

Data entry made easy

Websites offer a great opportunity to learn more about supporters and beneficiaries. And when that information is uploaded automatically into a charity's database they become even more valuable, as ERIC LOW discovered

Myeloma UK is the only organisation dealing exclusively with myeloma and its related disorders in the UK. Our services cover every aspect of myeloma, from information and support to improving standards of treatment and care.

In early 2005, we set ourselves the target of having the best myeloma website in the world. To do this, we needed to ensure the very latest information and fastest communication tools were employed. As a result we took the decision to review all our activities and evaluate our people, process and technology.

The website was to become our main source of supporter and fundraising information. It already offered a number of great facilities in terms of information and practical advice but we wanted to expand the

scale of interaction and advice available, develop online pledges, and ease of online ordering of our fundraising packs and so on. Around June 2005, we discovered the opportunity

through our supplier, Blackbaud, to link the website with our database, The Raiser's Edge.

In linking online and offline activities, it would enable data entered into the website to automatically update the database. This would offer opportunities

to improve our administration, track online donations and allow immediate responses to our marketing campaigns – rather than waiting for opening hours – and be active towards those that fundraise on our behalf.

While this integration of technologies offered many strategic and performance improvements, it also required ongoing careful and detailed planning, and as such the whole process took around eight months to complete. We have learnt a great deal on the way and with hindsight we would have done some things slightly differently.

For other charities wanting to embark on a similar project we would recommend they begin with an evaluation of what impact it will have across the whole organisation. This is a corporate decision, involving all departments at all levels of the business, so it's important this is taken into consideration. Involving the team along the way also has benefits – the website link to SRM gave us new dimensions in our operational effectiveness and we were able to gain much more from this by involving our fundraisers.

It was essential to set out our metrics, such as how the website is used today, the cost of data entry onto the database, data lost due to discrepancies between the two systems plus details of our comms strategies. Processes needed to be flexible as they were often modified and improved along the way.

It was also critical we did our sums; this was a large financial commitment and we needed to ensure it would generate return on investment.

The current benefits are far reaching. The number one application is the ability to receive donations online. This data is fed directly into

the database, which not only improves our donor care programmes, but also impacts on gift aid schemes and internal efficiencies.

We have been able to improve the effectiveness of supporters wishing to fundraise on our behalf through online registration for fundraising packs. This data is collected automatically on our database and assists subsequent communication and additional support programmes.

Events information and respective activity has improved as we are able to easily create specific micro sites that allow us to monitor online registrations, with information again feeding directly through to our SRM database. As a result, we track supporters' interests in different events and can direct relevant communications without trying to match data from separate sources and programmes – previously done manually. The latest information is now at our disposal, data and donations are more accurate, and all of this information can be used much more effectively for specific campaigns and communications.

Despite these improvements, we are not standing still and there are a number of additional key developments we are researching to help improve our mission. They include online direct debit registration and donations, merchandise ordering and the enhancement and improvement of our discussion boards and online help and support.

By sourcing these facilities we will be able to create a much more holistic communications strategy, which ultimately will enable us to provide better services to both our supporters and our beneficiaries. ■



Eric Low is chief executive of Myeloma UK