



GTC members Give To Charity

Last September, Jeremy Hoare posted a request on the GTC Forum on behalf of a friend, journalist and photographer Carole Edrich, who needed help shooting a promotional video for her inspiring new charity, No Walls. As so often in these cases, GTC members came up trumps

How does a new charity get sufficient publicity to attract funding when it needs that funding to get started in the first place? Thanks to three generous members of the GTC (and hours at the laptop creating a new website) I was able to avoid this challenge entirely.

I started gathering a team to help build the foundations of a new charity in the early months of 2009. We put together basic business and PR plans, a first cut short- and long-term strategy, ran a successful pilot project and were able to validate many of our basic assumptions. We were even able to get together a brochure featuring the results of a workshop for school children on the theme of 'it makes me want to dance.'

However, with no funds and no chance of finding an interim leader in the three short days between diagnosis and operation, I unfortunately had to put the project on hold when I was diagnosed with breast cancer in May.

Taking the positives

While it's not something I'd have chosen, the need to stay in one place, take extra care to keep out of the way of potentially lethal infections, and the general malaise that came with the operation and subsequent chemotherapy, put me in a position where I could review the charity's structure, objectives and business plan in very rigorous detail that would not otherwise have been possible.

Many people encounter huge barriers that prevent them from achieving objectives that, in other circumstances, could probably be attained. They remain unquestioning of the mental walls around them, and so when confronted with a new obstacle they'll automatically assume 'I can't because...' and leave it at that. Other people accept no mental or physical barriers, but are still challenged by tremendous odds. Sometimes the challenges that exist through misconceptions and prejudice are as difficult to break down as other great walls such as poverty, physical disability and hostile environments. I want to help.

The charity, which has the working name of 'No Walls', will provide

funding to small projects that help people break down these walls. By funding others I expect to keep our team (and overheads) lean, while benefiting the community on a variety of levels by demonstrating that the challenges they have identified can be overcome, both to those in managing or facilitating roles as well as to the beneficiaries. No Walls will formally launch in mid-2010; a public fundraising event is planned for the first quarter of 2010 and we're all working hard behind the scenes.

Getting started

I know what it's like to get start-up capital, having gone through the process for the risk management consultancy I once owned and ran. It was a challenge, but ultimately the numbers talked for themselves. Presenting our cash-flow forecast, profit and loss, supporting assumptions and best- and worst-case scenarios was a matter of presentation after thorough research. Because it was clear to everyone that my consultancy was a dynamic going concern with huge potential, the bank manager was friendly and potential investors came to us. Getting start-up funds for a charity in today's economic climate requires a rather different approach.

Although a significant amount of money has already been pledged, it is conditional on matched funding from others. To get money for No Walls I will be competing with far more experienced charitable fund-raisers. I decided that the only way this can work is to get myself invited to present to open-minded decision-makers. The only way to get that to happen is to generate sufficient coverage so that I'm invited to conferences, presentations and other similar events.

The dilemma, therefore, is how to attract sufficient attention to my embryonic charity without money for PR. My only choice is to harness the power of the Internet. I'm going to try to build a significant media and web presence for the charity – and am actually, as it happens, quite lucky to have the extra edge of being able to incorporate my own health challenges into the publicity drive.

To this end, I decided to launch the new website with what I hope will be an Internet meme.

The power of film

I've learned the power of film through another short project comprised of a combination of photographic stills and my voice, which could not have been done without my friend Jeremy Hoare, who produced it and gave invaluable advice. This resulted in an invitation to become the first photo-blogger to be

Jeremy showed me the way forward. He said that requests for charitable assistance were occasionally made through the GTC and offered to post one for me.

I was tremendously lucky. I wanted an outdoor tango event at Spitalfields Market to form the backdrop of the video and this was only a few weeks away. Of the several people who contacted me (all of whom had impressive CVs), there were two available at the date and time



▲ Carole directs the action while Stuart looks on



▲ Slow shutter shot as the light fades

invited to a world leaders' summit. The BBC uploaded it and interviewed me about it and I was the only photo-blogger to blog from inside the April 2009 G20 Summit. I decided to build on this experience to help publicise No Walls.

Unfortunately, I had no funds. In fact, since the amount of work I have been able to do has been limited by my chemotherapy (I write about travel and dance), I had less income, and therefore available money, than usual. However, a chance comment to

I needed as well as the subsequent contingency date. Steven Acton did the filming; Stuart McKears offered to produce and edit; and I asked Jeremy to attend as well so that we could draw on his tremendous wealth of experience.

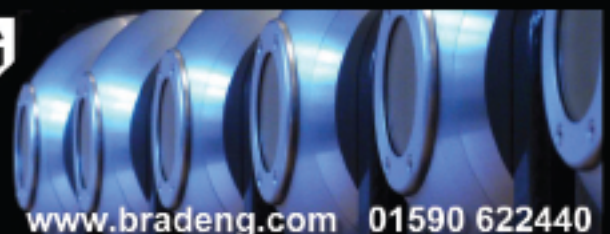
A little disorganised!

One of the unpleasant side-effects of the chemo was an unpredictable distortion of my sense of timing, and another (due probably to pain) sporadically muddled thinking. I'm never

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flustered when healthy but arrived late and fuddled. Steven, Stuart and Jeremy were very gracious about my tardiness, but I know Jeremy well enough to see in his eyes that such delays are unacceptable in this new strange world.

"I would like to let the GTC membership know of the generosity of both Steven Acton and Stuart McKears for giving their time to help Carole Edrich achieve this. Their professionalism and commitment shone throughout the evening and I'm sure the finished result will be highly beneficial for Carole and her charity"

Jermy Hoare

That I have never directed a film before must have been painfully obvious from the start. I knew about storyboards and had drawn myself one using little stickmen at home, but hadn't shared it because I was sure that those with me, being more experienced, would do better with only minimal direction. As we've not finished editing yet this theory still has to be proven one way or the other!

My cast were tango dancers, some of whom rolled up in true Latin American style (even later than me!). When finally assembled, I told people what I wanted and tried to arrange that this should happen. Simple enough in my mind's eye, I soon realised that the practicalities of using real social dancers meant there would have to be compromises. Unlike the ballroom dancing you see on TV, Argentine tango is an improvisational dance form, and if you try and prescribe a dancer's movements too much you kill all that is good, spontaneous and fun.

Tim and Geny, the youngest pair, gave a clue what it might be like to work with professionals. Tim is a professional actor and dancer and Geny an excellent follow. They danced

exactly where they were needed, looking relaxed, happy and natural, while Tim flirted wonderfully with the camera. He later told me it was great to be given the opportunity to improvise on film. Other friends who came later displayed dazzling

footwork, and the couple who run the tango event glided past with consummate professional ease.

But the ease of directing these individuals was offset by the difficulty of getting the others to do what remained simple and clear in my mind's eye. One couple, who perform regularly in front of crowds in London, surprised me enormously. He resolutely refused to look towards camera and her stage fright was such that her face was frozen in a constant grimace of terror. The others, well suited in height and experience, took the whole thing so terribly seriously that they were unable to smile and my attempts to lighten the mood fell like lead into quicksand. That can't fail to show in the final piece.

A great camera team

Jeremy, Stuart and Steven, in contrast, worked wonderfully together. Although they had never met in person before, I watched them quickly gel as a team. I saw Steve gain in confidence that he was getting what I wanted, and observed the way the three of them discussed the best angles and perspectives. Between them, they made invaluable contributions.

I am very keen to make the internet meme work (an internet meme is a catchy idea generated through the propagation of a digital file or hyperlink from one person to others via the internet), supported by a blog, photos and articles on the new website. It needs to have both emotional and intellectual impact and must be short enough that people don't think of going elsewhere before the message is delivered. It's my first time as a director and I know that I'm being ambitious even though I'm leaning heavily on the experience of those around me.

The end product

My vision is a very short piece. Less than two minutes long, it shows a variety of people dancing tango. They look 'normal and able' as they dance into view, but just before each leaves shot they are captioned: 'Open heart surgery 5 weeks ago', 'Told he'd never walk again', 'Lost collar bone and arm in accident', 'Breast cancer 15 years ago', 'Combined age 167'. Finally I dance to the front with my partner and take off my gloves, hat and scarf to reveal that I have no hair and am 'Currently undergoing chemotherapy'. Then comes our logo 'No Walls'.

The first rushes look promising but I have yet to visit Stuart to finish it. The process is both fun and totally terrifying. So much is riding on this; the charity, the willingness of others to help in the future, our credibility and more. But whatever happens, without Jeremy, Stuart, Steven and the GTC, this first part of an important venture could not have taken place.



Steve Acton: The Cameraman

Back in September, I read Jeremy Hoare's post on the GTC Forum asking for help in putting together a video to support a newly formed charity. Initially, I assumed that the request would be filled fairly quickly but

a week or two later I saw another post from Jeremy still requesting assistance. I decided to put myself forward.

Twenty minutes after emailing Carole, we were talking about what she hoped to achieve, and several emails between Carole, Jeremy and Stuart (the editor) and myself later, we found ourselves on a late September evening at Spitalfields Market.

The initial brief was to show people dancing (Carole's passion) and then reveal to the viewer that each dancer had recovered/or was suffering from a certain kind of illness – with the final reveal being Carole herself.

The weather was kind to us but the venue was to prove problematic. Spitalfields Market has a small covered seating area at one end and this is where the filming would take place. The shoot started well with enough daylight, but with filming in early Autumn, the light quickly dropped off. As there were no power outlets available, I had to rely solely on light from the surrounding coffee shops and my trusty Pag light which did its job well considering what it was being asked to do, but was nevertheless stretched to the limit.

Meanwhile, as an inexperienced director, Carole did a good job of explaining what she required and the three of us – Jeremy, Stuart and myself – tried our best to make it happen for her.

I'm pretty used to filming one-time only events but somehow on this shoot I felt particularly conscious of not wanting to make a mistake or of failing to capture what was needed.

Perhaps it was the presence of Jeremy and Stuart who have a lot more experience than myself – or just not wanting to let Carole down on this very personal project.



Stuart McKears: The Editor's Perspective

I became involved in this project not only because I have an intimate interest in all sorts of disability issues, but because I also have a particular interest in dance on film. Most dance currently on screen involves competitive events and is essentially treated like a spectator 'sport'. Yet, for the average person, participating in dance is not solely about technique or balance but personal enjoyment. I felt this project was primarily about individuals and their struggles with life, and it might just be a way to do something that was visually unusual. I approached Carole with the idea of the camera dancing with each dancer – as well, of course, as a more general unconditional offer to edit.

Carole accepted the latter but felt that a one-shot sequence would work better and be easier to shoot. However, we did agree that, time permitting and with the co-operation of Steve and Jeremy, a multi-shot variation might both be interesting and possible.

As everybody will be aware, shooting a dance sequence on a single camera is, to put it mildly, both complicated to film and tricky to edit, especially with limited rehearsal, no blocking and having to rely on non-professional dancers hitting marks, so I decided to drive up from the South Coast to Spitafields to help; some might say interfere!

Fortunately, Carole, Steve and Jeremy humoured me, the dancers tried hard and we secured enough footage for both versions.

During the post-shoot meal we viewed and transferred, via firewire, the footage to my laptop using Sony Vegas, my regular editing software.

Over the next week or so, after transferring all the footage across my firewire network to my static quad editing box, I completed two rough cuts, a quick single-take version first

and then a more leisurely multi-shot version. Due to a good ratio, neither cut was difficult to assemble, though a hitch with the sound did emerge. While a direct feed had been taken from the music laptop, this has turned out to be so heavily compressed, with little dynamic range and distorted peaks, that the original track will probably have to be sourced and overlaid for the final cut.

The other, already known, nuisance is that sophisticated grading will be needed, especially on the multi-shot cut, to match light levels that went quickly from dusk to night.

At the moment, the project is on hold while Carole tries to catch up with her life and work, but we hope to complete it early in the New Year.

The vast majority of my editing experience has been on my own footage, mainly way back in film, so this has been a fascinating project for me and I look forward to advancing my editing skills, especially on future charity or disability-related productions.

Fact File

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Photos by Jeremy Hoare

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