

Raising Money for Secondary Schools

Contents	Page
Section 1: Parents	1
Section 2: Business	
1. The school, business, parents and locality	5
2. Turning the tables: What would you do if you were in business and being asked for money?	9
3. Considering the donor: Turnover, profit and donations	12
4. Approaching smaller companies	14
5. Knowing your rivals	16
6. Why your suppliers are not likely donors	17
7. The companies that will give to your school	18
8. Do you really want some serious money?	19
9. What benefits can your school offer a sponsor?	21
10.22 Sponsorship plans	24
11. How to get the sponsors	49
12. Some final thoughts & sources of information	54

Raising Money for Secondary Schools

Section 1: Parents

There are two sources of income for schools beyond the normal income from the state and local authority: income from parents and income from businesses. We start with parents.

Parents and grandparents have a very strong reason to want to give some money to the school, and they are within easy reach – the school knows who they are and can easily send them messages asking them to donate some money. Which is why most schools initially look to parents and grandparents.

The “treble blank” approach

The treble blank approach of raising money from parents makes three fundamental errors:

- Firstly, it involves asking parents to give money without knowing what is going to happen to the money.
- Secondly, it involves not specifying how much they might have to give.
- Finally, it gives no idea what the parent will get in return, except perhaps a better education for the children in general.

The opposite approach is “please give £10”, “this money will be used to keep the swimming pool open next year”, and “in return for your money you will receive a tea-towel with drawings by members of your child’s class”.

The treble positive approach – the opposite of the treble blank – therefore forces the school to stipulate:

- How much the parent should be asked to give.
- What the money will be used for.
- What the parent will get in return.

The fact that there are questions like this to be answered means, quite obviously, that schools have to have someone to answer them.

Because schools often run on a committee basis there is an immediate temptation to pull together a committee to come up with ideas and push the matter forward. But there is also a need for this group to have a leader who is fully in touch with the ultimate aims of the school’s fundraising procedures.

To illustrate this point I will relate three very short stories which show exactly what needs to be done, and what needs to be avoided.

As I have been working on this report I have been talking with The Bulb Man Ltd, a company that offers a highly successful fundraising project for schools. Indeed schools using this company’s approach have raised over £1.25 million to date. The project involves the schools buying product in from The Bulb Man, and getting the parents and grandparents etc to buy the bulbs. There is an educational element in the service, but it is mostly about fundraising.

Now what struck me about this company, as I was working with them on their marketing plan, was the variation in results that schools could get. There was one particular school of under 80 children that had used the fundraising service each year for the past few years. Their figures varied, but averaged out at a profit of around £150 per promotion.

As this was such a tiny school there was little chance of committees running events and so the operation of the project was initially down to one parent who voluntarily took it on. After four seasons in each of which around £150 was raised, another parent took on the job and he decided to go back to the original material provided by the company on how they suggested money could be raised. In short, instead of doing it all his own way as the previous parent had done, this fundraiser studied the advice from the company and took on the project with an enthusiasm and focus that had not been seen before. He put a huge amount of energy into the campaign, got the children personally involved and as a result the fundraising went up from around £150 to over £1000!

Clearly all the conditions within the school were the same – same catchment area, same number of pupils. It was just that this parent did some research and put in a lot of personal energy. He made sure that the parents knew what the money was for, he got everyone excited and he was successful.

My second story comes from another primary school – but this one a city suburb school of 500 children – one of the largest in the country. The school has run a summer fete each year for many years, and the format has changed very little. At a committee meeting before the big day the group of teachers and parents who presided over the event debated each and every element of the day – even down to the cost of the hot dogs. Now it seems, according to the reports I received, that this debate was quite vigorous and lasted a long time – largely because the basis for pricing the hot dogs could never be agreed. Was the hot dog part of the money making process, or was it something that was provided for the parents to help make a pleasant afternoon.

My view is that all teachers and most parents have got better things to do than to debate the price of hot dogs, but what should have happened is that long before the hot dog debate got underway everyone should have known exactly why they were running the event. Was it to raise money or was it to make the parents think what a nice school this is and to give everyone a jolly time. In the end the decision was to sell the hot dogs at only a few pennies over cost, on the grounds that “we don’t think parents would want to pay more than that.”

My third and final story was reported in the educational and national press. It involves schools that took to phoning parents and sending them near threatening letters saying that the school needed more money and therefore the parents should expect to make a contribution to the school’s finances. Names of parents who did not contribute were bandied about openly, and the matter came to national attention when a parent who had a Sky dish on his house was approached by the fund raisers with the statement that if he could afford Sky he could certainly afford to donate £30 a month to the school, and it was a scandal that he would not pay.

What these stories highlights are this. Some schools think about events rather than aims. Some feel that simply letting matters take their course is a good way forward. Others get carried away with a desire, and forget that there is maybe a limit beyond which a particular approach should not be taken.

My view is that there should be agreement (be it announced by the managers, agreed by the PTA, or decided on by a committee) on what the school wants to do about fundraising. Does it want to bring the stakeholders in the school closer together, or does it want to raise money? Does it want to push

the fundraising as far and hard as it legally can, even if it runs the risk of offending one or two parents? Does it want to value the sense of community beyond everything else, and show everyone that money is not everything?

What these stories combined with our understanding of the treble blank approach show is that:

1. There is an infinite array of views that can be held about fundraising, and it saves lots of time if the school sorts out its view clearly and sets it down, so it doesn't try to redefine what it is doing every single time a new event comes along.
2. All methods of fundraising – from running barn dances to framing the art work of the children and selling it back to the parents – can be run in different ways, and there are some approaches that work far better than others.
3. There should always be a head of fundraising who is energetic and enthusiastic, who knows how fundraising works, who is open to new ideas, and who is fully aware of and in agreement with the way the school's managers feel fundraising should be handled.
4. People's ideas and views change over time, and no fundraising approach should get stuck. Just because you have had a barbeque every summer for the past five years does not mean you should do it again. If it is genuinely loved by everyone and consistently generates funds for the school, fine. However if the teachers moan about being forced to come in on a Saturday, if fewer parents turn up each year, and if the overall feel of the day is that the organising committee worked incredibly hard but got little support, then all that suggests it is time to stop and think of something else. There is no shortage of ideas and possibilities.
5. If you can get an agreement as to what you want to raise, how you want to raise it and what you want to spend it on, then there really should be no problem. What must be clear, however, is that this is utterly different from the approach that says "the school needs money, please help".

But pulling this together we might add that, although the traditional approach of "we want money please give us some" still works, and there is nothing wrong with it, it is not the most efficient approach. Far better is an approach in which each fundraising scheme has something different about it. In this way the whole project can be extended a number of times through the year. So you might raise money through the selling of bulbs, raise money through selling tea-towels, raise money through school photographs, raise money through selling mugs, pens, school blazers, and so on.

Fundraising from parents is a project that therefore benefits from organisation and structure – and knowledge of where the school wants to go and how it intends to get there.

It is also a project that needs to have an understanding of limits: the number of times staff will turn out for events; the number of times you can say to parents, please give some money. Of course you can extend this limit by changing the tactic and by changing the item/s you offer for sale, but in the end you are still asking for money from parents in a country where education is supposedly free. There is, as the third story showed, a limit to the amount of ways in which parents can be bullied into giving when they are reluctant.

All this needs to be understood by the person in charge of fundraising; s/he must know where the school is and where it wants to be in terms of its fundraising, how something has worked in the past, and when it is time to stop and try something else.

Giving without giving

New ideas come along all the time. Some work and some fail – but the fact that some fail does not mean that new ideas should not be tried. One of the first significant attempts to overcome the problem of asking parents for more and more gifts, while still getting a donation for the school, was tried through a programme known as My School Funds (MSF) in 2005. In this, parents went onto the MSF website, selected their school of choice, and then proceeded to make their regular purchases on the internet through all the major on-line stores. Through agreements with the stores commission payments were made to the nominated schools on each purchase. Ultimately the aim of My School Funds itself was that it would take part of this commission to pay for the running of the service, but in the early stages it offered to run the process at no charge.

The service failed, not through a lack of schools signing up to it, but because the schools could not persuade enough parents to route their internet shopping via the school account at MSF. What seems to have happened is that most of the schools that became involved simply told the parents once that the service was available, and left it at that.

Now obviously where a parent was told about this scheme at a time when s/he was about to buy, for example, a new TV set from John Lewis on-line this parent would of course go to John Lewis via the My School Funds site, nominate the school and so generate money for the school – at no extra cost to him/herself. But the likelihood is that, without regular reminders about the MSF scheme, most parents would forget and fail to make MSF the first port of call for on-line shopping. This is what appears to have happened and as a result commission generated by MSF on behalf of schools was unacceptably low.

However, many schools loved the service. Indeed in the six months after MSF shut we received letters and emails from many schools saying, “I can see that the service is now closed down, but we loved the idea – couldn’t we set it up again, just for our school.”

The answer was that there were good technical reasons why they might not want to do this (running the site and liaising with the stores was a fairly full-time job – worth it when spread across thousands of schools, but not worth it for one school alone), but more to the point there were good reasons why the situation might not be any better next time around.

So this approach of raising money for the school via the parents but without the parents having to pay did not work. But that does not mean we all have to go back to the school fete and the price of hot dogs!

What MSF showed is that parents will respond to a request for money – especially when linked to a product or service – but if you want to change their general habits you have to remind them over and over again. Parents will remember to collect coupons from supermarkets week after week (another form of giving without giving) – because the people at the check-outs are trained to say “are you collecting school coupons” – but if you just leave it up to the parents, nothing much happens.

What the school coupons, the crisp packets and indeed the notion of My School Funds had in common was that they sought to link the school, the parent and businesses that were to be found locally. If you can make that link work then you will probably reach the highest level of success in fundraising for your school that is possible.

Section 2: Business

1. The school, business, parents and locality

Ultimately most schools get to a position in which they can take the parents no further in terms of money giving and they have to turn to the next alternative – raising money from business.

But just as there are fundamental principles when raising money from parents, so there are with business. Certainly you need to have someone in charge, and certainly you need to have a set of clear understandings, to which everyone subscribes, if you are going to make a success of raising money from business.

Certainly, as far as I know, every school that has raised money satisfactorily in recent years has had a strong team leader who handles fundraising and who has tackled the four crucial questions, come up with very clear answers and got everyone in the team to agree to these answer.

The questions are...

- How much do you want?
- Why do you want it?
- Who do you think is likely to give you a meaningful amount for this cause?
- What will they get in return?

Answering the basic questions

I have had fund raisers answer the first question about how much they want with the answer, “as much as we can get”. That is not helpful here. We need to know if they want £50,000 as part of a specialist school bid, or £5,000 to buy a new electronic piano for the school hall. Do they want £500 to buy software for the French department, or £5,000 to re-tarmac the car park?

This is how businesses work – they work to budgets for projects – and they expect you to do the same. They don’t want to give you £5,000 so that the staff can stay in a five star hotel for a few days debating school improvement.

By answering the first two questions (how much and why) the third question (who will give you this amount for this cause) now becomes much more meaningful and answerable. It allows us to include some companies as potential donors and exclude others. Let’s take a couple of the examples.

- You want £50,000 as part of your bid to become a specialist school. Obviously the most likely sources will tend to be related to your specialism. We would expect a building company to be more likely to give money to an engineering specialist school than to a specialist music college; likewise we would have less expectation of a sizeable donation from the town bookshop than from a firm employing 1,000 local people and with a £100 billion turnover.
- You want £5,000 for re-tarmac work on the school car park. We might find that a car breakdown and recovery service might agree to put a little money in or indeed a major car