

+ The National Funding Scheme

CASE STUDY NO 5

[SHEFFIELD THEATRES TRUST – raising funds for a theatre refurbishment](#)

3rd October 2014



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DONATE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Over 600 donations were made following three live call-outs to the Theatre's audiences
- Total raised through DONATE - £3,560 with over 300 donations alone between 19th and 24th May
- Text channel only promoted to audience (96% of donations)
- Web channel not promoted leading to a 90% drop in Gift Aid (against DONATE's long term average) and very low data opt-in.
- Average donation by text channel £5 / average donation by web channel £9.82

THE ORGANISATION

The largest producing theatre complex outside London, Sheffield Theatres creates work to enrich and transform lives through the power of live theatre.

Sheffield Theatres presents classical revivals, new plays, large-scale musicals and immersive experiences, welcoming over 400,000 people to the Crucible, Lyceum and Studio Theatres each year. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Daniel Evans, this year Sheffield Theatres celebrates its second consecutive year as *The Stage* Regional Theatre of the Year.

Through community work, including the Sheffield People's Theatre, the organisation reaches young and older people across the region, develops new emerging artists and creates work that reflects and is accessible to many diverse communities. Sheffield Theatres makes the city a vibrant place to live, promotes the region as a cultural destination and places Sheffield on the world stage

THE CAUSE

Sheffield Theatres adopted DONATE to raise funds for the refurbishment of the Lyceum Theatre, to enable the Lyceum to bring the biggest and best touring productions to Sheffield as well as create their own created work to tour across the country.

The Lyceum is a Grade II listed building and was last refurbished nearly 25 years ago. It plays a vital part within Sheffield's vibrant cultural ecology and in order for it to continue to draw in audiences from across the country, they needed to install up-to-date equipment and modern facilities. The refurbishment work involved improvement to backstage equipment, some of which was over 20 years old, as well as to the building itself, such as:

- Installing air conditioning in the auditorium
- Refurbishing the Balcony seating, making it more comfortable
- Creating additional ladies' toilets and moving the cloakroom to the ground floor
- Creating buggy parking and additional baby changing facilities
- New lighting and sound systems to improve the quality of the audience experience

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THE STRUCTURE OF THE 'DONATE' CAMPAIGN

Sheffield Theatres acknowledged that consistent and continuous asks were required to encourage their donor base to give to their campaign. The following asks were made:

4th March 2014

The development campaign was launched on 4 March when the DONATE facility was profiled on the Sheffield Theatres website. The development campaign was also mentioned in their marketing collateral (ie. production programmes and season brochures).

19th May 2014

An email was sent to Sheffield Theatres' database with the message 'If everyone who receives this email donates £5, we will reach our target'. Over the seven days following this direct ask, they saw donations totaling £1,608 (including £963 on the day that the email landed).

2nd July 2014

A second email was sent out to their database to take advantage of the reduced commission fee that DONATE was offering to partners. This email generated an additional £811 (including £518 on the day that the email landed).

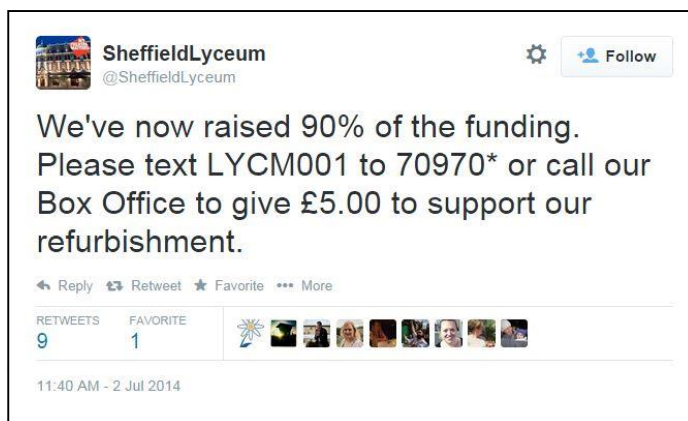
16th July 2014

The third direct ask took place after the press night performance of **The Sheffield Mysteries**; a Sheffield People's Theatre production, which featured a cast of 100 non-professionals. Chief Executive Dan Bates made a speech on stage and encouraged the audience to take a photograph of the cast to share with their social networks, and then to text to donate to the Lyceum refurbishment. Donations of £532 (plus £123 of cash in donation boxes) were given by an audience that was largely made up of press and cast relatives. On exit from the building, Ushers also gave out calling cards with the text code and number on as people left since when an additional £166 has been donated.

August 2014

Once the refurbishment was underway, signage went up on the fencing outside the Lyceum directing people to their website for further information on the refurbishment and also encouraging further text donations. This message has seen some impact on footfall, as donations continue to filter through on a weekly basis.

Sheffield Theatres intend to continue to profile this message and encourage text donations until the refurbishment project reaches completion at the end of September.





THE ORGANISATION'S PERSPECTIVE

Interview with Deborah Larwood, Fundraising Manager, Sheffield Theatres Trust

How is the National Funding Scheme/DONATE working for you?

DONATE has served as an additional tool to capture the attention and imagination of our donors and audiences and to encourage them to make a low level donation towards the Lyceum refurbishment. We have received positive anecdotal feedback from our supporters, who feel motivated to use a new and efficient way to donate to our work. The platform is user friendly, which is great for the donor experience, however the capabilities to interrogate donor information such as exporting data and running reports has proven more difficult. In addition, the online portal does not currently give detailed information on commission and card transaction charges that will be deducted from the final amount raised, which can hinder financial planning and forecasting.

Since taking on DONATE, our focus has been on the text donation element. This is because across all of our fundraising activity, we encourage and facilitate direct donations to Sheffield Theatres where possible, to enable us to develop and maintain direct relationships with our supporters.

How does DONATE fit with Sheffield Theatres wider fundraising strategy?

As the Lyceum capital appeal draws to a close, we are now looking at re-positioning this channel of giving to support our ongoing activity. A key part of our strategy is to profile the organisation's charitable status and the promotion of a text donation campaign will help us to raise awareness of the reliance on donations. We are also focused on harnessing the interest and attention of our younger audiences, who are the Theatre's members and donors of the future, and we see text giving as an opportunity for initial engagement. As digital platforms are fast becoming the key routes to share information and facilitate dialogue, DONATE will inevitably become a strand within our wider digital strategy for both engaging supporters and facilitating donations.

How have you marketed DONATE across your causes so far?

The DONATE campaign has been profiled across our printed materials, the Sheffield Theatres website, staff email signatures and in the Theatre's foyers. The direct email campaigns that ran in May and July alongside the signage outside of the Lyceum during the refurbishment have garnered attention and resulted in donations.

Do you think the DONATE digital giving platform has reinforced physical donations?

The digital giving platform has served to further enhance our 'charitable' message, which alongside communication around our work on stage, is a key communication priority for us. Text giving is already well used by a large range of organisations therefore people are very familiar with the concept. We can see that on the press night face to face ask, some individuals still preferred to make a physical donation and so we know that this platform has helped drive both digital and cash donations.

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What risks did you perceive in your chairman/ spokesman asking directly for support at a performance?

The nature of our work means that individuals tend not to have their mobile device switched on when they are in our buildings, therefore the ask had to be made quickly enough to capitalise on the enthusiasm following the performance but also allow enough time for individuals to switch on their phones and be ready to donate.

We were concerned that there might be confusion between the text code and the number to send it to, so to mitigate this risk we made large placards for the cast to hold up with LYCM001 and 70970 so that the information was as clear and as easy to follow as possible.

How could the event technology be replicated or adapted to other causes at Sheffield Theatres?

Although we discussed the possibility to utilising event technology e.g. real time donation totaliser with the National Funding Scheme, we decided not to pursue it due to the logistics of getting up onto stage following the performance. If we look to run a live text campaign at a future large scale event, such as a gala, then we would certainly consider a live feed reporting on donations in order to motivate people to make those additional donations to help us hit a target amount.

KEY WORDS

- **Organisation type:** Theatre
- **Location/Region:** Sheffield
- **Cause Codes:** LYCM001

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