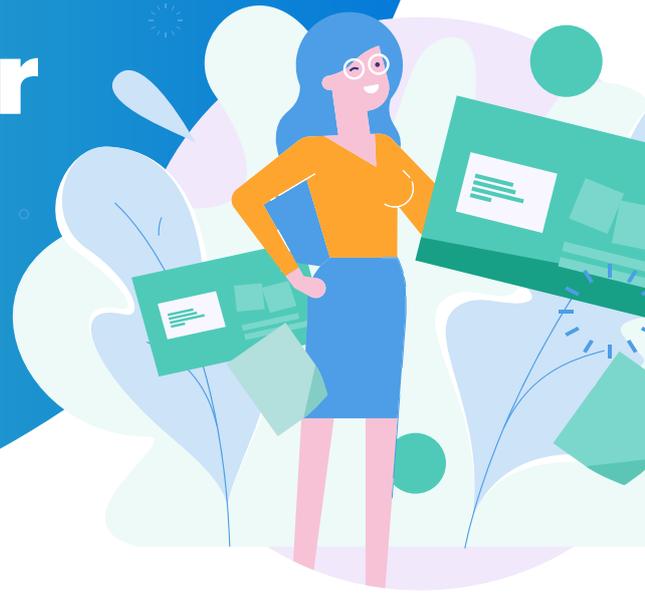


LIFE DURING LOCKDOWN

# Streamline your DM campaigns in 3...2...1...



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**Fundraisers, things just got interesting. Because moving fast has never been so important – which can be quite an ask in the traditional world of direct mail.**

The good news is, that although we've had our fair share of challenges recently, it's also sparked off a whole load of questions. Questions are good – we like questions. And fundraisers are now questioning established ways of working for direct mail, which aren't cutting it in the current climate.

Thanks to Coronavirus (Covid-19) we're seeing the adoption of digital skills and practices to improve fundraising agility across the board.

And this includes direct mail where the opportunity for individual giving fundraisers is to shift to ways of working that radically shorten campaign cycles as well as improve campaign performance.

We've broken down the shift into three connected steps - that you can take to streamline and improve your direct mail activity during Covid-19 and beyond.

### **3... Start using templates**

Templates are ace when it comes to getting things done quicker. Using pre-defined templates and formats can reduce DM campaign cycles by weeks.

Think of agreed templates and formats as 'production containers'. Using this approach, you can drop in relevant topical

content developed for specific audiences, but content that's designed with the template in mind. For example, you wouldn't have to start planning for a Summer Appeal now, when you could give yourself the opportunity to select the most topical and appropriate proposition and content nearer the time (but in tightly planned production parameters).

**“It's not controversial to say that audience, context and timing matter more than format.”**

After all, we wouldn't try to manage a very dynamic website without a pattern library, or develop an always-on email or digital advertising programme without an optimised set of templates to support rapid content deployment. But somehow for direct mail teams still work to painfully long lead times, with format often falling out of the end of an elongated content process.

Adopting pre-existing templates and formats is simply about reversing the order of play. You'll get back weeks of your life and have far greater control over your budgets. Both of which sound like winners.

## 2... Adopt Digital printing

There are two reasons why high-speed digital printing for direct mail (also known as 'white paper' production) has been a game changer for direct mail:

- It allows content to flex by audience within a single campaign.
- It speeds up production by negating the need for pre-printed stationery and overprinted personalisation.

So why hasn't this adoption for mainstream high-volume charity campaigns been faster?

It used to be that the price point was a barrier,

but not anymore. Arguably it's because the established process is a barrier to change – with audience, data planning and selections happening too late. It's still common for content to be developed ahead of the data planning – resulting in some crude mail merge process where content is generic and personalisation limited just to prompts and variable paragraphs. Not really the best supporter experience.

We call the shift to upfront data planning 'design by data'. Connecting upstream data planning with the personalisation possibilities of digital printing opens up a new frontier for direct mail – and a much more personal experience for the reader.

## Simplifying BAU for the BHF

The BHF's Appeals, Newsletters and Raffles were all produced one campaign at a time, with campaign cycles typically being 6–10 weeks.

By creating templated formats for each of these campaign types, and working in sprints on the content, BHF have been able to dramatically reduce overheads and lead times. Fundraisers have been able to shift their focus from onerous campaign management tasks to activities that will drive performance like audience planning and testing.

They have taken things a step further with their raffles, and are now producing content for multiple campaigns using a single content platform and sprint process.



## 1... Embrace Creative Sprints

The last piece of the direct mail transformation jigsaw is a new faster approach to developing strong content in short, focused bursts.

Developing campaigns in Sprints doesn't require Agile training, it's more about borrowing some ways of working that are commonplace in digital:

### Brooke's integrated COVID response



When Covid-19 undermined carefully laid plans, the team at Brooke were faced with the challenge of dealing with the disruption, whilst maintaining relationships with supporters, and protecting income to fund their important work.

An integrated emergency appeal including Social, DM, email and DRTV was conceived and created in record time using a streamlined approach and daily stand-ups. Concepts were created and delivered in a day, digital went live within 48hrs.

Direct Mail was the central pillar of the campaign and followed quickly behind the digital activity rather than a channel that lagged behind the rest of the campaign.

**Planning:** Agree on a block of time, perhaps a week or fortnight, and ensure a cross-functional team of fundraisers, brand folk, planners, creatives, and a project manager can come together to plan the creative process and commit to tasks.

**Doing:** Speak to each other on a regular basis during the Sprint, and set up tools (you have them already or they're free) to enable real-time collaboration. Now more than ever, close collaboration and being in the development of the work together is key.

**Deciding:** Ensure that decision-makers are in the team, so when the work is done it moves straight into deployment.

**Learning:** Track what works and what doesn't. Which templates and audiences are working better than expected, and what is falling flat. The team can use this information to make each sprint more successful than the last.

Depending on your project, you can cut your lead times considerably. Not only that but there is a greater degree of flexibility, making the mobilisation of integrated campaigns easier to manage.

Agility benefits aside, everyone we've worked with in this way has hugely enjoyed the process and said that it produces better work. No great surprise when this process neatly circumnavigates those cumbersome decision-making and approval cycles.

### Give it a go - right now.

Let's face it, there's no better time to try this approach, so pick a direct mail campaign or an integrated campaign with a direct mail element - and go for it. and go for it.

Maybe choose one that you want to mobilise quickly around Covid-19, or a campaign you want to delay starting because you're busy on more urgent work in progress. You may also want to kick

off an audit of your established programme and process, to define the change that is required to migrate to a format and data driven set of BAU products.

“The key is to start experimenting – after all, the most effective transformations are iterative and incremental.”

### Get In Touch

At Signal we have extensive experience in direct mail and helping a wide range of charity clients apply digital skills and practices to their individual giving programmes. So please get in touch if you'd like more information, or a more detailed deep dive into template adoption, shifting to data driven or working in sprints.

Connect with [Barney Hosey](#) on LinkedIn

