOW A COMMUNITY AND SEE IT FOR YOURSELF IN THREE SIMPLE STEPS...



Choose a community



Learn a little about them

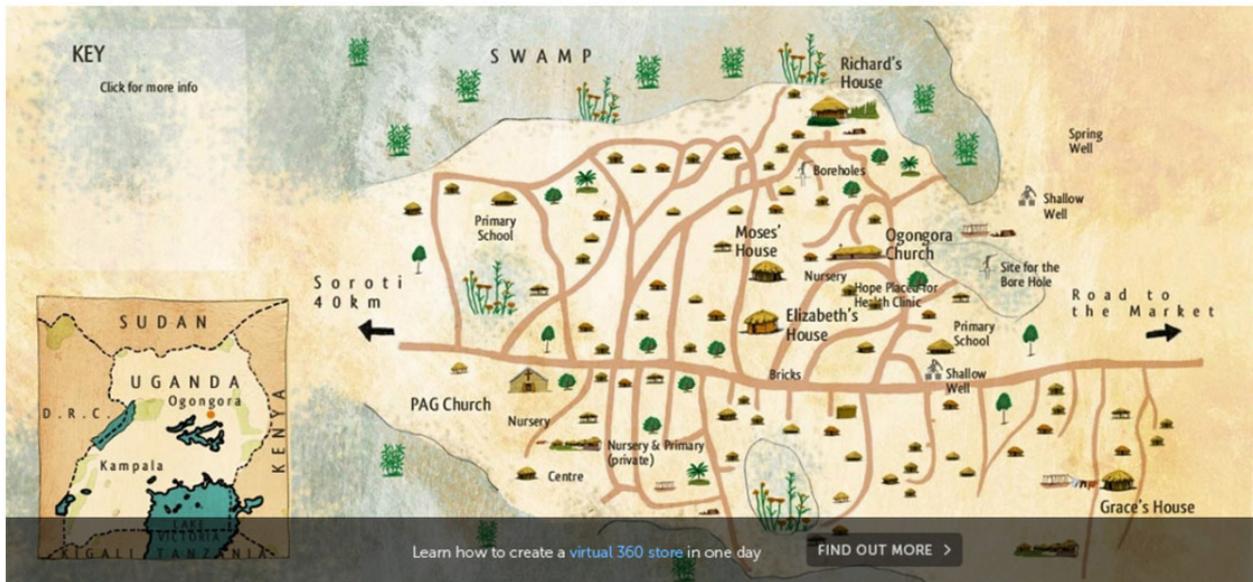


Add your support

Further, top charities should encourage financial transparency to distance themselves from evasive charities that have affected the reputation of the not for profit sector. It is by building trust that charities can ensure a positive reputation and initiate a meaningful, long-term relationship with potential donors.

## WELCOME TO OGONGORA, UGANDA

When rebels destroyed Ogongora in east Uganda, villagers lost everything – except hope. The local church is helping the community rebuild itself, to bring water, sanitation and enough food for everyone. Slowly, God's love is transforming an entire village.



### In summary, charities could:

- Tailor content
- Be more welcoming/thankful/less generic
- Show how the specific donation helped
- Highlight achievements to reassure decision to donate
- Use localisation to advise on nearby charity shops or events

## References

- Amar, Z. (2016). Charity boards are failing to adapt to the digital age - this has to change. [online] the Guardian. Available at:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2016/apr/11/charity-governance-digital-technology-trustees>
- Anon, (2016). Digital delivers more for charities. [online] Available at:  
<https://www.btplc.com/mydonate/News/Digitaldeliversmoreforcharities/index.aspx>
- Barry, F. and Barry, F. (2016). 12 Super Simple (but Effective) Donor Retention Tips from Nonprofit Fundraising Experts | npENGAGE. [online] npENGAGE. Available at:  
<http://npengage.com/nonprofit-fundraising/12-donor-retention-tips-from-nonprofit-fundraising-experts/>
- BBC News. (2016). Law to target aggressive fundraising by charities - BBC News. [online] Available at:  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-33490964>
- Blogger, G. and Blogger, G. (2016). 7 Little-Known Tactics to Improve Donor Retention | npENGAGE. [online] npENGAGE. Available at:  
<http://npengage.com/nonprofit-fundraising/the-7-keys-donor-retention-strategy-full-thanks/>
- Charitycomms.org.uk. (2016). A manifesto for digital change in 2016 | CharityComms. [online] Available at:  
<http://www.charitycomms.org.uk/articles/a-manifesto-for-digital-change-in-2016>
- Fritz, J. and Fritz, J. (2016). 5 Super Simple Ways to Turn New Donors Into Repeat Donors. [online] About.com Money. Available at:  
<http://nonprofit.about.com/od/Donor-Retention/fl/5-Super-Simple-Ways-to-Turn-New-Donors-Into-Loyalists.htm>
- Hope, C. (2013). Donors switch cash from large charities in protest over pay scandal. [online] Telegraph.co.uk. Available at:  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10523629/Donors-switch-cash-from-large-charities-in-protest-over-pay-scandal.html>
- Kusnitz, S. (2016). 12 Reasons to Integrate Visual Content Into Your Marketing Campaigns [Infographic]. [online] Blog.hubspot.com. Available at:  
<http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/visual-content-marketing-infographic#sm.00001gh7oubut8dm0y97koay5o36v>
- Lincoln, C. (2016). Philanthropy 2.0: Giving In the Digital Age. [online] 2machines. Available at:  
<http://2machines.com/173971/>
- Mintel.com. (2016). Charities get a helping hand from digital donations | Mintel.com. [online] Available at:  
<http://www.mintel.com/blog/technology-market-news/charities-get-a-helping-hand-from-digital-donations>
- Mintel.com. (2016). Charities get a helping hand from digital donations | Mintel.com. [online] Available at:  
<http://www.mintel.com/blog/technology-market-news/charities-get-a-helping-hand-from-digital-donations>
- Relationship quality, relationship marketing, and client perceptions of the levels of service quality of charitable organisations: International Journal of Service Industry Management: Vol 16, No 1. (2016). International Journal of Service Industry Management. [online] Available at:  
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/09564230510587168>
- Smart Insights. (2016). 6 Email marketing techniques for charities - Smart Insights Digital Marketing Advice. [online] Available at:  
<http://www.smartinsights.com/email-marketing/email-communications-strategy/email-marketing-charities/>
- Taj, S. and Rees, P. (2016). Relationship Marketing in the UK Charity Sector - An Exploratory Study. [online] Available at:  
<http://nonprofit.about.com/od/donorrelations/ss/Donor-Retention-How-To-Keep-Donors-Coming-Back-After-The-First-Gift.htm>

The Guardian. (2016). Voluntary Sector Network | The Guardian. [online] Available at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2015/jun/19/philanthroteens-young-people-who-use-their-pocket-money-to-change-the-world>

The Guardian. (2016). Voluntary Sector Network | The Guardian. [online] Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2015/mar/04/five-things-to-know-about-managing-charity-transparency>

The Guardian. (2016). Voluntary Sector Network | The Guardian. [online] Available at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/iof-partner-zone/2016/may/09/fundraising-regulation-new-dawn>

The Guardian. (2016). Voluntary Sector Network | The Guardian. [online] Available at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/iof-partner-zone/2016/mar/22/fundraising-creating-real-change>

Thirdsector.co.uk. (2016). Fundraising Regulation: 'Things have changed forever'. [online] Available at:

<http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/fundraising-regulation-things-changed-forever/fundraising/article/1369382>

View, T. (2012). The business of charity should be transparent. [online] Telegraph.co.uk. Available at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/telegraph-view/9399665/The-business-of-charity-should-be-transparent.html>

www.kiplinger.com. (2016). How to Check Out a Charity Before You Donate. [online] Available at:

<http://www.kiplinger.com/article/spending/T048-C011-S000-how-to-check-out-a-charity-before-you-donate.html>

## SHOUT DIGITAL

Shout deliver digital transformation for businesses using a strategy-led approach, providing expertise on user experience design through to design and build. The Shout team employs a wide range of specialists and deal with businesses throughout the UK and around the globe.

For more information about shout please visit [www.shoutdigital.com](http://www.shoutdigital.com) or contact our team using the contact details below:

# Shout

### Shout Digital

Keel House

Garth Heads

Newcastle upon Tyne

Tyne and Wear

NE1 2JE

Email: [hello@shoutdigital.com](mailto:hello@shoutdigital.com)

Telephone: +44 (0) 191 231 2377

[www.shoutdigital.com](http://www.shoutdigital.com)

TOP CHARITIES SHOULD ENCOURAGE FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM EVASIVE CHARITIES THAT HAVE AFFECTED THE REPUTATION OF THE NOT FOR PROFIT SECTOR. IT IS BY BUILDING TRUST THAT CHARITIES CAN ENSURE A POSITIVE REPUTATION AND INITIATE A MEANINGFUL, LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP WITH POTENTIAL DONORS.