enthuse

Virtual Realities

The Essential Guide to Raising More from Your Virtual Events

Contents

Introduction

Virtual events are the talk of the town at the moment. The reality is that they are nothing new, but right now they are both important and timely.

Charities have been coming up with different virtual event ideas since the web and social media first started becoming a part of our daily lives. Some of the most well known and successful campaigns of the last 15 years have been virtual events. Think of the success stories like Movember, the Ice Bucket Challenge, No Make Up Selfie to name but a few, and more recently Red January, Scroll Free September and the 2.6 Challenge. Although most have had events as part of their campaigns – the central idea has been virtual rather than in person.

At a conservative estimate these campaigns alone have raised about £300 million as well as the phenomenal levels of education and awareness they have created for their causes. The key to the success of these campaigns was having an idea that had wide appeal, was novel and was easy to get involved in.

But it's not just about these huge fundraising campaigns, there's been a host of smaller virtual event ideas that charities have used from running a marathon across a number of days or weeks to climbing the equivalent of Mount Everest on your stairs.

While virtual events have been around in one form or another for a while, they have been fuelled in recent months by both technology and necessity. No need to dwell on necessity as you'll have read quite enough about this already. In terms of technology the mainstream use of video and streaming, together with the integration of fitness trackers into fundraising technology has led to a democratisation of virtual events.

Now every charity has the ability to create their own virtual events, and an audience that, even as lockdown increasingly eases, is looking for entertainment and activities to get involved with. Now is the time to experiment and learn with virtual events, and look to establish them so they last way beyond the end of this outbreak. Make sure that your brand is seen front and centre of your virtual campaigns to give them longevity for your cause. As the lockdown eases, it's also worth considering how virtual event elements can improve and enhance physical events as they start up again.

The sections of this How To Guide will take you through the different stages to think about with virtual events, as well as their connection to physical activities. So without further ado – let's get into how to come up with your idea.

Coming up with your idea

Coming up with your idea

Getting started with planning a virtual event for your charity can feel daunting. It's easy to get concerned about whether ideas will work for your supporters or just be unsure what ideas you should be looking at.

We've put together a set of ideas to help get the ball rolling, so you can start thinking about what works best for your charity. The key to raising more

for your cause will be taking these starting points and relating them to your charity authentically in a way that also excites your supporters.

Remember to keep your brand centre stage and integral to the event itself. According to Charity Comms your brand is the single most significant factor in driving trust and a personal connection and commitment to a charity.

⚡ **5K/10K run or walk**

⚡ **Marathon**

⚡ **Baking challenge**

⚡ **Holding a virtual quiz**

⚡ **Giving up alcohol for a set period**

⚡ **Reading challenge**

⚡ **Sponsored silence for a set time**

⚡ **Climbing challenge event (e.g climbing height of Everest on your stairs)**

⚡ **Live streaming/webinar of a discussion with experts about your cause**

⚡ **Having a virtual coffee morning**

⚡ **Cycling challenge (static/road bike)**

⚡ **Marathon split over a number of days**

⚡ **A game of virtual bingo**

⚡ **Giving up chocolate for a set period**

⚡ **Writing challenge**

⚡ **Giving up social media for a set time**

⚡ **Live streaming or gaming challenge (via Twitch)**

⚡ **Watch along/listen along party**

Coming up with your idea

To get things started, it's worth thinking about what your most successful physical events have been and considering what a virtual version of them might be. Littlelifts, a charity providing practical and emotional support for women with breast cancer, is a great example of this. They had to cancel numerous events they would normally run during through March to June and hit upon the idea of a virtual marathon which would work well with their supporters who had been looking forward to taking part in running events for them. This **link** will take you through to their founder discussing what worked well for them.

Here are 3 key things to think about when coming up with your idea:

1   Do you want everyone to do the activity on the same day (e.g. a virtual 5km race) or would you prefer people to do it at their own pace (walking 50km over a month)?

2   Is it an open or closed event? If it's a virtual pub quiz, do you want it to be open to everyone or do you want it to be ticketed?

3   How are you going to help your supporters fundraise through the event? For example for a virtual cycle, how would you help them get set up to fundraise, or for a virtual pub quiz, would people pay to take part and then make additional donations on the night?

Getting things going

Getting things going

As you are coming up with your idea, like any physical event or campaign, you also need to think about what your objectives are and how you are going to meet those with your supporters.

There are a few things worth considering about your audience for virtual events. Firstly younger demographics are more likely to be engaged by virtual events, but older generations have upskilled significantly in the first half of 2020. Virtual events mean geography is no longer a barrier, so you can reach out far and wide. Finally the technology to enable this is in nearly everyone's hand with Ipsos Mori stating that 89% of all UK adults aged 15–54 own a smartphone.

Now, let's think about how to get things moving with your supporters.

Targets

Firstly as with all campaigns you need to set yourself, your campaign and the participants some targets. As you start out with virtual events, don't set yourself targets which are too much of a stretch – for your first forays into the virtual world you should be looking to test and learn while you build this element of your fundraising.

Your targets should include your overall fundraising goals for the event, as well as working out the number of participants you will need to raise those funds. Just as with any campaign, think about how much people raise on average and then build your overall targets and goals.

When you have your targets in place you need to look at how you are going to communicate your fundraising aims to your supporters. One way to do this is by setting a fundraising goal for your supporters when they sign up to the campaign. Much like a physical running event will have a fundraising goal, the same can be done by putting a target in place automatically for supporters taking part in a virtual event when they sign up. This should help inspire a competitive edge.

Getting things going

Authenticity

When you are finessing your ideas, consider how you make sure it's something authentic to your cause and your brand. Think about the statistics that are important for your cause and link those to the virtual event you are doing. This will give it a harder link to your cause. For example if someone is diagnosed with the disease your charity is helping people with every 60 minutes, perhaps your virtual event could be a 60 minute workout, or a 60km relay race for team participants.

Driving participation

The next step is to build the marketing plan for your event. Again, just like with a physical event or campaign, you need to look at how you are going to drive participation, fundraising and donations. Your usual mailing list and organic social will form the centre of this. It's also definitely worth considering paid social media activity as well as campaigns across the web (think special interest publications) to expand your supporter base online.

Make sure you have one central site to send everyone to so they can find out more information about the activity, sign up and get involved easily, as well as spread the word to their networks. Again, remember the importance of your brand being front and centre. Our own research shows that 46% of donors couldn't remember the charity that benefited the last time they sponsored a friend. This underlines how important it is to make sure your brand is both highly visible and a memorable part of the process.

Once you have your marketing plan up and running, it's time to go live and the race is on.

The race is on
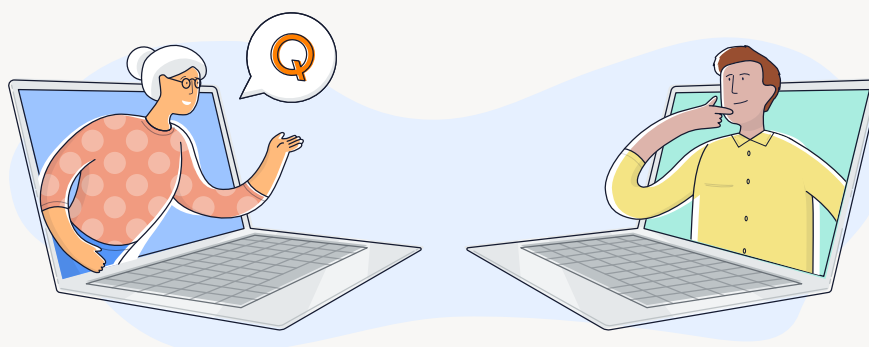
The race is on

Though there are no logistics to look after with virtual events, there is still plenty to do once your event is live. Here are three key things to consider:

Live streaming

Whatever your event, live streaming can have an impactful role to play helping people to feel part of the event and therefore more engaged with the activity. The live streaming could take lots of different forms depending on your event. Here are a few examples:

- **Virtual running/cycling:** If you are running an event on one day, like a 5K, supporters can let their friends and family know when they are getting started and broadcast it live on their fundraising page. This will help them to get some virtual cheers and virtual trophies as well as those all important donations as they get over the finish line.

- **Longer events:** If your virtual event is taking place over a few days, for example supporters running a marathon at their own pace, then you could encourage them to live stream their start and finish. This could help participants to get virtual crowds of donors along for key milestones in their race.

- **Pub quiz:** This could be run through your fundraising page, with the quiz host using live streaming to broadcast his questions (and the all-important answers) directly to the participants.

Live streaming might not suit everything though – a sponsored silence might not be the most exciting event to watch live!

The race is on

Tracking

Having tracking as part of athletic based events makes it more competitive and more engaging for your supporters, and their donors. Everyone loves a bit of competitive spirit and whether it's competing against friends or just trying to beat their own personal time, adding trackability gives another layer to events. This can work in lots of different ways, for example:

- **Races/relays and stages of races:** You could run a relay race between your supporters to complete a long distance activity, and tracking will enable the team members to pass the baton when they have completed their stage. Or you could have your supporters compete against each other to see who can complete a set distance or activity in the fastest possible time.

- **Individual and team goals:** Individual goals may be based on fundraising or it might be a distance you want a supporter to reach as part of a wider goal for everyone in that team, for instance running around the length of the UK.

- **Leaderboards:** These can really get the competitive juices flowing for your supporters. They can drive each other forward as they try to be top of the league for fundraising or activity during virtual events.

- **Overall event goals:** Setting a target for all your participants to achieve together to create a community spirit in a virtual event. This could be both a fundraising goal and a total distance or even doing the overall distance in a certain time.

The race is on

Donations and fundraising

Finally, and most importantly, during the event is helping your supporters make the most out of their activity. This may be the first virtual event you have planned, but it's also very likely to be the first virtual event your supporters have taken part in. This means they'll need your guidance on fundraising and driving donations. Here are some ideas on how to help:

- Virtual Fundraising pack: Make sure your supporters know what you want them to do and when to do it to help them get started on fundraising. For example, if you were running a virtual pub quiz do you want everyone to pay for tickets in advance or are you taking donations on the night or a combination of both?

- If it's a virtual cycling or running event, do supporters pay to take part or is it a free event where you want supporters to fundraise? Or again is it a combination of both.

- Highlight the key times for them to push fundraising – at the start of a virtual race, when they hit key milestones in a longer virtual event and of course at the finish. Make this easier for them by automating notifications about these.
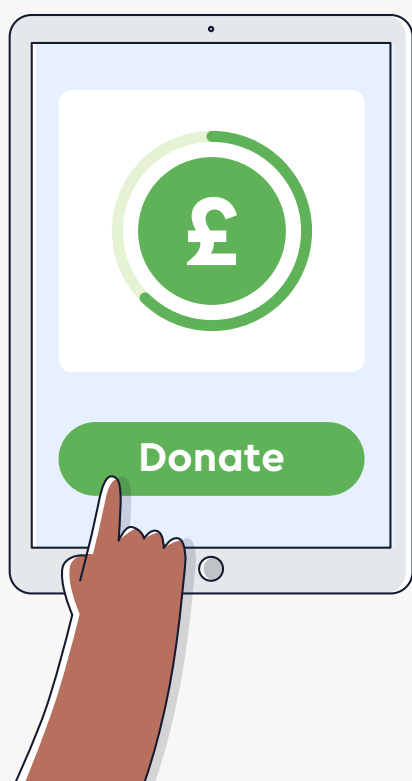
- Highlight 'donate to self' features to help drive fundraising, so your supporter gets the ball rolling by making a donation to themselves. People are more likely to donate to a page when there are already donations made.

- Encourage them to share their participation with colleagues as well as friends and family. We can still ask our colleagues for donations, even if we aren't sharing desks at the moment.

- Your fundraising pack is even more important for a virtual event than a physical event.

—————— **The race is on**

Do bear in mind the need to balance out your fundraising messaging with your brand messaging in your communications. The IPA Effectiveness databanks recommends that 43% of not-for-profit budgets is spent on branding vs direct response activities.
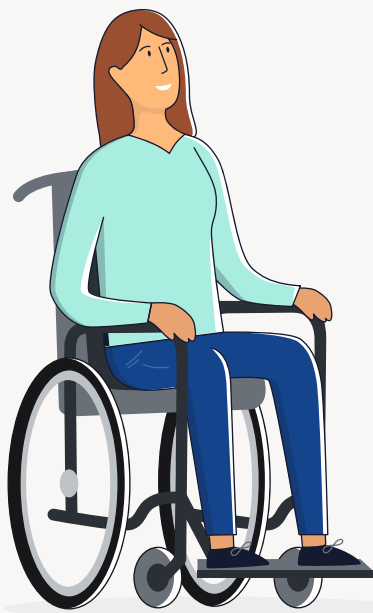
Finish strong

Finish strong

Even though you can't give them a hug, a pat on the back or even a handshake at the moment, it's important to celebrate the end of your event with your supporters who've taken part. Recognition of your participants on social media and in emails, celebrating their success is a great way to do this, but you can also go the extra mile for those who've gone the extra mile for you. Here are a few ways to do that:

Rewards

Work with companies you have close ties with to see if they can provide some prizes for your highest fundraiser and for the supporter who did the most miles in your race or set the fastest time. And another option of course could be virtual medals for virtual events.

Recognition

Celebrate your supporters' efforts on social media or over email. And also give things a personal touch with something as simple as a handwritten card.

Iteration

Even if you have followed everything in this guide, there is no doubt you'll have learnt a few lessons from your first virtual event. So as you start planning for your next one look at the areas that you can improve on and iterate from there. As the lockdown eases, also consider how you could potentially run a hybrid physical and virtual event. With guidelines changing all the time, some of your supporters may be keen for a physical event when they are allowed again, but some will still be cautious so consider how you can incorporate both. It's also worth remembering that a virtual version of your physical event means supporters can take part wherever they are in the country or indeed the world.

Finish strong

It's also worth remembering how important it is for your brand to be seen during challenging times. Millward Brown states that 60% of brands that go dark during a recession suffer significant brand metric declines. So a strong finish to your virtual event is not just important for your fundraising and supporters, but also important for how your brand is perceived.
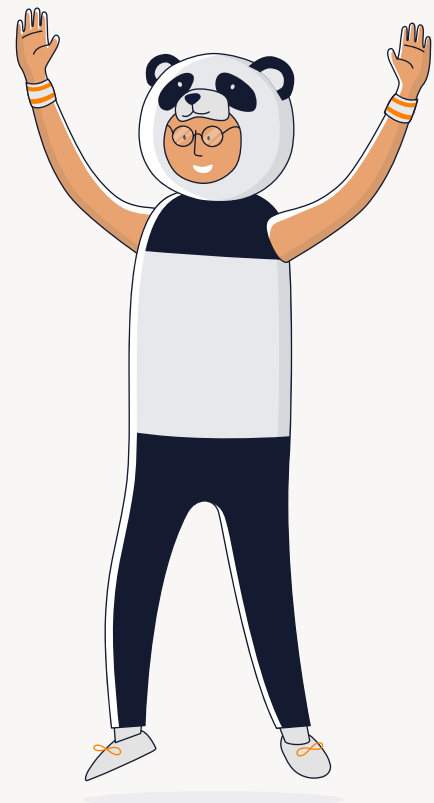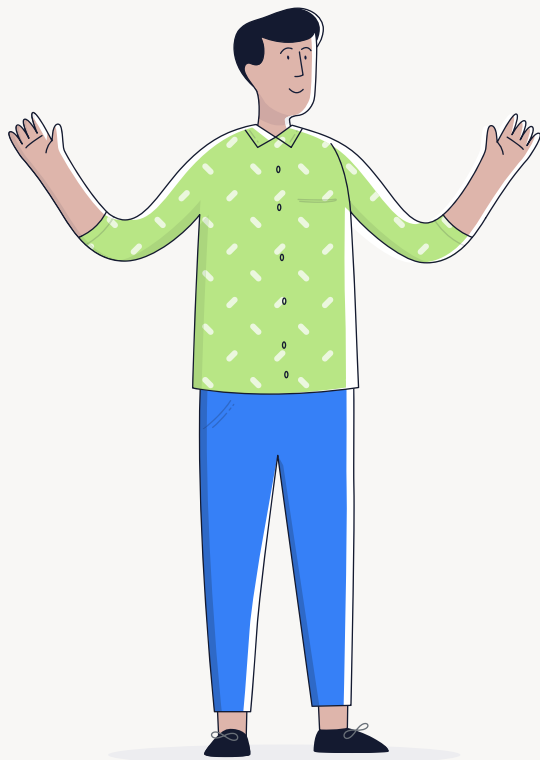
Conclusions
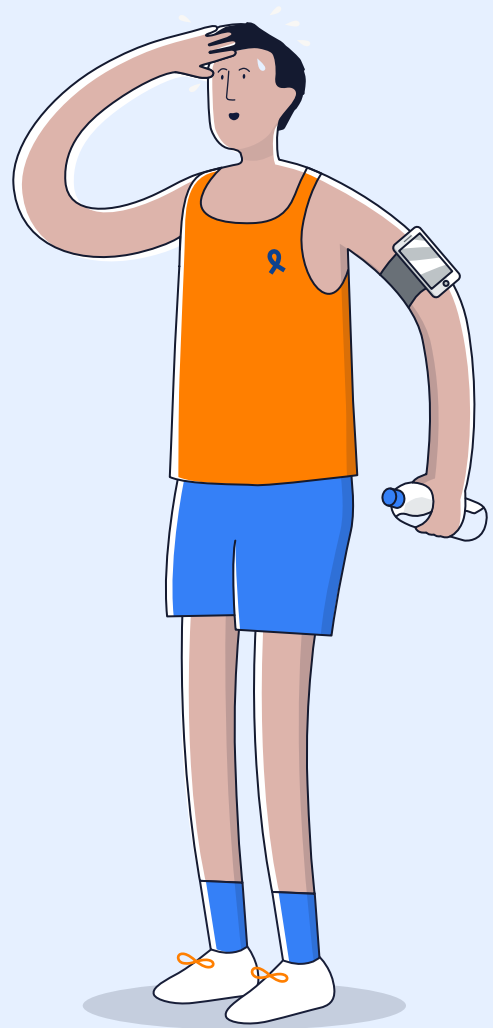
Conclusions

As the lockdown eases, it may be tempting to start thinking about returning to physical events. But the last few months have changed people's perspectives, with **only 6% wanting to see the same type of economy as before**. Many people are not ready for a return to where we were in February and want to work in different ways, socialise in different ways and live in different ways. Charities need to consider this message and understand that people will want different ways of supporting charities as well.

While there is no doubt that physical events will make their return in the months to follow, virtual events are here to stay too, and will become an increasingly important part of fundraising activities. They can be huge fundraisers in their own right, as well as key elements of a calendar of wide ranging activities. They will also become an important add-on to physical events, making it easier for more participants to take part in large scale events from anywhere in the world.

So now is the time to start building virtual events into your portfolio of activities. There is a huge range that you can start to experiment with and see which ones resonate best with your audience. They are low cost to start and run, but as with physical events they require focus to make them work well. Virtual events time has come and it is here for good. So use them to help raise more for your cause, and drive the long term value of your brand.

About Enthuse

Enthuse is a fundraising, donations and events registration platform that has helped more than 4,000 charities, including 1 in 5 of the top 100, raise over £70 million. Enthuse's solutions are customised under a cause's own brand and put the organisation in control of the data. This allows charities to build and nurture a loyal supporter base, raise more and ultimately have more impact. Founded in 2012 and headquartered in London, Enthuse is backed by socially responsible investors and was named "Most Committed Company to the Sector" at the National Fundraising Awards.

The company offers a virtual events solution which enables charities to create remote participation events and fundraising challenges based on both individual and overall event targets. These targets can be either distance or time based, as well as virtual races or relays, and the direct integration with Strava allows easy tracking and updating. Live streaming enables a charity's supporters to show their activities in real time directly to their donors, and virtual medals and milestones display progress towards their activity goals. It also automatically displays activity and fundraising leaderboards to get supporters competing to be top of the league.

For information on how to get started with virtual events, or to discuss how to grow your existing virtual events, please get in contact at **Info@enthuse.com**. You can also see how Enthuse's virtual events solutions compare with the market by clicking **here**, and find out more at **enthuse.com**

enthuse

t: +44 (0) 20 3872 2090

e: info@enthuse.com