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Heart and Stroke 'Obituary' Campaign

INTRODUCTION

Think of a brand category in which there are hundreds of competitors, each one going after the same target audience and in which new competitors are edging into the market each year.

All the products are making essentially the same claims for attention. Moreover, despite the fierce competition, you cannot say anything against your competitors, for they are all worthy. What do you have to sell? For sure, it's nothing glamorous. It will usually be disease, misfortune and death. And your product advantages and value-added benefits usually rest on images based on emotion, fear, empathy and often the memory of personal loss or grief. In this category, you can usually assume the budget is on a shoestring and media planning depends on goodwill.

This is the uniquely difficult world of not-for-profit advertising in which most Canadian charities must carve out their identity. It's an area in which all the persuasive powers of advertising must work without any of the positive images that are normally available. And in recent years, it's an area in which the growth of the discretionary 'donation dollars' of the Canadian public has suffered in the wake of the recession. At the same time, the list of worthy charities and causes has grown.

In spite of this reality, the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Obituary/Battement ad campaign rose above its many worthy competitors for scarce consumer dollars during the height of the recession. The campaign was able to strike a chord among householders. They reached a little deeper into their pockets to help the Foundation carry on its work. In so doing, they were able to achieve the stated pre-campaign goals decisively.

It's not easy going after donation dollars in Canada, even when the economy is booming. On average, Americans are more generous. All the more reason to see this case as an example of how advertising played a meaningful and memorable role in both educating and motivating the Canadian public who, at the time, had many good financial reasons to remain unmoved.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

When the economy contracts, so does the donation base of charities. This case shows how a national advertising campaign can succeed in raising charitable donations among individual Canadians under a variety of adverse circumstances. It proves that the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Obituary/Battement advertising campaign was directly responsible for a favourable change in public attitude. The resulting increase in donations helped the Foundation battle Canada's number one killer - heart disease and stroke.

MARKET SITUATION

Leading up to the last recession, inflation was outpacing growth in Canadian charitable donations. This eroded the true value of the funds being collected ([Figure 1](#)). As the recession hit and unemployment climbed, the financial strain on Canadian charities increased. The general need for charity funds was rising as more people were left needy. Government activities were not making matters any better. Efforts to reduce spending meant federal and provincial cuts to the funding of many public service programs. Demand for public funding grew but donations became scarce as the uncertainty of hard economic times forced Canadians to tighten their belts. For many Canadian charities, these realities were exacerbated by the sky rocketing awareness of the fight against AIDS. The world-wide rallying behind this worthy cause weakened public perception of the seriousness of other health causes.

THE CHALLENGE

Despite heart disease and stroke being the greatest killer of Canadians, the public saw cancer as the single most serious health issue facing them ([Figure 2](#)). To raise much needed individual donations, the Heart and Stroke Foundation needed to:

- i. communicate the seriousness of heart and stroke; and,
- ii. raise public awareness of the Foundation.

Only when this was done could volunteers translate the heightened awareness and concern into tangible donations during the annual month-long February canvassing drive. The campaign, however, was to be executed with one caution. While research showed that effective charity advertising could be based on emotional appeals, too little emotion and the execution wouldn't break through to the donating public; too much, and the Foundation risked being seen as shocking and insensitive.

THE CAMPAIGN

In January and February of 1990 and 1991, the Foundation's national advertising campaign went to the public in French and English television, radio and print executions. These executions struck an emotional chord common in all of us - our feelings of loss, injustice and personal vulnerability evoked when a loved one dies of something we believe should be preventable. Through the executions the target audience experienced these feelings vicariously. As a result the cause became real, relevant and important. It predisposed Canadians to donate before they or one of their loved ones became the next statistic.

THE RESULTS

The campaign heightened the perceived seriousness of heart disease and stroke among Canadians and increased the awareness of the Foundation ([Figure 3](#)). In doing so, it predisposed the public to give when a volunteer knocked at the door. When the canvassers called, individual donations to the Heart and Stroke Foundations climbed, exceeding expectations. In fact, growth in donations to the Foundation surpassed inflation and jumped past the slow upward movement in total Canadian charitable donations ([Figure 4](#)). During the period covered by the case, the campaign raised an incremental \$17.3-million. And despite the poor fund-raising environment, annual donations to the Foundation climbed 23 percent over the period ([Figure 4](#)).

BACKGROUND

THE IMPACT OF AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

The shockwaves of the economic downturn of the early 1990s were felt throughout the charitable fund-raising community. By 1990, donations had fallen a total of 16 per cent (measured in 1986 dollars). Furthermore, given the economic outlook at the time, Canadian charitable fundraisers expected matters to get much worse. As the recession arrived, the Foundation knew that it would have to work hard just to maintain its prized 1989 level of revenue.

CHARITABLE FUND RAISING IN THE EARLY 1990s

THE COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Experience had taught Canadian charitable foundations a hard lesson about economic downturns. When the economy soured, so did the potential of increasing annual revenues. The soon-to-arrive recession would likely be no different. With few funds to go around competition for donor's dollars would become intense. At the time, the need for charitable services climbed as the economy took its toll on the average Canadian. At no time was high awareness for the Foundation more needed. The objectives and vision were clear, but its execution would be very difficult. Although heart disease and stroke claimed the most victims of any malady in Canada, cancer was considered the most serious health issue among Canadians ([Figure 2](#)). In addition, the high profile of the celebrities and activities rallying behind AIDS usurped the share of mind and heart of other causes.

THE CANADIAN DOLLAR

Even in the best economic times, it is hard to raise funds for charities in Canada. Canadians are not as generous as Americans in supporting charitable causes. In fact, Canadians on average give two and a half times less than Americans to their favourite charity ([Figure 5](#)). Moreover, experience has shown that Canadians are very sensitive to the manner in which a cause is promoted. It was essential that any advertising campaign for a Canadian charity be developed with this in mind. Such execution would need emotional impact strong enough to elicit a response but not so hard that the donating public turned its back on a seemingly overwhelming cause. Achieving this balance would not be easy.

MARKETING AND ADVERTISING STRATEGIES

KEY ISSUES

Canadians did not recognize the seriousness of heart disease and stroke.

The first step in raising charitable donations is to establish the cause as being worthy. Despite being the number one killer of Canadians, heart disease and stroke ranked below cancer in the public's perception of the single most serious health issue. Canadians' level of awareness of this fact needed to increase if the charity was to be seen as deserving of their charitable donations. [Figure 6](#)

Canadians' awareness of the Foundation was low.

Canadians consider the profile and credibility of any charitable organization before donating. The public's awareness of the Foundation ranked below that of the Canadian Cancer Society. This position would need to change if Canadians were going to earmark their donations for the Foundation.

MARKETING OBJECTIVES

- Increase revenues at an annual rate of 5 per cent throughout the recession.
- Exceed the average rate of growth in Canadian charitable donations.

MARKETING STRATEGY

The marketing objectives would be met by:

- increasing the number of donors to the Foundation; and
- increasing the size of the average donation.

COMMUNICATING OBJECTIVES

1. On the 'Single Most Serious Health Issue,' the goal was to move from 34 per cent (pre-campaign level) to 36 per cent in the first year and to 38 per cent in year two.

Note on methodology and classification:

Before and after the campaign Canadians were surveyed. The success of the campaign in changing attitudes was measured against respondents' answers to: 'What is the single most serious health issue facing Canadians?' (The pre-advertising benchmark was 34 per cent of respondents who replied 'Heart disease and stroke' to this question.)

2. To increase the Foundation's Top-of-Mind awareness from 21 percent pre-campaign to 23 per cent in year one (25 per cent, year two), and Share of Mind from 56 per cent pre-campaign to 59 per cent in year one (62 per cent, year two).

Note on methodology and classification:

Respondents were asked to name the first Charitable Organizations that came to mind. When they mentioned the Foundation first it was scored as Top of Mind awareness. When the Foundation was listed in the remaining group of organizations they could recall it was counted in Share of Mind.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

1. To convince potential donors that heart disease and stroke could happen to them or to people they care about.
2. To convince potential donors that their contributions to the Foundation make a difference and individual contributors do help improve the odds against suffering or dying from heart disease or stroke through research and education.

EXECUTION

CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

The success of the campaign stems from research insight into human emotion and behaviour. When we lose a loved one to a disease, we are spurred into action. Quite often we make contributions to charities in lieu of flowers. We support the cause with the hope that someone else's life can be saved and their family spared our grief. The campaign recognized this aspect of human nature and built upon it. It evoked a feeling of loss. Viewers lived the experience vicariously, through a grieving woman writing her husband's obituary in the English execution, and through the visual remembrance of Quebec celebrities who have died as a result of heart attacks and strokes in the French execution. Out of compassion, remorse and to a degree of self interest, viewers were encouraged to respond by donating to the Foundation.

MEDIA

To support the cause, media time and space were donated by many Canadian broadcasters and publishers. In total, the campaign received a media weight equivalent to \$500,000 over a six- week period in both 1990 and 1991.

One 30-second TV spot, one 30-second radio commercial and a print ad in full, one-half and one-quarter page formats were produced and distributed nationally. Media were encouraged to donate time and space on an 'as available' basis. In addition, a billboard ad was created based on the print visual of an obituary column and out door space was donated.

CANVASSING

The six-week campaign supported the canvassing drive of more than 200,000 volunteers. These volunteers canvassed door-to-door to solicit donations from individuals. The efforts of the volunteers were vital in translating the awareness and motivation of the advertising into tangible contributions.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations events were held provincially and locally during the first few weeks of the campaign. These

events built Canadians' awareness of heart disease and stroke and the efforts and successes of the Heart and Stroke Foundation. While these events were a helpful and integral part of the overall program, the funds they raised were minor in comparison with the February canvassing drive.

RESULTS

QUANTIFIABLE PROOF OF SUCCESS

The Foundation's Revenues Climbed as Total Canadian Donations Fell

Fuelled by the campaign, the canvassing drives exceeded the marketing objectives. Despite the negative impact of the recession on the general level of charitable donations in 1990 and 1991, the campaign encouraged more people to donate more money to the cause than ever before. Growth in donations doubled the 5 per cent target. The Foundation's canvassing revenues grew by an average of 10 per cent - far outpacing the decline in overall charitable donations made by Canadians during the period. The significance of this growth is highlighted when contrasted against the highly effective fund-raising efforts of the well-known Canadian Cancer Society ([Figure 7](#)). In addition to attracting more than two million new donors, the size of the average donation also climbed 5 per cent in the first year of the campaign. In the second year, however, the Foundation was forced to change this aspect of its strategy. Due to the economic hardship, the public couldn't give more per donation ([Exhibit 7](#)). Consequently, the strategic focus turned solely to getting more people to donate.

SUCCESSFUL DESPITE THE COMPETITIVE ACTIVITIES OF OTHER CAUSES

During the campaign period the Foundation's major health charity rivals - AIDS and the Cancer Society - stepped up their efforts to raise funds. Each of these organizations increased the frequency and urgency of its pleas for funds to individual and corporate donors. It is estimated that Cancer Society's efforts were supported by at least the same level of media weight as the Foundation's. Moreover, the dramatic international rise in awareness of the fight against AIDS changed Canadians' perceptions about the seriousness of heart disease and stroke. All maladies had taken a back seat to this high profile and very serious disease. Despite these changes and activities the Foundation's objectives were exceeded as the Obituary/Battement campaign drove up revenues.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Sensitive consumer-relevant advertising

The creative executions were sensitive to the viewer. They were strong enough to encourage a response without being needlessly shocking. The campaign established the fight against heart disease and stroke as a relevant and worthy cause by:

- showing the tragedy and sorrow that heart disease and stroke bring to important people in our lives; and
- reminding the public that heart disease and stroke are still the number one killers of Canadians.

INTEGRATED MARKETING ACTIVITIES

The integration of canvassing activities provided a conduit through which donors, who were motivated by the advertising campaign, could take action and donate to the Foundation.

DONATED SUPPORT

The success of this campaign would not have been possible without the support donated by the many broadcasters and publishers and the innumerable individual volunteers who donated their personal time to this cause.

CONCLUSION

The Obituary/Battement campaign was instrumental to the success of the Heart and Stroke Foundation's fund-

raising efforts throughout 1990 and 1991. It changed Canadians' perception of heart disease and stroke and increased the awareness of the Foundation. It encouraged Canadians to give when it was difficult to do so. Consequently, donations to the Heart and Stroke Foundation climbed, exceeding expectations. Driven by the advertising campaign, growth in donations to the Foundation surpassed the increases posted by the Canadian Cancer Society. By 1992, an incremental \$17.8-million was raised making possible the continuation of programs to treat and prevent heart disease and stroke.

CLIENT

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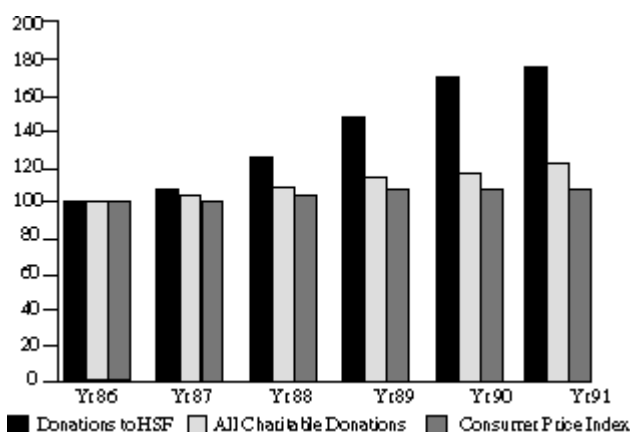


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NOTES & EXHIBITS

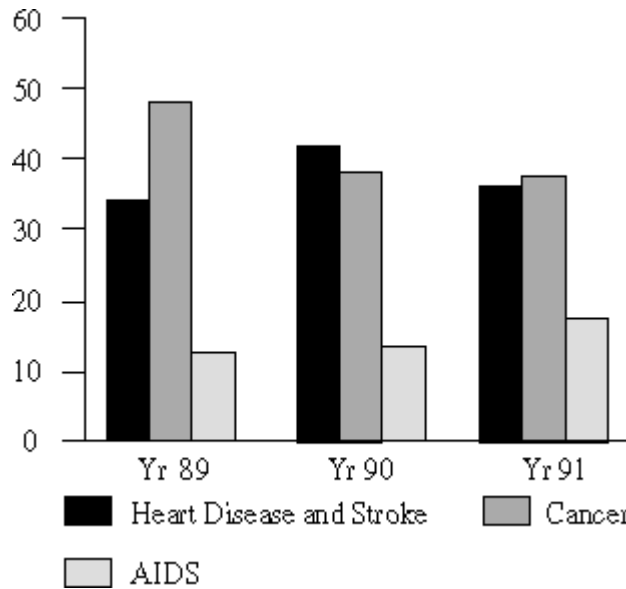
EXHIBIT 1: INDICES OF C\$ DONATIONS TO HSF, TOTAL CHARITABLE DONATIONS PER DONOR H/H AND CPI (Base Year = 1986)



Growth in HSF donations exceed total Canadian charitable donations and the Consumer Price Index

Source: HSF, Stats Can Family Expenditures, Social Indicators

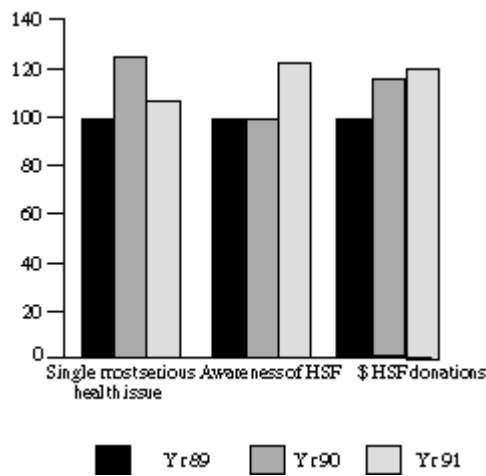
EXHIBIT 2: MALADIES RATED 'SINGLE MOST SERIOUS HEALTH ISSUE'



Heart disease and stroke rise in perceived seriousness in the first year of campaign

Source: HSF

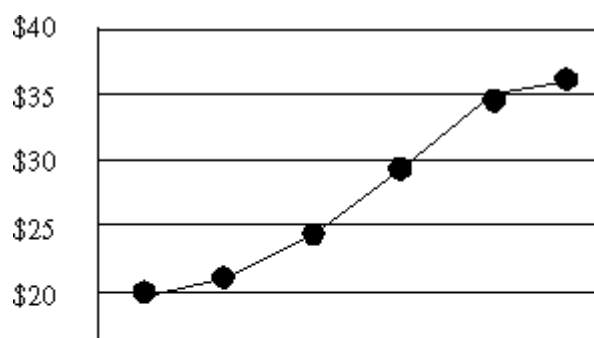
EXHIBIT 3: IMPACT OF 'OB' CAMPAIGN ON PERCEIVED SERIOUSNESS, AWARENESS OF FOUNDATION AND TREND IN \$ DONATIONS TO HSF

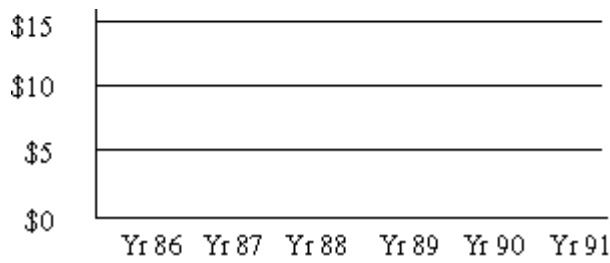


Donations increase as the awareness of HSF and perceived seriousness of heart disease and stroke climb during the campaign

Source: HSF

EXHIBIT 4: TREND IN \$ DONATIONS TO HSF

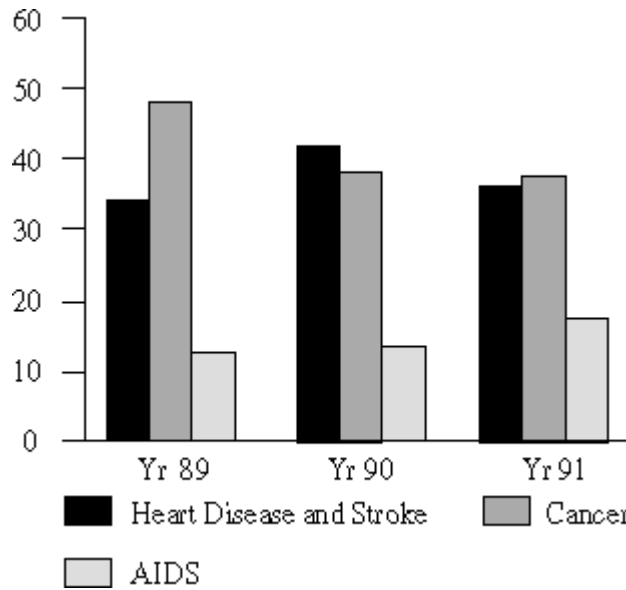




Despite the recession the campaign continued to drive up donations

Source: HSF

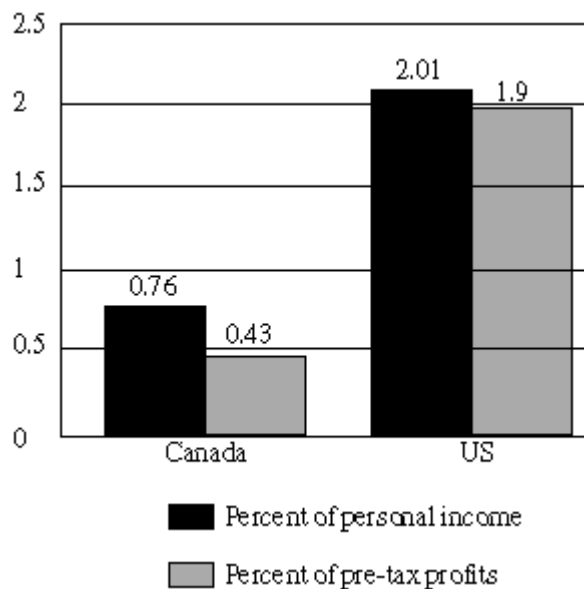
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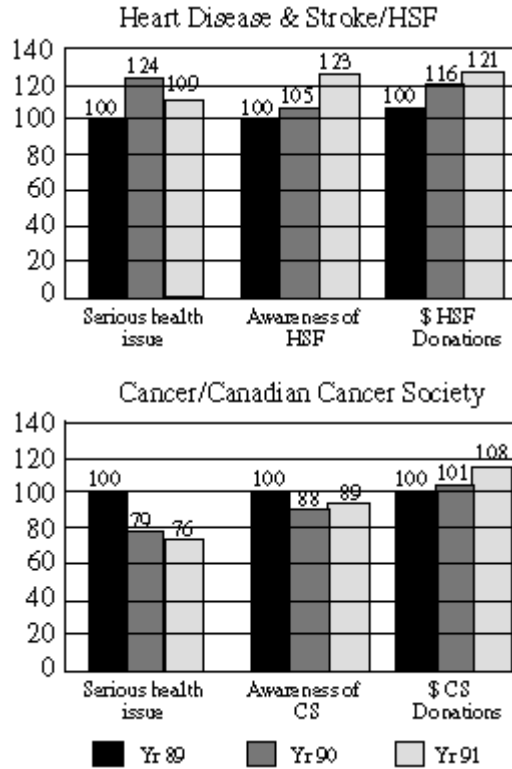
Source: HSF

EXHIBIT 5: CANADIAN vs. US LEVELS OF PERSONAL AND CORPORATE CHARITABLE DONATIONS



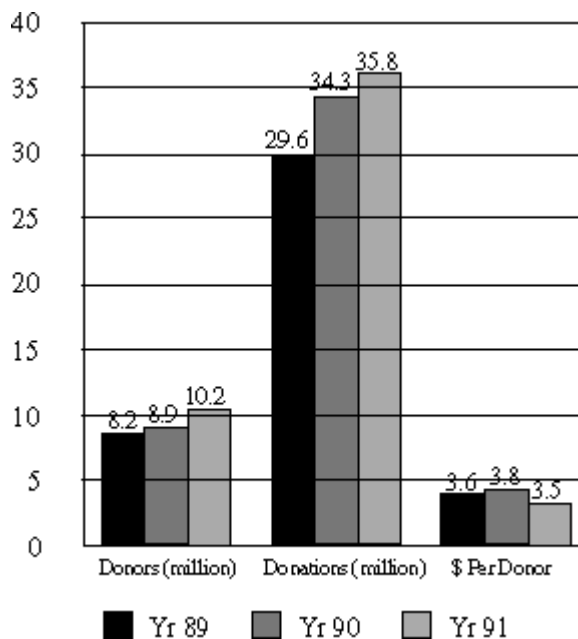
Source: Giving USA, Canadian Centre for Philanthropy

EXHIBIT 6: PERCEIVED SERIOUSNESS, AWARENESS OF FOUNDATION/SOCIETY AND TREND IN \$ DONATIONS



Source: HSF

EXHIBIT 7: TREND IN HSF DONATIONS - DONORS, \$ TOTAL, \$ PER DOLLAR



Total HSF donations continue to climb as average donations per donor softened in 1991

Source: HSF
