

# Driving better value from electrical donations



**Organisation:** Oxfam

**REBM type:** Electrical re-use

**Sector:** Charity

**Company size:** Large

**Service:** Donation, re-use and re-sale of electrical items.

## Key Facts

- Oxfam is a UK charity set up to fight poverty on a global scale. The charity's retail division specifically works to raise funds to support Oxfam's objectives.
- In an effort to boost revenue, the charity developed a scheme to increase donations of small electrical items, by postal and high street donation.
- The aim is to generate higher quality goods for donation, therefore increasing re-sale value.
- The REBus team helped Oxfam to identify and assess options for increasing donations of higher-value items. The aim was to maximise donation revenue for Oxfam and recover unused smartphones that may not otherwise be reused.

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## Introduction

Based in the UK, Oxfam was set up to address global poverty issues.

The charity's retail division specifically serve as hubs for driving donations and volunteering, and presenting Oxfam's presence on UK high streets, as well as working towards Oxfam's objectives.

Oxfam wanted to review the range of options available to increase donations of all electrical products to shops and through postal collection.



## REBM for electrical equipment re-use

The project has kick-started a mass-donation campaign for smartphones, both through postal collection, managed by a service provider called Fonebank, and donations made directly to Oxfam shops. Oxfam will receive a proportion of the profit from Fonebank on the sale of the phones.

Oxfam searched for a way to develop business models that would increase donations. Originally, it looked at in-shop donations, with an option to consider postal donations of certain small products, as well as the development of a refurbishment centre at an Oxfam [Wastesaver](#) facility.

Oxfam recognised, however, that electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) re-use activities would be challenging to implement quickly across all its retail outlets, as the skills required to undertake safety and testing were only present in a small number of shops.

For this reason, Oxfam decided to focus on improving the quality of gadgets donated so that they could be re-sold through a service partner with the right capabilities. Donations through shops, from corporate partners (either headquarters or driven through stores) and online were also considered as options.

Further electricals re-use activity is now being pursued by Oxfam, but this has been phased into different elements of a new, wider electricals strategy which includes in-store re-use and sales and, potentially, partnerships with other re-use organisations.

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## The pilot

The main driver for the project was financial. Oxfam had seen competitor organisations successfully develop offers on electrical products and wanted to make the most of its own resources.

The trial was similar to previous initiatives run with Fonebank; however the impetus had dwindled and fresh enthusiasm was needed to re-ignite the scheme.

The real 'light bulb' moment for all at Oxfam was the realisation that the electricals project needed to be split into different phases. As a result, the charity was able to focus on and deliver the initial donation drive with Fonebank, before working on compliance and shop electricals re-use schemes on a different timescale.

## Why REBus?

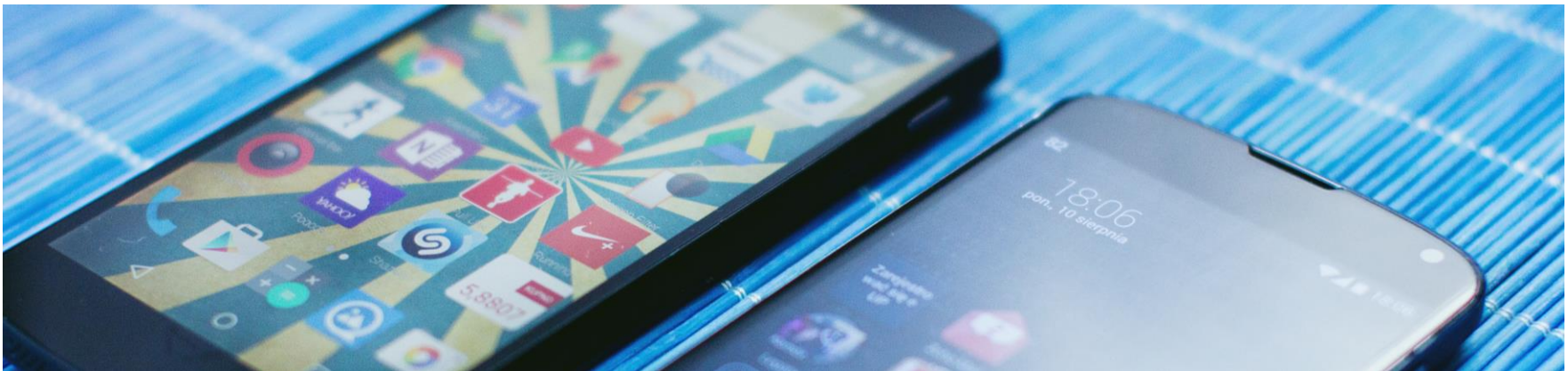
WRAP introduced the REBus offer, which presented a timely opportunity for Oxfam to review its position on electrical goods.

REBus brought extensive experience, knowledge, support and capacity to make the project possible; Oxfam had some knowledge about the issues but most of its experienced staff are distributed among a small number of shops across the country, making the project challenging.

REBus also enabled Oxfam Project Manager, Katie Liddle, to develop solid, workable ideas from initial development meetings, and to escalate key decisions with the right information to inform and advise those decisions among senior colleagues.

"We couldn't have done it without the REBus team."

*Katie Liddle, Project Manager, Oxfam Trading Department*



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## Barriers

Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) regulations and product safety were essential considerations in this project. Towards the end of the project, a major barrier in posting items containing lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries was identified by Oxfam. These batteries are classed as 'Dangerous Goods' and therefore the volume permitted in any single postal item is restricted.

After re-establishing a relationship with Fonebank, it became apparent that this was a major factor in previous reductions in interest. Whereas Fonebank were prepared to ship out envelopes to prospective donations, it became prohibitively expensive when new rules required that rigid containers be used, so Fonebank was reliant on Oxfam for effectively targeting donors and asking them to request packaging.

## Lessons learned

Ensuring the project team contained the right experts from within Oxfam was critical to success. For example, the Health and Safety Compliance Advisor in Oxfam was essential to the work and could have been involved sooner in the project as the advice and oversight on electricals re-se was, and will continue to be, essential.

The project team changed as the project progressed and focused on specific activities, meaning that a core team could take responsibility for implementation.

## Advice to others

- Be prepared to listen and learn – don't focus too much on initial expectations; you will need to adapt and change them as the project progresses.
- Find people with the right expertise and apply that to your project.



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Case studies were generated as a result of pilots carried out for REBus by WRAP or RWS and the named organisations from 2013 to 2016.

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