An Unforgettable Poppy Appeal

Poppyscotland, the charity behind the annual Scottish Poppy Appeal, experienced remarkable growth since undergoing a rebrand and embarking on a new marketing strategy in 2007. Donations to the Appeal increased by 50% between 2007 and 2011 and the new name became increasingly embedded in the public psyche. Fundraising income and awareness levels outwith the traditional November Poppy Appeal period had also significantly increased.

However amongst this success lay a number of issues which, if ignored, could have placed the long term future of the Scottish Poppy Appeal in jeopardy.

For 90 years the traditional November Remembrance period was synonymous with the Poppy Appeal. Charities, both within the ex-Service sector and outwith had in the past steered clear of high-profile activity at that time of year, opting instead to pursue their fundraising activities during the other 50 weeks of the year. Over the observation period this convention had, however, increasingly been eroded by other ex-Service charities campaigning in November. Any fundraising activity during the Remembrance period, particularly from other ex-Service charities, not only detracted attention and money away from the Poppy Appeal but, if continued over a number of years, had potential to diminish the significance of the poppy and the Poppy Appeal.

While Poppyscotland wholeheartedly supported the fact that money was being raised for the sector as a whole, we have a duty to our beneficiaries to maximise our fundraising potential from the Remembrance period. With around 70% of our annual income being derived from the annual Scottish Poppy Appeal we could not afford to sit back and let this continue. In reality however, there was little we could do to stop it. We had to raise our game.

To make our challenge greater, just as we had seen a steady rise in support for Poppyscotland during the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, we were aware there was likely to be a gradual dip coinciding with a reduction in media coverage and public attention as UK Forces’ involvement in those conflicts concluded. A decade of sustained military operations had, however, resulted in an increase in demand for our charitable services and we anticipated this upward trend continuing in the coming years.

This rise in support enabled us to weather the economic storm better than most with our income actually increasing during the early part of the recession. We anticipated a drop in post-Afghanistan support, an increase in demand for our services and the late-hitting recessionary effect on the national economy were all likely to have a highly adverse effect on our fundraising. Amid increased competition and a more saturated market, we were compelled to act swiftly.

To regain a competitive advantage we placed renewed focus on consumer insight. Research we had undertaken indicated that whilst our rebrand had been well received since 2007, there was public confusion as to what we stood for. Traditionally the poppy represented Remembrance of the World Wars and little else. We realised there was significant danger that the poppy was losing relevance. Since 2007 we had focused our messaging heavily on the support we provide to the Armed Forces community today. While this was important in modernising and broadening the public’s understanding of the Appeal, the research highlighted that it had led to a confusing proposition.

Were we an organisation rooted in Remembrance and past wars or one focused on raising money for the needs of today? It was clear from our research that we had to find a way of becoming both, but we needed more than just a clever strapline. To give prominence back to the Poppy Appeal a refined proposition had to lend itself to a multi-channel approach. We had to increase the number of Poppy Appeal touch points for the public. The Poppy Appeal needed to be much more memorable. In fact, it had to be Unforgettable.
Although no more than one word initially, we immediately recognised that *Unforgettable* could form the basis of a new language platform for the charity. It encapsulated the essence of Remembrance in a contemporary way. It was positive, emotive, uplifting, forward looking and, importantly, was the basis of a refined proposition that we could credibly “own”.

**Unforgettable advertising**

We began developing an *Unforgettable* creative route with TV, radio and outdoor campaigns in mind. Our research highlighted that stories about those we had helped resonated strongly with the public so we set about identifying a powerful case study. Private Stephen Bainbridge was serving with the Black Watch in Afghanistan in 2011. While on patrol on Remembrance Day he stepped on an Improved Explosive Device which resulted in him losing both legs. Despite ongoing treatment, Stephen bravely agreed to front our campaign and share his *Unforgettable* story.

Insight gained from our research indicated we had to strike the delicate balance of presenting a hard-hitting advert without it being harrowing. The final TV creative followed Stephen from the moment of the explosion through to his rehabilitation, in the context of a wheelchair basketball game. There were no holds barred in the match footage, reminding the public that people like Stephen don’t need pity, but instead need practical support to get their lives back on track. Stephen explained that he will never forget what happened, but he’ll never be forgotten by Poppyscotland. His voiceover concluded with a very clear call to action, ending with the line “Your support is Unforgettable”. The radio and 6-sheet campaign carried a supporting creative which reinforced the *Unforgettable* theme.

**An Unforgettable launch**

To generate as much media coverage for the launch as possible we wanted to utilise the profile of a major Scottish celebrity who had a credible connection to our cause, the endorsement of the Armed Forces community and showcase how donations to the Poppy Appeal make an *Unforgettable* difference to those we support. Having recently provided funding to help establish two local military wives choirs, we invited these groups to perform at the launch and to talk about the impact of
Poppyscotland’s support. On discovering that Scottish singer Susan Boyle’s father had served in the Second World War, we invited her to join us for the launch.

Susan Boyle’s involvement guaranteed a big media turnout, but having such a fitting link to our cause made her presence all the more newsworthy. Life can be difficult for military families and the choir members highlighted some of the issues they face, explaining how the support from Poppyscotland was making an Unforgettable difference to them individually and collectively.

The remainder of our PR campaign reinforced Unforgettable. As well as offering a range of high-profile, picture-led PR opportunities to the media we drove home key campaign messages through in-depth editorial coverage. Case studies of individuals with compelling stories of their experiences since leaving the Armed Forces highlighted the multiple and complex issues many of our beneficiaries face, reinforcing the Unforgettable support provided by Poppyscotland.

An Unforgettable Flash Mob

Launching the campaign on social media we created something that our ever-growing digital audience would find Unforgettable. Working with the Military Wives Choirs, we staged and filmed a Flash Mob. Set in Glasgow’s Buchanan Galleries Shopping Centre a handful of choir members suddenly burst into song and were gradually joined by another 80 singers who appeared from all corners of the Centre. At the time our Unforgettable Flash Mob created a huge buzz for passing shoppers but it was the impact it had on social media which ensured it left an Unforgettable impression.

Unforgettable music

Continuing the musical theme we launched the first ever single in aid of the Scottish Poppy Appeal. Scottish singer Jai McDowall, who received over 10 million votes when he won Britain’s Got Talent in 2011, kindly agreed to re-record the Nat King Cole classic hit Unforgettable for Poppyscotland. We launched the single in an exclusive with the Scottish Sun and Bauer radio network and Jai’s debut public performance of the song, which took place at the Scottish Parliament following an invitation from the Presiding Officer, generated additional media coverage.
Unforgettable content

Extending *Unforgettable* further, we created a series of Twibbons via a dedicated microsite where supporters could attach an *Unforgettable* thumbnail to their profile pictures. This automatically generated a message to their Facebook timeline and/or a Tweet. We also introduced the hashtag #UnforgettableSupport on Twitter and encouraged Scottish celebrities and supporters to Tweet who they wore their poppy for.

Beyond Twibbon we created a variety of content for our social media channels. We produced our own videos which we published regularly on Facebook and YouTube. Entitled *Unforgettable Stories*, the videos included moving testimonials from people helped by Poppyscotland and light-hearted interviews with veterans answering questions submitted via Facebook and Twitter. Our weekly podcast featured Poppyscotland news and interviews with serving soldiers in Afghanistan.
Unforgettable Stories

As well as large-scale national activities we brought Unforgettable to life at a local level. Working with renowned Scottish photographers Trevor and Faye Yerbury we captured photographs of 100 people from across Scotland for an exhibition entitled Unforgettable Stories. People from all walks of life took part and provided a written card explaining why the poppy is Unforgettable to them. The exhibition featured serving soldiers, beneficiaries, volunteers and the First Minister, along with people who had no connection to the cause but felt passionately about what the poppy represents. The exhibition was displayed in Perth during the Poppy Appeal and generated considerable local interest.

Unforgettable artwork

We approached award-winning artists Patricia Leighton and Andy Scott to secure their support to transform two of Scotland’s most visible outdoor art installations. The iconic grass Pyramids next to the M8 motorway at Livingston had three giant poppies painted on them while Andy Scott’s Heavy Horse at the M8 near Baillieston was emblazoned with a large metal poppy.

Unforgettable shopping

Unforgettable was incorporated into our new retail range for 2012 too. We created branded outlets in the most popular shopping centres and high streets in Scotland. These Unforgettable “Poppy-up” shops offered the public an attractive new touch point for the Appeal and some of our most popular items utilised Unforgettable branding. In addition to our own range we entered into a sub-licenced agreement with Scottish jewellers Ortak who produced a bespoke range of poppy jewellery, generating huge press interest when TV and radio presenter Cat Cubie launched the collection in October.
Unforgettable results

With such a vast range of activity in a relatively short period, awareness of the 2012 Scottish Poppy Appeal was likely to be high, but it was important for us to measure the impact. Donations to the 2012 Appeal will clearly be a key indicator of our success but due to the reporting cycle this figure is not fully calculated until later in the year. However there are some promising signs that 2012 really was an Unforgettable year.

We grew our Facebook followers from 40,000 to 95,000, had over 130,000 interactions* and a total reach of more than 6 million** during the Appeal. Beyond Facebook, the #UnforgettableStories hashtag was used more than 20,000 tweets and reach more than 1 million Twitter users. More than 10,000 supporters downloaded an Unforgettable Twibbon. To date 75,000 people have viewed our Unforgettable Flash Mob and there have been a total of 130,000 video views on our YouTube channel. Clearly the Flash Mob had the desired effect but it was particularly pleasing to see that downloads of the other films on our YouTube channel proved to be just as popular and meant that those we engaged via YouTube got a broad picture of Poppyscotland’s work. The Poppyscotland Podcast has had more than 22,000 downloads while traffic to the Poppyscotland website grew by 19% year on year.

These metrics have increased massively from 2011 but it is the frequency of interaction which clearly indicates a rapidly growing interest in Poppyscotland. It also underlines that our content strategy resonated with our digital followers.

Traditional press coverage from the Poppy Appeal launch generated an advertising equivalent value of £176,122, which was a 25% increase on the 2011 launch.

Our Unforgettable art installations next to the M8 motorway were seen by 75,000 motorists a day and featured in local and national press.

Though the Unforgettable single didn’t quite reach top of the pops, it made Number 1 spot on the iTunes Easy Listening chart and generated additional media coverage.

Thanks in large part to our Poppy-up stores, our retail sales were up by 65% year-on-year.

Given the success of recent years it would have been easy for us to rest on our laurels. However, we owed it to our beneficiaries to ensure the Poppy Appeal regained its prominence. In just one year we have successfully refined our proposition, introduced a new language platform and creative route. We have grown our media coverage, witnessed an explosion of activity on a variety of social media platforms thanks to innovative and engaging content, reached the top of the charts and made lots of Scotland’s motorists see “red” (for all the right reasons!). We think that’s a pretty Unforgettable year by anyone’s standards.

* link clicks, photo views, video plays, etc.
** number of times Poppyscotland featured on a timeline