



Unexpected Consequences

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The product of the data regulation earthquake of the last two years is that phoning has become even more central to the solicitation mix of every school. We all thought email, crowdfunding, social media would start to dent the supremacy of phoning as the number one method of delivering regular giving, a culture of giving and a pipeline of major donors. Now we know they won't, but phoning will...

PECR has given all of us a huge headache over email. Obtaining explicit consent is not that easy and will always leave a large number of alumni unreachable. That does not mean that it is not worth trying (or that you may well have a lot of contacts you already have adequate consent for). However, given the effort and the poor level of giving that ensues from email campaigns, it is no longer a front-line method for getting gifts. People are becoming much more particular too about social media due to Facebook and Cambridge Analytica. Automated decision making which offered opportunities for behaviourally driven communication and solicitation has been particularly savaged by the ICO. Crowdfunding has been proven to demand a great deal of digital noise to drive traffic to the site and the issues described above play against that being possible. Even when it is worked well, the resulting gifts are poor. One major university drove their regular giving this way last year. They ended up with as many gifts, maybe more than they got by phone, but the income was devastated. The long and valuable monthly gifts were swept away in a tide of tiny single donations. Perhaps even worse, they learnt nothing about those alumni who might be major prospects.

We might all regret these woes were it not that phoning remains effective, conversational, engaging, valuable to alumni relations and profitable. Most of all, it is possible! The recent pronouncements from the Fundraising Regulator, Ofcom and the Direct Marketing Association confirming a model of permissive inclusion of TPS numbers transforms the future of phoning. Ironically, we are entering into a golden age of phoning. Institutions will be able to get permission to call. Alumni and parents will supply their numbers in the knowledge marketing is going to take place. But they won't do that for PPI firms, or Personal Accident, or even main-stream charities. Freed from constant harassment from dubious commercial organisations, respectable companies and charities that, though worthy, the person only has a passing interest in, people will find a call from their alma mater a pleasant opportunity to reconnect. This is what happened when in 1999 the TPS first came in and the authorities bothered to apply it.

The world is full of unexpected consequences. We are celebrating the 20th Anniversary of RBA and 25 years since our Founder was a student caller himself. Having been so involved in making telephone fundraising the bedrock of educational philanthropy in the UK and beyond, it is great to see how central and valuable it will now inevitably be in the years ahead.