Never without Art

Kerstin Glasow reviews how the Art Fund dramatically grew their membership base and increased funding for museums and galleries

Established in 1903, the Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art which helps museums and galleries across the UK to acquire great works of art in all forms and media, from treasure hoards and Old Master paintings to contemporary sculpture. We receive no government support but are funded entirely by the public, with the majority of our income coming from our members. In return for their support they receive free admission at over 200 charging museums, galleries, castles and historic houses across the UK and 50% off entry to major exhibitions.

At the end of 2010 we were stuck between a rock and a hard place: we were determined to increase our funding for museums at a time when the government was reducing its commitments for the arts but we were struggling with a static and ageing membership base. Awareness and understanding of our charitable work and the benefits of supporting us was low among non-members.

We knew that in order to meet our goal of increasing our funding for museums and galleries we would have to dramatically grow our membership base. Our second objective was to develop additional means of supporting our partner museums and galleries beyond our grant giving activities. We were keen to help our network of 550 partner museums generate additional visitors and income.

So, how did we go about it? Until 2011 the focus of our communication strategy – with the public, our members and the museum sector – had been mainly about our grant-giving activities. Large-scale national fundraising campaigns, for example JMW Turner's *The Blue Rigi* with Tate and the Staffordshire Hoard (for Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and the Potteries Museum), put an emphasis on our remit to 'save art'. Working with creative agency 101 we decided to develop a new strand of messaging which put our membership card, rebranded as the National Art Pass, at the heart of our public-facing activity. This was achieved without changing the actual benefits of the product. The Pass took centre stage, and 'Never without Art' became the organising idea for all our related communications to promote the concept. It also echoed our overall mission and is a motto for art lovers everywhere. This re-branding of our proposition allowed us to broaden our reach and also target younger audience segments.

We launched the National Art Pass with an integrated marketing campaign, which included outdoor, press and digital in London and the South East plus regional activities in important hubs such as Edinburgh and other cities with a high concentration of both prospects and partner galleries and museums. A partnership with the *Guardian* and the *Observer* newspapers complimented these activities.

Over an eighteen-month period, following the launch of the Pass, we embarked on the second phase by evolving our current communication channels and developing new platforms through which to promote our partner museums to art lovers – both Art Fund members and non-members – across the country.

The biggest adventure was the development of our Art Guide app (www.artfund.org/app), a free listings app for iPhone and Android smart phones which features 700 museums, galleries and historic places as well as exhibitions across the country. We also re-launched our website www.artfund.org, one of the first arts websites in the UK using responsive design, optimised for use on mobiles and tablets. The app and website are integral parts of a wider digital communications strategy which also includes our social media platforms. Segmented e-newsletters (www.artfund.org/enews) allow us to provide subscribers with tailored exhibition recommendations and special offers relevant to their region. This enables us to regularly promote even more of our partner museums and galleries. The comprehensive listings of art organisations and

The Pass took centre stage, and 'Never without Art' became the organising idea for all our related communications to promote the concept

The app and website are integral parts of a wider digital communications strategy which also includes our social media platforms.

exhibitions across all our digital channels have established our website and app as a one-stop shop for art information across the UK and the Art Fund as relevant and reliable source. More than 85,000 people have downloaded the Art Guide app so far; 80% of app users are repeat visitors planning exhibition visits and days out.

In order to be able to promote our partners' exhibitions to museum and gallery visitors across the country we devised an Exhibitions Guide leaflet. Published every four months it features some of the best exhibitions in the UK and is distributed by more than 600 partner museums and displayed at additional cultural venues. These new communication tools enable us to proactively promote our museum network to Art Fund members and to hundreds of thousands of art lovers in Britain.

Since 2011 our museum network has increased by 20% to more than 650 partners. The vast majority of the new museums are marketing partners who want to capitalise on our communication channels and value our members as strong advocates for their exhibitions and collections. Visitor statistics prove that by promoting our partners online and offline we can make a huge difference to exhibition attendance.

Since re-launching our membership card as the National Art Pass we managed to increase our membership base by 20%: there are currently more than 100,000 art lovers in the UK who own a National Art Pass. We were able to recruit a new generation of members: on average they are 21 years younger than existing supporters. 50% of Art Fund members say that since buying the Pass they visit museums and galleries more often than they did before and 90% 'always or regularly' visit the museum café or the shop. In this way the National Art Pass also brings incremental revenue for participating venues in admission income and secondary visitor spend.

Overall, awareness of the Art Fund among non-members has risen from just below 30% across museum-going audiences to 60%. National Art Pass awareness has grown to 45%. We have managed to change our public perception and have been able to establish the Art Fund as a cultural membership scheme and a provider of arts information in addition to our ongoing and fundamental role as a philanthropic arts charity.

Thanks to the increase in membership we are now able to support even more acquisitions for public collections across the UK so these can be enjoyed by future generations to come. ■

Kerstin Glasow
Senior Marketing Manager
The Art Fund
t 020 7225 4854
e KGlasow@artfund.org
w artfund.org