

iHobo is a controversial awareness raising tool from Depaul UK that highlights the issue of homelessness through a phone application



The application of technology

There's an app for just about everything, including philanthropy. Organisations are applying digital technology in ever more sophisticated and creative ways to engage donors in playful processes with a serious purpose.

In the last edition of the Philanthropy UK newsletter 'Digital for donors' we reported on a soon-to-be-launched GetGiving application offering a low-friction way for donors to make micro donations on Apple iPhone, Blackberry or Windows Mobile to selected charities in seconds, allowing beneficiaries to collect Gift Aid more easily.

And new philanthropic apps are starting to appear with the aim of promoting giving, raising awareness of causes and engaging donors more deeply through play.

A controversially-named free application iHobo launched by Depaul UK (www.depauluk.org) in May 2010 aims to challenge perceptions surrounding homelessness and engage new donors.

Created pro bono by Publicis, the app, the first ever to feature interactive live action video footage, allows users to download a virtual homeless person on to the user's iPhone and effectively demonstrates in real time the complexity of homelessness; lack of shelter, food and money, emotional distress, isolation, drug use, crime and physical and mental abuse.

The app shot to the top of the iTunes download chart within a week of launch and had clocked up more than

400,000 downloads in its first few weeks. It was the No 1 free download; and you can preview the app and a special short film on it at www.ihobo.org.uk.

In the application, the homeless young person wears a hoodie, takes drugs and throws litter and has created controversy around such stereotyping of homeless people. Over three days iHobo is the iPhone user's responsibility with every decision made – such as offering food, money or emotional support – impacting on his life. It uses Apple's most recent 'Push Notification' technology to send alerts to the user when iHobo needs help. Once the application cycle is complete it makes the point that homeless people are in fact not hobos and the user is invited to make a donation directly to Depaul UK, so far more than £46,000.

Through it the charity is looking to attract a new generation of young, affluent donors to continue its work. Paul Marriot, CEO of Depaul UK, says: *"Homeless young people are often stereotyped and looked down upon. When they sleep rough, they are highly vulnerable and face very real risks. But they are just like any other young person and, with the right support, they can be back on their feet and fulfil their undoubted potential. By creating this app we aim to dispel negative stereotypes of young homeless*

people and raise awareness of the reasons that young people become homeless and the emotions that they feel. We wanted to create an app that would stand out and make people pay attention, and make people think about how they can make a difference."

Depaul UK and Publicis are keen to start a debate around youth homelessness, government commitment, general awareness and the solutions to these problems.

Tom Ewart and Adam Kean, joint executive creative directors, Publicis, say, *"We wanted to reach that elusive generation of young, affluent donors, who tend to exist in a world defined by their mobiles. It's been a complicated process getting live interactive footage onto an app, but doing something that's never been done before was never going to be easy."*

Neil Simpson, Publicis London chief executive, called iHobo "modern charity marketing" which had successfully created greater awareness, engagement and return at a relatively low cost.

Marriot adds, *"As with all social media, as an organisation you have no control over how that conversation goes. Some of the talk has been very critical of the organisation and the application. However, we know that many of those who have actually downloaded the application have become very emotionally engaged with the issue of youth homelessness. And, for an organisation with no real marketing capacity, the opportunity to raise the profile of our cause and our charity to such a wide audience is immensely valuable."*

iHobo is free to download from the iPhone app store:
<http://www.apple.com/iphone/apps-for-phone/>

Another app from 21/64 (www.2164.net), part of Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, aims to help philanthropists picture what they want to achieve from their giving, allowing philanthropists to consider better 'where the soul meets the business plan'.

The app is an online extension of the training, consulting and advisory organisation's Picture Your Legacy deck of 52 colourful images designed to spark discussion among funders of any generation, facilitating greater understanding of an individual and groups' philanthropic identity and aspirations. *"The images help funders develop language to write a mission statement, a vision statement, and an articulated message to funding partners, grantees or family members about what they want to accomplish through their philanthropy."*

Images that include a dancer leaping across the stage, a redwood tree or a lighthouse beacon, help guide funders towards articulating their legacy, be it in business, philanthropy, or life. *"It is often difficult to write from scratch a vision for what you want to accomplish in the world. Images can be helpful in stimulating the process in way words may not,"* it says.

The iPhone application is designed for users to search the image database, tag chosen images with keywords and notes, and send their choices to others for further reflection and discussion.



The Picture Your Legacy app from 21/64, part of Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, aims to help philanthropists picture what they want to achieve from their giving