

Best Practice Guide
Harnessing the talent:
working with celebrities

open doors to opportunity

widen the reach of your
messages and values

media

engage supporters

Welcome

As many tabloid journalists and consumer magazines will testify: celebrity sells. When linked to your charity, celebrities can bolster your public awareness, shine a media spotlight on an often-ignored issue, or keep corporate partners happy when the perfect after-dinner speech is delivered at the annual fundraising ball.

Charities can use celebrities in many ways – some big and some small. A quote in a press release can increase the chances of it getting picked up and make certain stories more glamorous. A celebrity interview in a popular magazine we wouldn't usually be able to get into can help widen the reach of our message. An appropriate celebrity wearing a charity t-shirt can make it a 'cool' charity by association, and strengthen the brand. But as those in the profession of sourcing and engaging celebrities know full well, there are many unwritten rules of engagement. This guide is designed to give an overview into engaging high profile people with your charity, including links to further reading and groups that specialise in celebrity management. A lot, if not all, is common sense, but we hope it will help some charities avoid the pitfalls and employ good practice when deciding who to approach, making that initial phone call and building a lasting relationship.

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What is a celebrity?

One of the first things you might want to think about is what constitutes a celebrity and whether you even want to use this word. Many of the managers who work in this field will avoid this word as the 'talent' may not like to hear themselves referred to as a celebrity. Many charities prefer the words 'ambassador' or 'patron' or avoid such labels altogether. It can also sometimes set up unrealistic expectations. The word celebrity immediately aligns itself to someone hugely famous, when in reality a sports personality, local TV weather presenter or someone known for a certain skill or point of view might be just as good a fit for the job. Think about your audience and which one person they will sit up and listen to. Someone who appeals to teenagers probably isn't going to attract grandparents.

What do you want to use a celebrity for?

There are some questions you might want to ask before looking at this area. The first thing to consider as objectively as possible is what a celebrity will bring to your campaign, event or cause. A celebrity should always be an added bonus. No event, campaign or stunt should hinge solely on celebrity involvement. In other words, start with a good idea – the celebrity should be the cherry on the cake. Is it about media attention? A celebrity does not guarantee press coverage. Today the media is full of celebrity photos, stories and gossip which your celebrity will have to compete with, so it will need to be a strong project in its own right.

A celebrity does not guarantee press coverage

Although a high profile celebrity can often help with media interest and coverage, their profile isn't the most important thing to consider. It's more critical to find a celebrity who is engaged with your cause and has a genuine interest in your campaigns. This means you can forge a deeper relationship between the charity and celebrity that will hopefully last for many years. How many celebrities of a top calibre do you actually need? Do you really need 10 well-known names to attend one event? Keep in mind they can only be asked to do a few things per year. Do you really want to be using all those asks up at once? What are your main objectives? Are you looking to raise money, generate press interest or create awareness? Certain celebrities are better suited to different things. Manage the expectations of internal staff from the start. Be very clear what you would like from the talent. Don't waste their time if there really is nothing for them to get involved with. They will forget you and move on.

High-profile supporters secure success for Child Sponsorship Week

Holly Monks, celebrity coordinator, ActionAid

As a celebrity coordinator, I'm often asked how valuable celebrities are to a charity. My response is that there are lots of things to consider, but ultimately the celebrity's most important asset is being able to communicate the values and messages of a charity to a huge audience. This in turn helps raise vital funds, increase awareness and ultimately bring about change.

The celebrity support for ActionAid's Child Sponsorship Week was no exception, with a host of famous faces helping us celebrate child sponsorship throughout the week-long PR, fundraising and digital campaign in November 2012.

Find supporters with a genuine interest

A lot of research happens before we approach a celebrity we haven't worked with before. We identify celebrities we think will have a genuine interest in our work and who would appeal to our supporters. Approaches are made through agents and/or publicists, so it's important for us to nurture these relationships too. They must understand your cause and why you'd like the support of their client before they'll pass the request on.

Some of the celebrities involved with Child Sponsorship Week were long-term supporters of ActionAid and extremely engaged with our child sponsorship work. They were therefore very willing to support us and often talked about their own experiences of being a child sponsor, which was a great angle for media interviews.

Give them different ways to get involved

We're very conscious that most celebrities have little spare time and are often being asked to support a number of charity campaigns simultaneously. We therefore offer a variety of ways celebrities can show their support, including participating in photo shoots, attending events, doing media interviews, sending us a quote or showing support on social media. We hope that by giving a celebrity a number of different ways to get involved they will be able to help in some way, depending on the availability and time they have.

Actress Samantha Womack gave a great deal of her time by visiting ActionAid's work in Burma (Myanmar), where we were launching our child sponsorship programme for the first time. Samantha was deeply moved by the projects and people she met and spoke passionately about her experience on the sofa with Lorraine, to Sky News and a host of radio stations. There was also a fantastic double-page piece in *The Mirror* and *Woman's Own* as well as a number of online features and celebrity newspaper columns.



Fay Ripley, Mark Watson, Gabby Logan, Sarah Alexander and Katherine Kelly supported the campaign by taking part in our photo shoot to help us demonstrate in light-hearted ways how little 50p could buy in the UK and how it's much better to spend 50p a day sponsoring a child with ActionAid.

Some of our long-term celebrity child sponsors also did media interviews and provided quotes about their experience of sponsoring a child with ActionAid, which helped us secure a high level of media coverage. There was also great support in the Twitter-sphere from Stephen Fry, Jamelia, Angela Griffin, and Vicky McClure to name but a few.

Integrate your activity

Integrating the celebrity support across all ActionAid's communication and fundraising platforms enabled ActionAid to shout loudly about the campaign. We are in no doubt that the celebrity support we received was instrumental to the campaign's success.

Fay Ripley, Mark Watson and Gabby Logan: the 50p photo shoot was a fun way to highlight a serious need
Photos: Immo Klink

Picking your celebrity: do your research

Celebrity endorsement is sometimes seen as a quick-fix to lend credibility to a campaign, but it can be hard to get right. You don't want to use a celebrity just for the sake of it. You are essentially aligning two brands, so the ideal use of a celebrity is to find somebody who has a link to your cause.

This doesn't necessarily mean they need to have personal experience of your cause; it can be something more tenuous. Perhaps they are a soap star who had a storyline reflecting a pertinent issue; or they have an outspoken opinion about a health issue or a relative on the receiving end of it. They may be well-known for having a specific talent which you can tap into – such as men's fashion designer Paul Smith's connection with Maggie's Cancer Caring Centres (see case study) – which will give you a return over and above the publicity which accompanies their connection.

This approach to sourcing a celebrity with a connection to your cause may gain your charity better credibility with the media while also strengthening your key messaging.

You need to engage celebrities, not use them

Once you have specific names in mind that fit your charity's brand you need to think about your target audience. Sometimes although a daytime television or children's presenter is not well heard of, if you're trying to engage with mums and kids they are a perfect draw. There are also those names your boss or CEO just wants to court, but who aren't really adding value. This relates directly to why you've asked that person to be involved: are they there to lend credibility to the charity – or just your chief exec?

Think outside your bubble

Think of the memorable charities using celebrities in a unique or creative way. These are typically organisations that integrate their big messages – including celebrity endorsements – across fundraising, campaigning, PR and awareness-raising, and social media.

Think laterally about working with a celebrity long term, and not just for a single project. Remember these people need to be looked after the way you would a major donor. You need to engage them, not use them. They might well have their own ideas of how they'd like to be involved with you – as an advocate, a fundraiser, a donor, an ambassador, a publicist – even a trustee. It's important to understand the specific interests of your celebrity supporter and not use them as a go-to person for every activity you need help publicising. It's much better to ask them to support a few specific activities which they might be passionate about, as both they and the charity will get the most out of the relationship.

Therefore a stewardship plan needs to be tailored around the individual to complement their supporter journey. You want to build a relationship with them and have them come back and support you over and over again, not just lend their name to a one-off campaign.

Centrepoin't's royal patronage has young people at its heart

Matthew Wilk, head of marketing and communications, Centrepoin't

The Duke of Cambridge became Patron of Centrepoin't in 2005. It is his first royal patronage and follows in the footsteps of his mother Diana, Princess of Wales, who became Patron in 1992.

The Duke visited Centrepoin't with his mother and brother when he was younger, and the issue of youth homelessness is very important to him.

Youth homelessness is one of the key charitable areas receiving support from the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, with the others including members of the armed forces and their families, children and young people, and promoting conservation and sustainable development.

Active advocacy

The Duke's support is extremely important to Centrepoin't. He is an advocate in much more than name, having volunteered at Centrepoin't hostels and even sleeping on the streets to deepen his understanding of youth homelessness. His patronage obviously draws attention to the issue, which it may not otherwise receive. Given his limited availability, the challenge for Centrepoin't is to ensure it makes the most of his time and to explore other ways to maximise the patronage. There is no set or 'contracted' amount of time the charity receives each year; it depends on the projects or campaigns that would benefit from his support.

Young people are at the centre of everything Centrepoin't does and the involvement of its patron is no exception. However, there are three main forms of support the charity receives from a communications perspective:

- 1 Personal visits/attendance at events
- 2 Supportive quotes
- 3 Video messages

Maximising coverage of personal visits

The Duke has visited Centrepoin't hostels on several occasions, providing ideal media opportunities. The timing of these visits dictates the angle the coverage is pitched at: Christmas, for example. The visits always generate coverage but the challenge is to ensure this coverage is as wide as possible and includes our key messages, such as 80,000 young people experiencing homelessness each year. The amount of attention they create also



means we need to increase capacity (we use the PR agency Red during these times), brief those involved even more thoroughly than usual and cope with other challenges such as security, which will often dictate timings, photo opportunities etc. Attendance at events, which are usually held to raise funds, presents the same issues but it is often more straightforward as the venue will be used to Royal visits. The key to success for these events is planning – as far ahead and as detailed as possible (bearing in mind it will usually change on the night!).

18-year old resident Vanessa Boateng entertained royalty when the Duke and Duchess visited Centrepoin't's Camberwell hostel

Supportive quotes

If a personal visit isn't possible, a supportive quote for a project, event or campaign is an excellent way to increase coverage. Examples of this for Centrepoin't include:

- Regional Sleep Outs in 2012, which were organised by partner charities but benefited hugely (over 300 articles nationwide) from a quote from the Duke, following a request from Centrepoin't
- An elderly lady, Doris Hancock, walked Hadrian's Wall for Centrepoin't. A message of congratulations from the Duke ensured regional broadcast and print coverage

The accessibility of video

Finally, video messages are becoming increasingly useful as more people can access them from phones and tablets. The Duke rarely provides these due to his other commitments, but Centrepoin't has benefited from them in the past (in support of a team that took part in a race to the South Pole). This format is obviously stronger than a straightforward quote (quotes can be used from the film if necessary) and can be used in a variety of ways over a longer period of time. There is a risk that this sort of message can look the same as every other message of support so the script and format need to be as original as possible. Centrepoin't benefits from the support of several other celebrity ambassadors who have recorded messages for campaigns/appeals and have proven to be very effective.

Strong links with the Palace

Other than specific Centrepoin't activity, the charity is also often asked to comment on the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. In these cases, it's vital to maintain strong communication with the press team at St James' Palace to ensure any comments



don't contradict them. However, the Palace is extremely supportive of the charities that benefit from a Royal patronage and encourages them to generate as much coverage as possible. For example, the CEO of Centrepoin't attended the Royal Wedding in 2011 and was interviewed over 10 times, not to mention the publicity gained from 50 giant orange balloons carried by Centrepoin't volunteers outside the Abbey!

An unexpected benefit of the Duke's support is the support of the other charities that share a Royal patronage. Comms leads from each charity meet quarterly to share best practice and promote each other's work – usually through joint projects or digital cross-promotion.

How to maximise a Royal patronage:

- Be realistic in terms of their time and be flexible/creative to get the most from it
- Plan, plan, plan
- Communicate clearly and consistently with the Royal press office
- Do something different – a Royal event will generate coverage but a unique picture of them will grab the front page

The Duke's unexpected dance routine stole the show – and grabbed the headlines

Photos: Harriet Armstrong

How to approach your chosen celebrity

Whether you get in touch with your carefully-chosen celebrity directly, through their agent/manager or via a mutual contact, make your approach personal. Tell them why you want to work with them in particular, what difference you believe they'll make to your cause, and what they stand to gain from the relationship. Give them a few different options of how they could get involved – and make them interesting ones. Depending on who they are, your celebrity may be approached by any number of other worthy causes, so try and make their involvement interesting and appealing.

How to get the media engaged with your celebrity

It takes more than a well-known name tipping up to an event to guarantee press coverage. You'll also need all the usual trappings of a compelling story – a strong news hook, case studies, the reasons why your celebrity got involved, your charity or campaign's key messages. As with any media work, do your research on the media you're pitching to – understand how your celeb might appeal to their audience, know their deadlines and how these fit with your timeframe.

Try to offer your target media something unique

Depending on how much of your celebrity's time you have to play with, and what they're prepared to say and do, try to offer your target media something unique from your celebrity. But don't overpromise – make sure you can deliver what you offer.

Preparing your celebrity

Make sure the celebrity is well briefed. Not only will the celebrity and agent appreciate you doing this, but they won't make any slip ups that might reflect badly on your charity.

Give them as much information as you think they'll need (without overwhelming them) on

- the background of your charity, cause or project
- timings and venues of all the activity you want them to be involved with
- pertinent details of any press you want them to engage with
- the role you want them to perform for you
- the key messages you'd like them to get across
- suggested answers to any challenging questions you think they might come up against

Crucially, don't forget to thank them for their time and support.

CASE STUDY

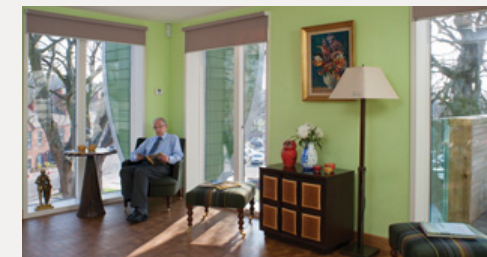
Tailor-made ties: Paul Smith and Maggie's

Katie Tait, head of PR, Maggie's Cancer Caring Centres

At Maggie's we're lucky to work with some extraordinarily talented people: none more so than Paul Smith.

Maggie's is about empowering people to live with, through and beyond cancer by bringing together professional help, communities of support and building design to create exceptional centres for cancer care. Our centres are for anyone affected by cancer. They are places where people are welcome whenever they need us – from just being diagnosed, or undergoing treatment, to post-treatment, recurrence, end-of-life or in bereavement.

Five years ago we started our campaign to bring a Maggie's centre to Nottingham and one of the newly appointed board members to the campaign mentioned she knew Paul Smith. Paul, the iconic men's fashion designer, was born in Nottingham, members of his family live there and his head office is situated there.



A natural synergy

We thought Maggie's might appeal to Paul because of the design of our buildings. Paul Smith is all about quirkiness, originality, style and individualism which matches Maggie's to a T. The board member organised a meeting and we asked if he might consider designing the interior of our new centre. To our delight, he said yes.

What was important to us was the natural synergy between the two brands. We genuinely needed his advice and

guidance to create a brilliant interior.

His strong Nottingham roots gave us another reason for asking him to design the centre. This meant not only did we get an amazing interior but the story of Paul designing it had real authenticity and we gained a lot of press coverage.

Paul also offered to design us a mug – he drew a lovely cat and dog on a comfy chair with material especially designed for Maggie's and it sold everywhere. He also hosted an evening for us at his shop in Nottingham where he signed mugs and served champagne. It was perfect.

An ongoing relationship

Since that first opening Paul has supported us over and over again, mainly without us asking him to, from donating charity prizes to organising raffles in his stores.

We're really careful never to 'over ask' for his support and choose very carefully the projects we feel he might be interested in.



Rather than a whole lengthy document, we send his office snippets of information that might interest him. We make sure we meet up often with his lovely team and that we are up-to-date with all his work and interests. We also make sure we thank him in a way that is appropriate – after Nottingham opened we sent him a giant stuffed bunny/cat with his name sewn into it. It might not be for everyone, but flowers simply weren't enough.

Sir Paul Smith officially opens Maggie's Nottingham centre with Sarah Brown, actress Hermione Norris, Piers Gough (the architect), Judy Naaqe (Maggie's campaign chairman) and Laura Lee (Maggie's chief executive)

Photo: Matt Alexander

The power of the president

Caroline Mackenzie, celebrity liaison manager, Sparks

Sparks has always had a strong affiliation with its celebrity supporters. The charity was founded by sportsmen and women who were grateful for their own health and wanted to reach out to others who were less fortunate. The aim was to give all children the chance to live a full and active life – just like their sporting heroes.

Over the years, Sparks' high profile supporters have continued to support the charity's fundraising by attending events, giving prizes and directly donating funds.

Sparks has a strong fundraising presence, but a lack of awareness of how the charity helps families around the UK has led to the development of a strong communications strategy to spread Sparks' key messages nationwide. This will enable us to educate and engage new supporters and strengthen our brand. As a result we're beginning to use our celebrity supporters in a slightly different way through communication channels, as well as fundraising activities.

Choosing the Sparks president

The charity's president is chosen annually by Sparks' trustees. Having strong connections with sportsmen and women, the charity has previously appointed presidents with a high profile in their individual sport. However, having identified the need to engage with an audience reflecting our beneficiaries – to enable young families to emotionally connect and feel inspired to support the cause – we need a president who can also relate to this audience.

When approaching potential candidates, we look for an individual who is passionate about improving children's health and who believes in Sparks' mission. They should be willing to help us reach new audiences as well as educate and inspire them to get involved with the charity's work. The president is a representative of Sparks and an extension of the Sparks brand, so we select them carefully. Sparks' president represents the charity for a year, with an option to continue for longer if they'd like to.

Appointing new dad Matt Dawson

As president, we ask the individual to do a variety of things on Sparks' behalf,

including endorsing campaigns, talking to the media and attending and speaking at key Sparks events. We identified retired English Rugby Union player Matt Dawson MBE, a long-standing Sparks supporter, as an ideal president for 2013.



Matt Dawson promotes Sparks' Bake for Bumps campaign by demonstrating his mother's carrot cake recipe in a viral video

Having recently become a father for the first time, Matt has a new understanding of the importance of children's health. He is keen to champion children's medical research by attending medical visits and encouraging the public to get involved in Sparks' fundraising to help more babies be born healthy and stay healthy.

Once he'd accepted the role, we met Matt early in the year to outline our priorities for 2013 and see what he could commit to. Regular updates on Sparks' fundraising and research projects around the UK keep Matt close to the charity and its core values.

As a regular panellist on BBC1's *Question of Sport* and winner of *Celebrity MasterChef*, Matt's media profile is a great asset to Sparks in helping us reach a broader audience through his television appearances and social media activity.

We're proud of the dedication of the individuals who support Sparks as our president. We look forward to engaging more supporters through this rewarding role in the future, to promote the importance of children's medical research.

Developing an ambassador strategy

Beth Gooch, ambassador and VIP liaison manager, The Scout Association

The Scout Association has always been fortunate in having support from some amazing ambassadors. But until a couple of years ago there was no dedicated person to develop our strategy, cultivate new relationships and look after existing ambassadors. We have an objective in our marcomms strategy to "increase visibility of Scouting ambassadors in their sectors, supporting ambassadors to promote the need to give to Scouting". Our ambassador strategy helps deliver this.

We began the process of drawing up our strategy by taking a look at our current supporters, and identifying any gaps. It became clear we needed to diversify and look at recruiting additional people to complement our existing ambassadors. We realised we needed a diverse range of people to appeal to our key audiences.

Finding a good fit

We wanted to make sure we were approaching people who were a good fit for The Scout Association. We ask our ambassadors to do a variety of things for us, including endorsing campaigns, attending Scout camps, appearing at an event in Parliament, speaking for us at an event or about us in the media. Our ambassadors represent us for two years, with an option to continue for longer if they'd like to. They are representatives for Scouting and an extension of our brand so we wanted to select them carefully.

We made it clear in our strategy that we were looking for people who fitted our brand values: they had to have the spirit of everyday adventure, be up for a challenge and be inspirational. Our ambassadors should help us to reinforce our brand, so embedding our values into the strategy was vital.

They didn't need to have been Scouts themselves, but they did need their own 'Scouting story' to tell. This could be their personal experiences in Scouting as a child, or via a parent or child in Scouting, or even just attending a Scouting event and speaking with young people.

We're very much associated with explorers and adventurers, but we were



Former soldier Phil Packer embodies the adventurous Scouting spirit as the newest ambassador recruit

also keen to work with people who've overcome their own challenges. Our latest recruit, Phil Packer, sustained a severe spinal injury when serving as a British Army major in Iraq, but went on to take on some inspiring personal challenges including parachuting, rowing, mountain climbing and several marathons. Overcoming adversity and demonstrating adventurous Scouting spirit, he's proved an inspiration to our young people and our volunteers.

Focusing on diversity

Before recruiting new ambassadors we wanted to look at other aspects of diversity including ethnicity, disability, sexuality, gender and age. We used our strategy to discuss these issues and to put processes in place for how we would approach new people, what we would expect of them, and a plan for how and when we would contact them.

We concluded our strategy by stating our ultimate aim was to have a roster of around 15 official Scouting ambassadors encompassing a wide range of experiences and backgrounds, and who are actively supporting Scouting.

Going into the final year of the strategy we're aiming to recruit another two or three ambassadors who we hope will increase diversity even further.

We're incredibly proud of the people who support us in this role, but still recognise there's always room to have an even greater number and diversity of inspirational people supporting us.

Queen against the badger cull

David Bowles, head of public affairs, RSPCA

At the end of 2011 the government made its long anticipated announcement that it would push ahead with a trial cull of badgers in two areas (Somerset and Gloucestershire) as the preferred method of controlling bovine tuberculosis (TB) in cattle. The trial was to assess if the proposed method of shooting badgers was humane.

While all sides in the debate, including farmers and animal welfare groups, agree that action is needed to reverse the increase of TB in cattle, disagreement rages on the best method and whether culling will have the effect farmers want.

After an eight year government-funded trial, scientists agreed that a cull of badgers would only reduce the disease by 16% in the trial area and on the periphery may make things worse. In addition, no one is absolutely certain how much of the disease cattle get from badgers and how much is passed on from other cattle. The key question was: is it better to kill badgers or use non-lethal methods such as controlling cattle movement, stopping badgers interacting with cattle or vaccinating badgers themselves against the disease?

With passions high on both sides and the government determined to fulfil a manifesto commitment to use all means to control the disease, the scene was set for a heated debate.

Raising the profile of the issue

The animal welfare groups quickly realised that if they were to stop the government-led and farmer-backed cull, they would have to pool their resources, work closely together and raise the public profile of the issue. The first task was quickly achieved. At a time of financial squeeze it made sense for all the major animal groups to combine their supporters and resources. A coalition of 14 groups came together with the



simple message of stopping the cull and putting forward a humane alternative to bovine TB. But we needed to get to new audiences.

Some of the groups had already worked on highlighting animal welfare issues with Brian May, guitarist with rock band Queen. Brian owned a number of wildlife sanctuaries, was personally interested in the badger issue and could see scientifically that the government's arguments didn't stack up. He also had his own organisation, Save Me, so his personal commitment could not be doubted.

Opening the door to opportunities

The Team Badger campaign, fronted by Brian, was officially launched in September. The short-term aim was

Brian May's support of the Team Badger campaign opened doors to the media and more
Photo: RSPCA

to raise public awareness so that the government backed down; the long-term aim was to present a viable alternative to killing badgers.

Public interest was galvanised through the normal avenues of social campaigns, letter writing, billboards and town hall public meetings in the cull areas. But it was Brian's presence which created opportunities that wouldn't have existed before.

The closing ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics, at which Brian performed wearing a badger and fox motif sewn into his jacket, reached a global audience of billions and a UK audience of over 26 million – 81% of the viewing public that night.

The message found its mark, and the farming press was fuming.

Brian attended many local meetings, his presence boosting numbers. At one meeting in the small market town of Stroud, over 300 people came to make their anti-cull voice heard. A rally in Bristol meant the target of getting 100,000 people to sign the No 10 petition calling for an end to the cull was quickly reached. This led directly to a debate in the House of Commons.

The power of personal commitment

Brian doesn't need briefings as he knows the issue better than many of the campaigners – his personal commitment comes through. He is also one of the few people who can get hard bitten MPs to line up for his autograph. After the debate, the number of MPs voting in favour of stopping the cull (147) outweighed those against (28). Only a few days later, the government confirmed that it was postponing the cull until mid-2013.

Even when some newspapers accused Brian of hypocrisy for once allowing the culling of deer on his land, his credentials

as an animal rights campaigner meant the key messages of the campaign weren't hi-jacked. In fact, in explaining the way the deer population was managed on his land, Brian was able to restate the objections to the badger cull to a new audience.



Yes the campaign has merely paused and further battles need to be won. But at least we got a pause. Having Brian front the campaign meant we were able to turn the publicity into one of the largest and fastest ever growing No 10 petitions, turning public interest into action. He is there for the long haul until a time when the disease of bovine TB has been beaten and the threat of a badger cull has gone.

Public interest turned to action as the Queen guitarist helped generate one of the largest and fastest growing No 10 petitions

Is the party over?

What to do when good celebs go bad

Max du Bois, Spencer du Bois

Until recently, the cost of a celeb was usually measured in the hours spent matching diary dates or taking them to the 'front line' to see our work, to record another track or complete a 10k run. But the cost always seemed negligible compared to the value of raising the profile of our causes or using them to raise hard cash.

From a brand perspective, especially if we weren't the ones liaising and organising, it seemed a particularly good deal, harnessing their fame and gravitas to our goals and name.

That is, until the chief executive calls and asks if we've seen their now ex-best friend on the front of *The Sun* with a line of coke and they're trending on Twitter for all the wrong reasons.

What do we do? How do we limit the damage? How do we protect our brand?

It all depends on scale, transgression and timeframe.

How close is the connection?

On scale, how closely related to our brand are they? A fundraising tool for our 10k trek or gala dinner? Not such a disaster, unless it's current: then it's more of a costly inconvenience. A memorial fund? More difficult and expensive. Leading a major campaign? Not good. On our trustee board? A tough conversation, usually about a very clear decision. In our name? The worst.

Do our audiences directly and spontaneously associate the celeb with our charity? Not our cause but directly with us? The law of the inverse perversely plays here. Often, unless they're on a current bit of DM or in an ad, despite all our best efforts, will they be linked to us? You'd pull what they're on. You might not use them for a while but it's unlikely anyone will damn your brand (this raises the question of their value in the first place, but that's for the rest of this guide to address.)

Are they more heavily associated with us? This could be more serious and costly. Not just in short-term association but in the long term as you lose their fundraising or campaigning bite.



How big is the scandal?

Then there's the scale of transgression. Where does it sit on the public's scale of heinous?

Naked? Drunk? Unless that's directly contradictory to your mission, it'll be lost in the news cycle. Violence? Abuse? That's damaging.

These two are the major factors that act as multipliers to all other factors. Hit the high end of them and you're looking at limiting serious damage, not just riding out a storm. Hit the middle ground for one or both and it can be serious but not fatal. The low end? Cease immediate use, but look to the medium term.

The press wants what's current: time can erase the media's memory

The test of time

The final factor is timescale. How closely are they involved with you at the moment? Note the 'at the moment': chief executives tend to remember last year's photo opp like it was this morning when these things happen. The press generally doesn't; it wants what's current.

A good rule of thumb here is whether you'd mind being seen with them personally a day, a week, a month, six months or a year later? If they repulse you, they'll repulse others.

Remember when Kate Moss was caught with several lines of coke? She was deserted by commercial brands at the time but is now back in the ads and doing a great job with breast cancer charities and Comic Relief.

Bringing them back to the fold

Is there a point when you can reintroduce your celeb? Remember: if you support them when the scandal hits, not by using them but by keeping in contact as all their media friends desert them, you'll be remembered. You can also act as a source of positive media exposure further down the track, but this must be on your terms. Grateful celebs often bring friends and work harder.

Can bad news be good news?

Are there occasions where public transgressions help? Donations to disgraced US cyclist Lance Armstrong's Livestrong actually went up during his unmasking. It's one of the very few occasions where people have heard about a related charity and found its mission and brand so compelling they actually donated.

So is all bad news really bad news? Assume so. It usually is, and the exceptions are rare.

With so many of these issues, it's about how you manage your response. In all but the worse instances, be 'proactively reactive'. Be prepared with briefings and

releases, let key staff know what to say and don't go to the press. Comment only if they come to you and then only to acknowledge the work the celeb has done and deny any negative impact. Whether or not the celebrity supports your charity will soon be lost or forgotten in the greater details of the scandal.

However, if your organisation is heavily cited you should acknowledge any good



Donation to Lance Armstrong's Livestrong charity actually went up during his unmasking
Photo: Cain and Todd Benson, Flickr

work and immediately distance yourself, shutting down the relationship. Share your worries about how this can damage the work you are doing for a good cause.

The key factors in brand terms? Be rational, logical and decisive but focus on the wider role of building a brand that's bigger than any reputational risk.

Our objectives as charity communicators

- To engage the right celebrities - and use them to create greater awareness of our cause among clearly defined audiences
- To nurture ongoing relationships so celebrities begin to consider our cause their cause – and support us in other ways
- To connect to a celebrity's wider networks which may also be able to support our charities in other ways (pro bono advice, access to otherwise unobtainable goods and services, auctions, freebies etc)

Celebrities work best as part of a comms mix

Risks to avoid

- Pairing up with a celebrity for one-off events that neither lift the profile nor give reason for the celeb to find any real affinity with the charity
- Approaching the wrong kind of celebrity on a whim, or someone just looking to extend their fame; this can have damaging reputational risks for your cause
- Getting too obsessed with celebrity affiliation instead of concentrating on a strong mission or campaign
- Managing internal expectations of what a celebrity can realistically do for your charity – particularly without a paying contract
- Failing to be clear about corporate endorsements – either where the celebrity ends up endorsing a sponsor or corporate partner you're involved with instead of your charity, or the celebrity's own endorsement of a company or product gets blurred with their support of your charity

Final tips

- Define your purpose and choose your celebrity accordingly. Are you looking for fundraising, awareness, campaign endorsement or press attention?
- Remember: celebrities work best as part of a communications mix
- Put on an event that is enjoyable in its own right and use it as a learning opportunity for the celebrity to bond with your cause. These people are invited to hundreds of events. They need to have a good experience at yours
- Be realistic about what you are asking the celebrity to do, and manage internal expectations accordingly. As charities do not pay their celebrities fees, there will be a limit to the amount of time they can give
- Although you're not paying a fee, offering to pay for transport is always appreciated and can be a good way to keep track of your celeb if they're running late. You'll also need to have the budget for a good photographer. A national paper might just print a camera phone snap *in extremis* - but they're much more likely to publish a decent shot.

About the authors



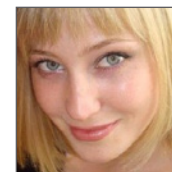
Rob Dyson

In his day job, Rob is public relations manager for young people's charity Whizz-Kidz, and pioneered the organisation's digital communications strategy and delivery. Rob founded the Third Sector PR & Communications Network on Facebook, and is a founder member and former trustee of CharityComms. Rob blogs on third sector issues, media relations and digital comms at robdysonPR.com



Beth Gooch

Beth started in PR before moving to the celebrity supporters department at Barnardo's. From there she became the celebrity manager at Shelter and then moved to the Scout Association where she has been the ambassador and VIP liaison manager for the past two years.



Caroline Mackenzie

Caroline is a celebrity liaison manager for Sparks. She has four years' experience in managing charity celebrity portfolios, having previously worked at Marie Curie Cancer Care. Caroline is currently the chairman of the UK's Celebrity Managers' Forum which allows the sharing of best practice and information, as well as providing support and mentoring for those new to this area of work.



Vicky Browning

A former magazine journalist, editor and publisher, Vicky worked at Haymarket Publishing, the UK's largest privately owned publishing company for 16 years, publishing a wide range of business titles. She then enjoyed six years as an independent publishing consultant before joining CharityComms as director in March 2010. She is passionate about CharityComms' mission to improve communications standards and practice in the third sector.

Further reading and information

Why not join the Celebrity Managers Forum? This is a group of charity PRs and celebrity managers who meet monthly to pool knowledge and tackle shared issues. Contact the Forum at celebritymanagersforum.webs.com/

CharityComms Thought Piece: What's the value of a famous face? charitycomms.org.uk/articles/what-is-the-value-of-a-famous-face

Live Q&A: Working with celebrity patrons guardian.co.uk/voluntary-sector-network/2012/jan/12/charity-celebrity-patrons-discussion

MediaTrust online guide resources.mediatrust.org/celebrities-and-charity/

About CharityComms

CharityComms (charitycomms.org.uk) is the professional membership body for charity communicators. We're here to improve the standard of communications and champion its role in the sector.

Membership of CharityComms gives you access to great content, examples of best practice, free seminars and exclusive networking events and a host of opportunities for professional development. Find out more at charitycomms.org.uk/membership

To explore best practice on a range of key communications issues, check out our events calendar at charitycomms.org.uk/events

Other CharityComms Best Practice Guides include:

[Show and Tell: portraying beneficiaries and service users](#)

[Branding Inside Out](#)

[CharityComms Guide to Social Media for Charities](#)