

e-Donate helps BBC Children in Need tap into new money

In 2002, BBC Children in Need introduced a new e-Donate platform from BT. This provided real-time statistics to aid future event planning and helped it earn extra interest and increase online donations by 50% – every penny of which goes directly to those in need.

BBC Children in Need (BBC CiN) is one of the highest profile charities in the UK, providing a vital umbrella service to a host of smaller charities and organisations working with children and young people. BBC CiN's Appeal 2001 raised a massive £25m for disadvantaged children, a figure that BBC CiN hopes to match for Appeal 2002. The signs are positive, thanks to the biggest 'on-the-night' total since 1991, of £13.5m. However, in today's economic climate, where money is tight and interest rates are the lowest they've been for nearly 40 years, making the most of every penny is more important than ever.

Every penny goes into a grant

It is BBC Children in Need's pledge that every single penny that is donated will be used to benefit disadvantaged children and young people in the UK. People are often cynical about this, assuming that operational costs are paid out of the money raised. This is not true. All the charity's costs, such as administration, promotional materials, salaries, etc are paid out of the interest accumulated on the money raised. And any interest left over, after all costs have been paid, is recycled back into the grants, to help even more children. When you consider that a small grant of only £250 pays for a trip to the seaside for 30 disadvantaged children, it's easy to see how every little bit, no matter how small, can make a real difference.

BBC CiN has always worked hard to raise as much money as possible, continuing to find new ways to encourage people to donate and to make itself more accessible to people who have never donated before. This year, more than most, it realised it must work doubly hard, not only to increase donations, but to ensure this money is processed as efficiently as possible, maximising the amount of interest earned.

e-Donate earns extra interest

The answer for Appeal 2002 was e-Donate – a BT enabled secure, custom-made, managed platform, that supported BBC CiN's existing website and Digital Satellite TV (DSAT) donation services. Fundamentally, this provided something that had never been possible before – the means to automatically process card donations straight into the bank. Previously, card details were stored on a secure system and processed after the event. This meant it could take up to two weeks for donations to go into the BBC CiN account – a transaction that is now almost instant.

The sooner the money is in BBC CiN's account, the sooner it starts to earn interest. For a charity that relies heavily on this income to pay off its operational costs, every penny counts. The several thousand pounds the extra two weeks' interest generates, is therefore all the more crucial. It also means that when interest rates start to rise, there will be a system in place to reap the benefits.



Key Results

- 50% increase in online donations
- Donations go directly into the bank to earn interest quicker
- Cheap and efficient solution means no more data processing costs
- New Radio 2 donation channel raises £30,173
- Real-time statistics help programme makers plan future events

“An increase in e-donations suggests we are tapping into new money... it has definitely been a positive benefit to the appeal to have this platform in place.”

David Ramsden,
BBC CiN Head of Finance and Operations

For more information please

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Cheaper and more efficient

The benefits don't stop there. Before the recent new media development, donors' details often had to be scanned in or manually inputted, tying up valuable human resources and increasing overheads. Staff also had to deal with calls from online donors who had expected their donations to go through straight away, and were worried, when they checked their accounts, that their donation hadn't appeared. "Data processing directly cost a few thousand pounds and consumed several work days in order to get the data prepared and appropriately submitted," explains David Ramsden, BBC CiN Head of Finance and Operations. "So we've got a real cash saving in terms of the processing costs, and an additional saving in resources. It was undoubtedly cheaper and more efficient."

Proven expertise in secure e-payment delivery

e-Donate was custom designed, built and tested by BT in just a month. BT was specifically chosen because it offered a robust solution, showed it was capable of working to very tight time frames and that it had worked in these areas before. "The reason that BT stood out was partly because of the trusted relationship that has built up through the provision of Network Telephony to the Appeal, but also because it provided a solution to all the needs we had in 2002," says David Ramsden. "It was able to service an online donation facility for the BBC Radio 2 website, an online donation service for the BBC CiN website itself, and



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for the interactive TV service. It was a comprehensive solution capable of delivering a solution on all the platforms we required.”

BT's experience in this area also helped it win the e-Donate contract. BT had recently worked on the Commonwealth Games website, among other solutions, and had strong statistics on how it had been highly secure and very responsive in terms of delivering web pages. As for Interactive TV, BT had already been involved in integrating Odeon's on-line booking application with Sky Active's service. This enabled customers to press the interactive button on their remote and order

cinema tickets from countrywide Odeon cinemas from the comfort of their living room. "I think the fact that we'd done it before in terms of working on large-scale web presences and that we had a lot of experience in interactive TV, made us come across as a very capable team," says BT's Sean Ronan.

New channel increases donations

BBC CiN had already provided a web-based donation service for five years via the BBC website (www.bbc.co.uk/pudsey), but this was the first time that there had been a branded Radio 2 donation page, (www.bbc.co.uk/radio2). It was easy to use. Web donors simply had to click on the 'Donate Now' button on the BBC Radio 2 or BBC Children in Need website and were automatically transferred to BT's e-payment facility to make their donation.



New media donation totals – Appeal 2002

Digital Satellite TV (DSAT)

38,331 donations £668,000 raised (average donation £17) max donation £1,000

BBC Children in Need website – www.bbc.co.uk/pudsey

14,329 donations £403,894 raised (average donation £28) max donation £5,000

BBC Radio 2 website – www.bbc.co.uk/radio2

1,021 donations £30,173 raised (average donation £30) max donation £2,000

Total raised – £1,102,067 (53,681 donations)

This new BBC Radio 2 page created a whole new donation channel that raised £30,173 from just over 1,000 donors. These donors' average contributions of £30, was higher than for any other donation medium, including phones. Promoted on BBC Radio 2 by Terry Wogan, David Ramsden sees it as a real success. "The fact that we are giving people as many opportunities to give as possible, is the most important thing. And the fact that BT enabled us to have a BBC Radio 2 presence as well as a normal 'Pudsey' presence has certainly, I believe, increased our overall total." It has also increased accessibility for potential donors who prefer to donate online, but don't want to click through numerous links or visit the Pudsey website.

Tapping into new money

BBC CiN provided a DSAT donation facility for the second time in 2002. This new service enabled DSAT subscribers to donate through their televisions by pressing the red interactive button on their remote controls. They were then guided to a secure donation platform, with easy-to-use fixed donation options and with a minimum donation of £5.

The results were fantastic. More than 71% of the 53,681 new media donations were made through DSAT, raising an incredible £668,000, a 57% increase on 2001's DSAT total of £425,000. BBC CiN was the first ever user of DSAT for a major telethon, and, as with any new technology, it expected uptake to be slow while it gained the public's trust and confidence. With more than 38,000 donations, people have certainly embraced DSAT enthusiastically. However, its average donation of just £17 shows that there is still room for growth – developments that e-Donate is already in place to support.

"I would say it has definitely been a positive benefit to the Appeal to have this platform in place," enthuses David Ramsden. "The fact that the online and interactive TV donations increased quite markedly this year suggests that we are tapping into new money – existing people are supporting us in new ways and new people are now supporting us too."



Real-time stats aid future programme planning

As well as tapping into new money, e-Donate's hi-tech database was also able to produce quicker and more accurate updates of donation totals throughout the night. Additionally, it was able to provide a comprehensive pool of statistics on every single donation made.

These statistics were then analysed to show when, and how much, people were donating. This gave the team an idea of what made people donate (famous stars, short films on those in need etc), and also gave accurate figures on the average donation for each medium. The DSAT donations produced distinct peaks and troughs that directly corresponded with specific segments of the televised event. For example, a Call To Action at 9.25pm by popular girl band, 'Atomic Kitten', raised over £7,000. However, during the news, between 10.15pm and 10.43pm, there was a

dramatic slump in donations, followed by a massive surge when the bulletin finished. A short film about refugees then prompted viewers into action.

This level of in-depth information was never previously available, and can now be used as an invaluable tool for future event planning. "It's extremely useful to see what gets people pressing their red buttons," says David Ramsden. He adds: "This year is the first year we've had really good real-time data on what was happening on digital satellite and online during the show. It's been an evolution, because we've always had some statistical data, but the quality of what BT was able to provide us with in 2002 means we can be even more sophisticated in 2003's show."

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A mission to embrace new technologies

For many years BT has supported BBC CiN's Network Telephony requirements, supplying the majority of the phone lines used on the night, and staffing six of the call centres with BT volunteers. This latest solution has extended BT's offerings and provided a platform to support future technological advances. The total cost of the BT solution was £30k. BT, as a supporter of children's charities, chose to donate this amount as a contribution from its employees to the charity.

"I think we are confident that the use of interactive TV and online donations should increase and become an even more important part of our Appeal as the years progress," concludes David Ramsden. "We are determined to keep abreast of new developments so we can give our supporters as many opportunities as possible to support a charity that they clearly hold in very high esteem."

A huge success

The BBC Children in Need Appeal 2002 was a huge success. All methods of donating, both online and by phone, increased to generate one of BBC CiN's largest on-the-night totals for over 10 years. Donations are still coming in, and the final total has yet to be announced, but David Ramsden is optimistic: "Last year we raised over £25m in total, and we're positive we'll get close to that this year."

This money will go towards hundreds of grants of differing sizes, to be distributed to carefully selected organisations that help give disadvantaged children a better quality of life. The grants are currently being finalised and distributed but will aid similar causes as in the past. For example, providing vital care and support for children psychologically damaged by the effects of war, or for those that are terminally ill or suffering bereavement. BBC CiN is also dedicated to giving disabled and impoverished children the chance to experience activities many of us take for granted. Last year a £5,000 grant for the Cambrian Education Foundation in Wales enabled a little deaf girl to fulfil her dream of learning to dance, by 'hearing' the ballet music through vibrations in the floor. Many other deaf children were also able to enjoy music, rhythm and sound in



ways they otherwise wouldn't have been able to, while other grants helped severely disabled children express themselves through art.

This year the grants will go to other equally deserving causes. But what you can be certain of is that BBC CiN will always guarantee that every penny in every pound donated will go directly to the children who need it most. And, if there is any interest left over, you can be sure that BBC CiN will put that straight back into the grants as well.

BBC Children in Need is a registered charity - no. 802052

HOW IT WORKS

e-Donate takes 53,681 donations

Designed in four weeks, e-Donate can take up to 32 donations per second. This automated electronic payments service is sited at BT's secure application hosting data centre in Cardiff. Based on an existing solution from BT Card Payments it was integrated with the appeal web pages and other payment systems.

Custom application & database

e-Donate is a custom application for donation capture storage and management of information. A managed turnkey service, it automates the process of passing card transactions through the banks. It comprises:

- 13 dedicated servers forming a resilient platform connected to the Internet
- Four pairs of UNIX web servers/database servers
- Multiple Oracle databases
- Xtreme Network Switches balanced traffic from a single public-facing IP address.

Traffic load was balanced across all four front-end web servers. If a web server stopped serving pages, for any reason, it would be taken out of the load automatically. Failure by any single component would not have stopped the service as a whole.

A separate 'totals' server to provide statistics

Through-out the event a separate server provided statistics, queried all the other database servers and kept a total that was refreshed every five minutes. Another server stored back-up information sent from each database server every minute or so – minimising the possibility of losing donation details.

Secure 'administration' web server

A password protected administration web server was provided, so the BBC could see the totals. Like all the web servers it was secured with a Verisign digital certificate from BT Trustwise, so all traffic could be encrypted and sent over a Secure Sockets Layer. As an additional security feature, it was only accessible from known addresses. Additionally:

- Two separate servers let developers mirror and test the application or any updates prior to going live
- Dual Nokia 530 Firewalls running Firewall 1 software were arranged in a 'fail over' pair and monitored by Intrusion Detection systems.

Donate Now!

You can donate to Children in Need

all year round by calling:

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