



2023 APAC Effie® Awards Gold Winner

The Silent Night

Categories:

Experiential Marketing - Services (Gold)

Product/Service Classification: Government and nonprofit

Brand: Wellington City Mission

Client: Wellington City Mission

Lead Agency: Special Auckland

Original Version

Executive Summary

Christmas 2022 wasn't looking merry.

The cost-of-living crisis forced a 400% increase in demand from the Wellington City Mission (charity providing social support).

The Mission's major donors (small, wealthy group), couldn't cover the increase – we needed more people donating.

Our solution?

Harness the city-pride of Wellingtonians by making donating a community experience:

'The Silent Night' – a fundraising event, at the city's (Wellington) iconic venue. The catch is, nothing happens, and no one goes.

The empty event was a sell-out (outselling Guns N' Roses and Queen). With nothing happening, 100% of sales went to those in need – \$1m worth of support.

Market Background

The Wellington City Mission is a charitable trust, serving the Wellington region (New Zealand's capital city and surrounding areas), home to approx. 543,000 people. They provide a range of support to the community from food support, transitional housing and 1 to 1 advocacy. Thousands in Wellington rely on charities.

In New Zealand, we have seen increasing demand on government services and resources. Charities and other for-purpose organisations are being asked to do even more with less, driving further reliance on donors, and the goodwill of employees and volunteers.

State of the Marketplace & Brand's Business/Strategic Communication Challenge

PROBLEM

The Wellington City Mission (The Mission) needed to deliver at Christmas.

Many people depend on The Mission to ensure their family can celebrate together, and every year, they run a Christmas Appeal to raise donations.

The importance of successful Christmas appeals is two-fold.

Firstly, the appeal covers the cost of supporting those unable to afford food, presents or housing. Secondly, the goodwill of the season can boost overall support for The Mission's ongoing non-Christmas specific initiatives.

Unfortunately, in 2022, Christmas wasn't looking merry.

Demand for charitable support was higher than ever...

The cost-of-living crisis had forced a 400% increase in demand for support (1).

...but, donors were down...

The cost-of-living was also affecting The Mission's ability to fundraise.

While The Mission have a small core of major donors, most of the funding needs to come from smaller, less regular donors.

Concerns that fundraising would be tough, had proved to be true. Approaching Christmas, The Mission was down 300 donors compared to 2021 (7% of donor base) (1). 'Middle' New Zealanders are a critical contributor to charities in this country and this group were finding themselves increasingly concerned with their own financial struggles (2) (3).

...so donations had fallen off a cliff.

With shrinking discretionary spending and increasing financial concern comes smaller and fewer donations. The Mission was heading into the Christmas period hundreds of thousands below budget for the financial year, hugely concerning when coupled with the exponential increase in demand (1).

CHALLENGE

We faced an urgent need for additional support, but getting it wouldn't be easy.

More charities than ever were fundraising

The number of charities has steadily increased – 1,078 new charities per year for the last 8 years (4) – to meet growing demand for support, meaning fundraising requests from the public are at an all-time high.

We couldn't build empathy through emphasising the struggle

A common fundraising technique is to highlight the suffering of those in need. The Mission avoid this approach as it can foster a culture of 'us and them' – donors framed as the saviours of 'lesser' people.

We had to work against established behaviours around giving

People want to know where donations go, and the majority of people don't know what support The Mission actually offer (4).

We had no budget

We needed an idea that would capture the support of corporates, media outlets and partners, and ultimately, the Wellington public.

Objectives & KPIs

To help The Mission to support the community in increasingly challenging conditions, the Christmas appeal needed to:

1. OBJECTIVE: Build support for The Mission and the Christmas appeal

Measured by: High levels of earned media and positive commentary

It's critical that The Mission build and maintain their reputation and generate talkability about their initiatives.

Without budget behind our fundraising activities, we would rely heavily on the support of partners, suppliers, and earned media to spread our message to potential donors – we need an idea that could overcome budget limitations.

2. OBJECTIVE: Raise critical funds for Christmas initiatives

Measured by: Budget to fund Christmas initiatives (\$130,000)

Demand for food, housing, and toys for the region would require \$ \$130,000 (1).

3. OBJECTIVE: Use the Christmas appeal to provide a halo for all The Mission's efforts

Measured by: Increase in overall (non-Christmas specific) giving to The Mission

Generosity tends to be high over the holiday period, and it is a key time to build connections with first-time donors or reactivate lapsed donors. Generating a high-level of interest around the Christmas appeal, can create a halo for The Mission's other efforts. We were significantly behind on targets, so wanted to leverage Christmas goodwill into financial support for all The Mission's initiatives. (1).

Sourcing: Section 1

1. Wellington City Mission Internal Reporting and Tracking
2. Stats NZ - Volunteering and donation statistics, Survey, 2016
3. Research New Zealand, Survey, 2022
4. Moxie, Independent Agency Research

Audience

Our existing donor base wouldn't be able to cover the increased donation need, so we needed to get more people to give.

The size of Wellington (New Zealand's capital has a population of 543K (6)) is prohibitive to being too specific in terms of audience targeting (1). To attract the scale of donations required we would need to find a way to rally all the different people of the Wellington region around The Mission.

Research identified two key aspects of the Wellington community that we could leverage:

1. COMMUNITY-MINDEDNESS DEFINES WELLINGTON'S CULTURE

Wellington is the nation's capital city, but it's more like a town in how it acts. Its small geographical footprint makes it the most walkable city in the country, and you don't go for a walk in the CBD without bumping into someone you know. Therefore, the region outpaces New Zealand overall in terms of perceived importance of being involved in the community (1).

2. ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IS COMMONPLACE

People come together as a community regularly: 28% of Wellingtonians have attended a sporting event in the last week and they are 32% more likely than the average New Zealander to have attended an arts-based event (1). Cultural moments like the New Zealand 7s rugby tournament and the filming and screening of the Lord of the Rings had seen the region almost universally come together in support.

Insight

INSIGHT: local connection drives donations

Research shows 77% of people prefer to support local charities over global charity initiatives (2), driven by the belief that charity begins at home (3).

INSIGHT: Wellington community pride needed a boost

78% of Wellingtonians feel it's important to have a strong sense of community, and pride themselves on the city having a rich cultural and events scene. These aspects once earned Wellington praise from Lonely Planet as "the coolest little capital in the world". Unfortunately, more recently Wellington has suffered a significant drop in residents believing it's a great place to live, work and play (4), a 22% decline in city pride and has spurred headlines such as "Why Wellington's reputation as the coolest little capital is stone cold dead" from our largest national news outlets (5).

We wanted to tap into the community-mindedness and city-pride of Wellingtonians generate support for The Mission.

The Big Idea

Make donating an unmissable community cultural event in the city.

Sourcing: Section 2

1. Nielsen CMI – Quarterly survey, 2022
2. Moxie, Independent Agency Research
3. JBWere Report
4. Poneke Promise and Wellington City Council Research
5. Stuff NZ
6. Stats NZ – Subnational population estimate, 2022

Bringing the Idea to Life

THE IDEA:

'The Silent Night' – a Christmas fundraising event that no one goes to.

Sky Stadium is the biggest venue in Wellington, with 34,000 seats. It's an iconic building, nicknamed 'the cake tin' and is located right in the centre of the CBD. When the community comes together to support – from the All Blacks (NZ's national rugby team, and one of the nation's greatest sources of pride), to Ed Sheeran – they do it at Sky Stadium.

Together Sky Stadium and The Mission put on the ultimate event for Wellingtonians to show their support: 'The Silent Night'.

A fundraising event where nothing happens and no one goes, meaning 100% of sales went directly to those in need. All people needed to do to show their support was buy a ticket.

We challenged the community to come together to sell-out the stadium, a full-force demonstration of the regions' generosity.

THE ROLL OUT:

Without a dollar of paid media budget available, we needed to draw on the generosity of media partners, local people and businesses who could evangelise and support us.

Through an integrated approach of 'paid', earned and owned media we:

Created a localised sense of occasion and intrigue

We needed a strong presence in the city to connect 'The Silent Night' with the region and its people.

A month out from the event – having earned the support of media – the city was flooded with the distinctive outdoor execution for 'The Silent Night'. Traditional placements were supplemented with local businesses lending their equity to us by placing our posters in their storefronts and owned assets.

Stirred Wellingtonians' sense of connection

The leading voices of Wellington gave us the credibility and attention we needed to spread the word.

Front page stories in the national paper, well-respected radio DJs, and commentators during major sports matches hosted in the city helped build meaning into the event.

To engage local businesses, we offered corporate boxes to 'The Silent Night'.

National channels 'upped' the stakes of selling out the stadium. Nothing motivates a group more than knowing the nation is watching and this was an opportunity to prove Wellington's unique level of care.

PR played a key role in spreading the message.

Translated goodwill to donation

Working with Ticketek (a major ticketing platform for large venues), our crowd-less event had the full sales functionality of their platforms. QR codes were added to all executions, directing people to purchase.

Used sales progress to keep the hype

As tickets sold, news outlets ran stories on how many more tickets were left to go to sell-out. Once all 34,000 tickets had sold, stories celebrating the regions' generosity were published, creating another boost of sales (resulting in us overselling the capacity of Sky Stadium). On the night, we live-streamed the

empty stadium with a haunting rendition of 'Silent Night' playing over the sound system as a thank you to all our supporters.

Sourcing: Section 2

NA

Results

THE SILENT NIGHT WAS A SELL-OUT SUCCESS

We sold 37,109 tickets – the second largest (non)attendance in the stadium's history (Eminem is #1, if you're wondering), outselling major acts, including Guns N' Roses, and we smashed all of our objectives:

1. OBJECTIVE: Build support for The Mission and the Christmas appeal Measured by: High levels of earned media and positive commentary

The novelty of transforming a donation drive into an event no-one would attend had its intended effect in creating an unreasonable amount of exposure without a budget to speak of. Corporates, media outlets and partners came out in spades – 'The Silent Night' was unmissable.

Media partners offered traditional formats to make the campaign inescapable. Paid media donated:

- Combined reach: 1,502,537 (1)
- Ratecard value: \$1,026,148 (1)

Earned media enabled us to deliver a more detailed message from credible voices.

We secured coverage from all major outlets, including two stories on the biggest national current affairs shows, and the front page of Wellington's largest newspaper.

Earned media achieved:

- Combined reach of coverage: 8,362,179 (2)
- Media value: \$1,490,952 (2)

Wellingtonians responded to the hype. Search volumes for The Mission spiked and between paid and earned media, we drove over 38,000 visits to site. (1)

2. OBJECTIVE: Raise critical funds for Christmas

Measured by: Raise \$130,000 for Christmas initiatives (ticket sales to 'The Silent Night')

Result: \$330,114

The region came together behind The Silent Night, and new supporters to The Mission with 98% of buyers being either new, or long-lapsed donors (3).

3. OBJECTIVE: Use the Christmas appeal to provide a halo for all The Mission's efforts Measured by: Increase in overall (non-Christmas specific) giving to The Mission

Result: 51.7% increase in general donations

The noise created from 'The Silent Night' did more than just sell tickets. The Mission had never had such a high level of exposure as a brand – creating a halo effect on their other fundraising efforts: general donations increased by 51.7% in 2022 with 1054 individuals donating (3).

"The increase in attention for The Mission because of The Silent Night created an unprecedented increase

in interest in what we do and in donations. We have never seen this kind of response from the public before.”

Sharon Cavill, GM Brand and Communications

SOCIAL IMPACT

The Mission commissioned ImpactLab to understand the ‘measurable good’ of the work they do. This study calculated the long-term outcomes achieved through the various community initiatives of The Mission, including health outcomes, safety, and potential enablement to find employment. They term this positive impact ‘social return on investment’, or ‘measurable good’.

ImpactLab found that every \$1 donation returns \$3.40 of social return on investment (4).

‘The Silent Night’ generated \$330,114 in donations.

Factoring in the social return on investment, the campaign delivered \$1,122,388 of ‘measurable good’. A million dollars all from a sell-out event, where nothing happened and that nobody went.

Additional Marketing Components

| | | | |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| | Couponing | | Leveraging Distribution |
| | CRM/Loyalty Programs | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Other marketing for the brand, running at the same time as this effort |
| | Economic Factors | | Other : |
| | Giveaways/Sampling | | |

Other Contributing Factors

Every year, The Mission run initiatives to collect toys, food and other items. The spend to run these initiatives is minimal and was the same in 2022 as previous years.

Sourcing: Section 4

1. Media Partner metrics for the period 1 November – 31 December 2022
2. iSentia Tracking
3. Wellington City Mission Internal Reporting and Tracking
4. ImpactLab – GoodMeasure report – August 2022

Media Addendum

Paid Media Expenditures

| Current Year: 2022 | | Year Prior: 2021 | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under \$100K | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> \$1M - under \$5M | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Under \$100K | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1M - under \$5M |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100K - under \$250K | <input type="checkbox"/> \$5M - under \$10M | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100K - under \$250K | <input type="checkbox"/> \$5M - under \$10M |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250K - under \$500K | <input type="checkbox"/> \$10M - under \$20M | <input type="checkbox"/> \$250K - under \$500K | <input type="checkbox"/> \$10M - under \$20M |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$500K - \$750K | <input type="checkbox"/> \$20M and over | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500K - \$750K | <input type="checkbox"/> \$20M and over |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$750K - under \$1M | | <input type="checkbox"/> \$750K - under \$1M | <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable |

Compared to other competitors in this category, this budget is:

- Less About the same More Not Applicable

Compared to overall spend on the brand in prior year, the budget this year is:

- Less
 About the same
 More
 Not Applicable

This campaign was pro bono – all paid media placements were gifted by media partners who saw the value of the idea and supported the cause.

It is hard to accurately gauge the spend of other charities in the category as there are over 27,000 in New Zealand and they vary greatly in size and funding structure.

Owned Media

Website, social media channels, email database.

Sponsorships

NA

Communications Touchpoints

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Branded Content - Editorial | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - SEM | <input type="checkbox"/> Print - Magazine |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Branded Content - Product Placement | <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - SEO | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Print - Newspaper |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cinema | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Short Video (:15-3 min.) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public Relations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contests | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Social: Organic | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Radio |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Affiliate | <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Social: Paid | <input type="checkbox"/> Retail Experience: Digital |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Audio Ads | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Video Ads | <input type="checkbox"/> Retail Experience: In Store |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Content Promotion | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Direct Mail | <input type="checkbox"/> Sales Promotion, Couponing & Distribution |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Display Ads | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Events | <input type="checkbox"/> Sampling/Trial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Email/Chatbots/Text/Messaging | <input type="checkbox"/> Health Offices / Point of Care | <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsorships - Entertainment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Gaming | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Influencer / Key Opinion Leader | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sponsorships - Sports |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Influencers | <input type="checkbox"/> Interactive / Website / Apps | <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsorships - Unique Opportunity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Location based | <input type="checkbox"/> Internal/In-Office Marketing | <input type="checkbox"/> Street Mktg. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Long Video (3+ min.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Trade Shows, Trade Communications, Professional Engagement |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Marketplace Ads | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OOH - Billboards | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TV |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Mobile | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OOH - Other Outdoor | <input type="checkbox"/> User Generated Content & Reviews |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Product Placement | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OOH - Transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Programmatic Display Ads | <input type="checkbox"/> Packaging & Product Design | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Mktg. - Programmatic Video Ads | <input type="checkbox"/> Print - Custom Publication | |