



DBA Design Effectiveness Awards 2017

London's Air Ambulance: telling the right story

Category: design for society

For publication

Industry sector | Charity not for profit
Client company | London's Air Ambulance
Design consultancy | The Clearing
Date of entry | June 2017

London's Air Ambulance delivers world-class pre-hospital care to Londoners – helping 2,000 critically injured people inside the M25 every year. Providing a 24/7 service costs £8.7 million per year, mostly funded through charitable donations.

The service's trauma team provides immediate medical treatment to critically injured patients at the scene of their incident within minutes. However, when the helicopter was out of action for maintenance or training, patients were left without support. During long summer days, flying hours were lost as the crew could only fly for 12 hours. The fleet of rapid response cars was subject to London's heavy traffic.

Another helicopter would save more lives. But it would increase costs by £1.2 million per annum, a huge challenge for a small charity.

The Clearing realised that the helicopter – the brand's most visible asset – wasn't telling their story or boosting fundraising. Highly visible in the sky above London and always photographed when attending incidents, it was a missed opportunity covered with sponsor's logos.

We used the livery of the helicopter and the rapid response car fleet to maximize Londoners' awareness, understanding and support of the charity.

Two objectives:

- 1. Communicate purpose and charitable status**
- 2. Generate financial support to help deliver 2nd helicopter**



The helicopter became a billboard featuring a call to action, number of critical missions and trauma team messaging. The centre of all PR and fundraising activity, it helped communicate the story. During the first year of the rebrand, fundraising income increased by 68.3% year-on-year.

£4.5 million of the **5 year £6 million target** was raised within months with a campaign featuring the rebranded helicopter.

A second helicopter was purchased two years after the new designs were launched.

£4.5
million
raised in 3
months

68.3%
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income

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LDN



The brief:

What we were asked to do, their needs

London's Air Ambulance had to get to patients as quickly as possible, every day and every daylight hour possible. In 2015, the single helicopter was unavailable for the equivalent of 63 days for planned and unplanned maintenance reasons, including 25.5 days for its annual maintenance. During this time the charity used rapid response cars, but during the day in London the average traffic speed for emergency blue light vehicles is 20mph. Speed of treatment is vital. Having been an operational aspiration for many years, acquiring a second helicopter became a strategic priority in 2013.

The charity faced a familiar problem in this quest: it was being eclipsed by powerful sponsors' brands, failing to connect with the public or explain why they needed more support. Despite its extraordinary work and worldwide prestigious reputation, the charity still relied on donations and remained relatively unknown within the city in which it operates.

The helicopter was the most effective opportunity deliver these messages, so we worked on a strategic redesign of this most iconic asset.

Key objectives:

1. Communicate purpose and charitable status: connect with Londoners, corporate partners and volunteers ensuring the London's Air Ambulance story and call to action was clearly understood and could be acted upon
2. Generate financial support to help deliver a 2nd helicopter to extend daylight flying hours and save more lives: use the brand to accelerate and maximize fundraising activity



Approach

We focused on the livery as the most visible asset of the brand to communicate key messages to Londoners and potential donors, helping them to understand more about the organisation and its vital services.

Communicate purpose and charitable status: we created a clear call to action with **Support London's Air Ambulance** sitting prominently within the helicopter and car design.

A specialist trauma team treats patients at the roadside: **Advanced Trauma Team** became a secondary message on all vehicles.

Generate financial support towards a 2nd helicopter: We needed a powerful, emotional message to touch people's lives and further general support. We added a changing message to the helicopter tailfin that communicated the number of critical missions flown, and therefore the scale and importance of the service.

Alongside this, we brought the core elements of the red helicopter and the 'battenburg' green and yellow chevrons together in a fully integrated livery, building equity into the brand design.

London's Air Ambulance's position as a charity and its essential place in London's emergency infrastructure was signaled in the livery, alongside carefully-placed bright chevrons on the fuselage and clear messaging explaining the Trauma Team's role in an emergency.

The new livery turned the emergency helicopter into a powerful communication tool.

Agency fee: £6,000, plus further pro-bono work

Barrier 1:

The helicopter was overwhelmed by the sponsor's brand

Barrier 2:

Costly service to run

Barrier 3:

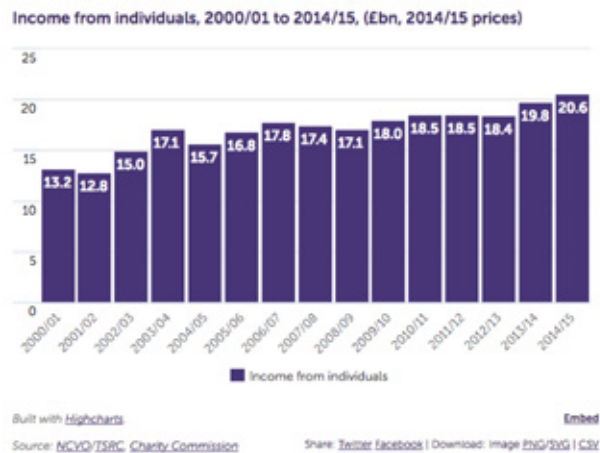
Perceived as an ambulance not an ER room



Client background

Giving under pressure

The general upward trend is holding, but those that give have become more discerning: thinking harder about where to donate while simultaneously demanding more in return.



Congested charity sector

In a congested charity sector, London's Air Ambulance needed an engaging and simple way to communicate a variety of messages, and appeal to Londoners, professionals and businesses.

Emotionally engage without blackmailing

High-pressure fundraising techniques make consumers uncomfortable. 35% of donors state that over-emotional messaging would stop them donating (consumer attitudes report 2012, REaD group).





Outline of design solution

Old

The helicopter was eclipsed with Virgin corporate sponsorship. Easily spotted, it looked like a private helicopter rather than a charity-run emergency vehicle. The branding was so prevalent that the public widely assumed Virgin covered all the operating costs.

New

We brought the core elements of the red helicopter and the 'battenburg' green and yellow chevrons together in a fully integrated livery, building equity into the brand design.

“We knew we needed to appeal to the people London in a much more emotional and holistic way if we were going to generate the financial support that the charity needed to enhance and sustain itself. Our ultimate goal was the acquisition of a second emergency medical helicopter and enhancing the livery on the current aircraft helped us promote the critical messages of the advanced trauma service, that we are funded by donations and how many patients we have cared for in our history. Building equity into the livery design turned our helicopter into a powerful communication and awareness tool”

Graham Hodgkin, CEO London's Air Ambulance 2012 - 2016



Core elements

The helicopter was designed to demonstrate the vital role in London's emergency services cover that it plays - to look like an emergency services vehicle. The brand's red was retained, but key messaging and reinterpreted ambulance 'battenburg' patterns were added. Design elements from this livery were easily transferred to the car fleet livery.

For the first time the brand could use these same elements in fundraising materials and activities.

Campaigns

The new brand was pivotal in 'Your London, Your Helicopter' and '#YourHelicopterLive' tweetathon, where the helicopter was a central icon. London's Air Ambulance engaged a PR agency to run competitions to name helicopters, involve the community and encourage photographs to be shared extensively – all taking the message further. During 'Your London, Your Helicopter' over 11,000 new social media followers were gained and 350 proactive pieces of press including national – all with the helicopter and its design-led messaging, which removed the need for any additional explanation. The messaging worked strongly and moved far beyond paid-for traditional media activity.



1. Communicate purpose and charitable status

The development of London's Air Ambulance brand helped deliver a key part of their business strategy, which would have been impossible if the charity had continued to be eclipsed by their sponsors' brands. The shift in strategy gave commercial partners a positive story about London that they can be part of – rather than the more limited chance to brand a helicopter. New commercial sponsors were attracted by the overall rebrand including BlackRock, HSBC London branches, Hogan Lovells and Vocalink.

Total potential PR reach was over 94 million people, all of which were made aware of the London Air Ambulance's story through the new livery design and messaging – contributing to direct donations, and a remarkable outreach for a local charity. The small team had to work effectively and efficiently, and creating a visual icon that contained the messaging increased their impact.

Over 11,000 new social media followers were gained during the “Your London, Your Helicopter” campaign, resulting in 390% increase in visits to the website and over 350 pieces of campaign news coverage, reaching potential of 94 million people. The PR agency also ran the first ever Tweetathon #YourHelicopterLife following the operational team. All these pieces of activity used the helicopter, making the story local, powerful and easy to share for the first time.



2. Generate financial support to help deliver 2nd helicopter, extending daylight fly hours, and save more lives

The £1.2 million fundraising was not sufficient to convince trustees, and a 5 year £6 million campaign was put in place. The “your London, Your Helicopter” campaign with the rebranded helicopter launched and raised £4.5 million within months – enough to move ahead with the purchase.

A second helicopter, an MD902 Explorer, now registered as G-LNDN, was acquired towards the end of 2015. The impact was a rise in operational availability from 83% with one helicopter, to 98%, or nearly 600 hours of additional availability, with two helicopters in the first nine months of 2016. It meant the trauma team could be at a patient's side up to eight times faster than in a car – a life-saving different to more critically-injured patients. The second helicopter meant flying longer during the summer, with an additional 314 hours of helicopter coverage.

Other influencing factors

LAA received £1.2 million towards its second helicopter in 2014, from LIBOR. This covered the operating costs for one year only - it didn't cover design costs or subsequent years of flying

PR team was used to work alongside fundraising activity. They used the rebranded helicopter as their central icon, with the new livery.

Research resources

NCVO, Charity Commission, REaD Group