Donating in the wake of Sandy gets social with apps

Natasha Baker, Reuters

(Reuters) - People eager to support relief efforts following Hurricane Sandy can use apps that provide creative ways of donating to charity and nudge friends to do the same.

Budge, an iPhone app released last week, aims to make donating to charity social. Friends can challenge each other in games and activities such as chess or charades and the loser makes $1, $2, or $5 donations to one of the charities supported by the app.

"For us it's really about changing the way people think about donating," said Hillan Klein, co-founder and CEO of New York-based company Budge. "We are driving to change the culture and say you can have fun while you do good."

The challenges are meant to be activities that friends already enjoy doing together. For couples, it could be doing the dishes or taking out the trash.

"It's relative to people and their relationships with their friends, which makes it a personal experience," said Klein.

Although the donations are small, Klein said they add up.

"People are still donating $25, $40, or $50 over the course of the month," he said, adding that smaller donations enable donors to disperse funds across a range of charities, and to get more friends involved.

The app supports 11 charities, including the American Sustainable Business Council which has setup a relief fund for businesses affected by Sandy, Breastcancer.org, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and the World Food Programme USA.

Klein said the company is looking for more charity partners to aid with Sandy relief efforts.

"An example would be non-profits that deal with first respondents -- some of them have lost their homes in Hurricane Sandy themselves and they're still out there helping others," said Klein.

Budge, which is free and available in the United States and Australia, receives a fee of up to five percent of each transaction.

At the moment the login is through Facebook but the company plans to change that and to release an Android app.

Another web app, Raise5, allows its users to list services online, which can range from web design and proofreading, to lessons on making jam. Services range from $5 to $50, with all funds donated to the charity selected by the service donor.

CEO Mike Tang said Raise5 supports more than 100 charities including the World Society for the Protection of Animals and Virgin Unite.

People wanting to support Sandy relief efforts can also donate to the Red Cross on their website. The Red Cross is working with more than 50 national partner organizations, and has more than 640 partner volunteers deployed to help people impacted by Sandy.

Apple has also set up a portal to donate to the organization through iTunes with 100 percent of the donation being transferred to the Red Cross.

(Editing by Patricia Reaney and Marguerita Choy)

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