

To quote the Beatles, it's been a 'long and winding road' that's brought street fundraising to where we are now in 2006. And it doesn't end here either, as when this medium matures in one country, new challenges, some previously experienced and some not, occur in different places as the method spreads around the globe.

In many ways these challenges are only just beginning – as an industry we are just now starting to explore the potential offered by face to face (F2F) recruitment, offering a new and sizeable demographic of supporters who give on a regular basis; and therein lies the rub. Street fundraising is successfully attracting much younger, more committed givers, but it hasn't yet received full acceptance from the wider public, and some charities are struggling to keep and develop the younger donors they receive through this technique.

The history of street fundraising is well documented: since it started in Austria in 1995 – DialogDirect Austria created the first street campaign for Greenpeace – it has since spread to many more countries, including the UK.

Agencies have tried and succeeded, and tried and failed, in making the medium successful, and some charities have also introduced their own in-house teams of face-to-face fundraisers.

What is undeniable is that millions of pounds are given to charities via the donors recruited through the street fundraising method on an annual basis. In the UK alone, 600,000 people signed up to make a regular donation to charity in 2003, recruited both on the street and by door-to-door methods. Assuming these supporters continue giving,

## Facing forward

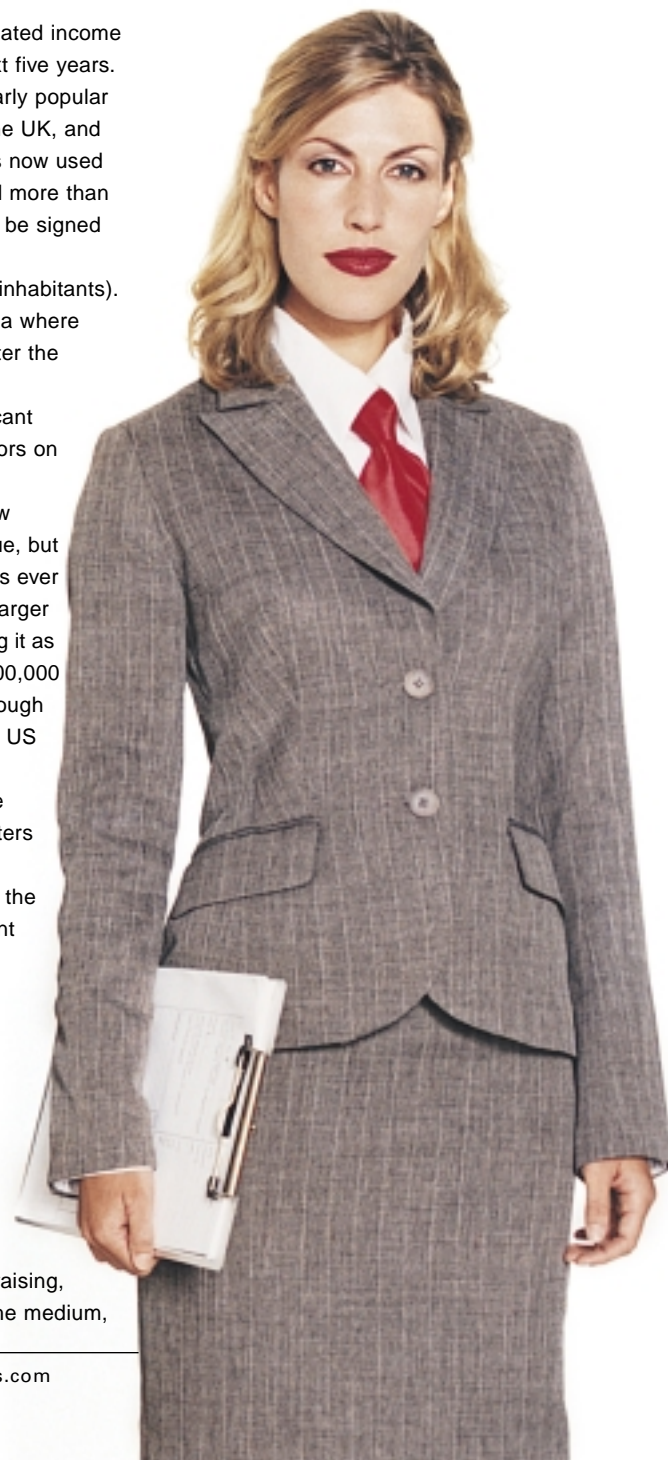
While face-to-face fundraising may have received its share of bad press in the UK, it has proved a successful technique for recruiting new donors. Robert Buchhaus explains how 'F2F' has developed since it was first introduced, and compares its reception in the UK to other countries where it has been adopted

this translates into an estimated income of £210 million over the next five years.

In Austria, F2F is a similarly popular technique compared with the UK, and after more than ten years is now used by a variety of charities and more than 100,000 people continue to be signed up every year (Austria has approximately eight million inhabitants). The same is true in Australia where it was introduced shortly after the UK, and most of the major charities now gain a significant proportion of their new donors on the street.

The US is a relatively new market for the F2F technique, but in the last two to three years ever increasing numbers of the larger charities have been exploring it as well – in 2005 more than 100,000 donors were recruited. Although compared to the size of the US market this figure seems relatively low, very likely the total volume of new supporters gained on the street will increase significantly within the next few years as the current results prove that the technique is as successful there as in other markets. Also, average amounts donated there are higher than in Europe (averages are above \$20 per month) and more and more charities are beginning to use the technique.

In addition to street fundraising, more services supporting the medium,



including telephone fundraising and database services, are coming online as we seek to develop further the regular donors recruited through this method.

### F2F perceptions

From a UK perspective, street fundraising does receive a largely unfair press, which is slowly improving, but this has not diminished its potential. As a very visible and proactive form of fundraising it was always likely to draw attention. Thankfully, in the charity sector itself, the arguments around the issue have now moved on to those concerning its economic benefits and not those simply claiming it's 'clogging up our high streets' or questioning the eagerness and zest of its 'usually young' practitioners.

For our part, we have always sought to defend the medium in the press and have never fought shy of speaking in a forthright fashion where our fundraisers' integrity has been attacked, or disinformation has created unnecessary prejudice.

In those countries where face-to-face fundraising has existed for many years, there is a growing sense of acceptance and we are beginning to witness this in the UK. Of course, there will always be 'disgruntled of Tunbridge Wells', but at the end of the day, you can't deny the

facts – it is an extremely successful form of fundraising.

Historically, any proactive form of 'selling', or fundraising for example, has drawn an initial backlash from those uncomfortable with it. Direct mail and outbound telephone approaches have both been attacked in the past.

Reading the Irish press – Ireland being a recent adopter of street fundraising – you notice history repeating itself and a similar pattern developing to that which we have experienced in the UK over the last few years, with the press turning its magnifying glass upon the medium.

The US & Australia have not had the same intense scrutiny as that experienced in the UK for example, but this is partly because of the nature of the fragmented press in those countries and the adaptive nature of their citizens. The public in the US and Australia give more money per-head of capita to charity and are more attune to new methods of giving.

Our ability to attract fundraisers has not been damaged by perception nor has there been a marked drop-off in donations – face-to-face fundraising is settled and will continue to deliver.

It is vital that we approach our fundraising in a coordinated fashion if we

are to learn even more about the donors we recruit and further refine face-to-face fundraising techniques. Making a direct approach to a member of the public on the street is just the first step in a long relationship, if that person commits to giving on an ongoing basis to a charity for at least five years, for example.

Face-to-face fundraising has changed the culture of giving significantly in some markets where it has existed for some years, since it has helped to recruit a younger group of donors. Although the basic principles of street fundraising methodologies have not changed significantly since it was introduced, once a donor is successfully recruited we can now employ a range of communications in order to develop these donors further and not least to give them a sense of belonging to the charity they give to regularly.

So the future success of the face-to-face technique will also depend on the ability of charities to explore the full potential of these often young donors that join them through this method, and to make the most of their relationships with them. This means better 'tailor-made' communication and 'after care' programmes specifically for these supporters.

**Robert Buchhaus is director of The Dialog Group**

