

Improving Contributions with Parent Deposit Calling

BUFFALO
A DIVISION OF RUFFALO NOEL LEVITZ



Contacting Parents for Donations

When looking for new avenues to bolster their regular giving programme, many schools have asked us how to approach parents about donating their deposits when their child leaves the institution. The practice can be particularly lucrative - with returns of over £16 per £1 invested - due to the contributions being primarily large, single gifts, which parents can be willing to donate if they feel the school has provided a good standard of education for their child.

However, there is only a small window in which to contact parents. As every gift is potentially lucrative, it is imperative that you contact as many parents as possible and that your message is simple, effective and clearly communicated.

So, what is the best way to ask for deposits to be donated? In this paper, Buffalo will outline some of the common methods and their drawbacks, before offering our own innovative solution.

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Communication is Key

The first preference for many development offices is to send out a direct mail to parents. Cheap and efficient, it is easy to understand why this is a popular method for schools, whose development teams are typically small in size and under pressure to make every penny count.

But with the potential for large returns, can you afford to leave it to a letter? The average response rate to a direct mail is 4%, which is acceptable when the mailing group is large enough, but for parent groups of between 50–200 people, all of whom could potentially give a significant gift, it pays to choose a more thorough and personalised method.

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How do you Personalise your Ask to Every Parent?

Ideally, asking a parent to donate their deposit should be conducted face-to-face, but with the many constraints imposed on small development teams, the time required for such an exercise is impractical and difficult to justify. With this in mind, the most cost-effective alternative is to conduct personal telephone calls.

The problem with this method, however, is that it still requires considerable resources. In Buffalo's experience, it can take over 60 calling hours to successfully contact just 50 parents, which becomes particularly difficult to manage when the bulk of these calling hours need to be conducted during evenings and weekends.

While one solution might be to include them alongside the standard selection in a student-led telephone campaign, these small groups are not particularly suited to the short, intensive nature of telethons. Such an approach would risk antagonising parents by calling them too frequently, or simply not reaching an adequate number of them during the campaign's short timeframe. To complicate matters, not all schools conduct annual telephone campaigns, and even those that do, often hold them after the deposit return date, rendering any discussion on the matter ineffectual.

Faced with these problems, Buffalo has worked with several development professionals to pioneer a new approach.

Buffalo's Solution

Using our call room, Buffalo conducts parent deposit calling in-house with a small team of dedicated staff. Our experienced personnel engage in tailored conversations with each parent, gaining valuable feedback for the school and increasing the likelihood of a donation. The calls are spread over a wider timeframe to ensure that no one is contacted too frequently, and very few choose to opt out of the process.

The approach has been very successful, with a recent campaign returning the following results:

Amount Pledged	Number of gifts	% Giving	Gift per Call	Number Called	Amount Confirmed
£17,219	13	28%	£366	47	£18,139

We are also well-placed to contact parents based overseas. The above example had a significant number of parents living in Russia and China, so Buffalo translated the letters to these parents into Mandarin and Russian and hired Mandarin- and Russian-speaking callers. Of the £18,139 raised, £13,000 came from parents based in these two countries – which suggests they appreciated the personalised approach.

In addition to the calls themselves, Buffalo can assist with the data processing and consult on pre-call and post-call strategy to alleviate pressure on development staff and free up resources. As well as offering a comprehensive package, this approach represents good value for money, with previous returns on investment of up to £16 raised for every pound spent.

Benefits of Buffalo's Parent Deposit Calling

- *Having a one-to-one conversation with parents is one of the most effective ways to build engagement and warmth, thereby making them more likely to give now, or in the near future*
- *20-33% of those to whom we speak will donate*
- *Previously every pound invested has equalled up to £16 in returns*
- *It allows you to update contact details and preferences, so you can accurately tailor your direct mail and keep your database healthy*

Summary

Parent deposits are a lucrative fundraising avenue that should be part of every school's regular giving programme. With the potential for significant returns, it is vital that you select the right approach when deciding how to contact parents about donating in this way:

- **Direct mail** is cheap but ineffective, with a poor response rate.
- **Face-to-face meetings** require too many resources for a small development office, especially when many parents are based overseas
- **Main telephone campaigns** do not suit the small size of a parent group, which requires a longer timescale with less frequent calling.
- **Buffalo's Parent Deposit Calling** solution provides development professionals with a tailored approach that does not put pressure on existing resources, while our industry-leading experience will assist you in producing excellent results.

For more information on how Buffalo's parent deposit calling campaigns can help improve your regular giving plans, please contact Eleni Jackson on 01179 464210 or at elenijackson@buffalofc.co.uk