



STATE OF INDIANA
DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES (DCS)
CHILD SUPPORT BUREAU (CSB)

Award No. 90FD0211

USING DIGITAL MARKETING TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN THE CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAM

FINAL BRIEF

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BACKGROUND:

PURPOSE OF DIGITAL MARKETING GRANT PROGRAM

The Digital Marketing grant program, sponsored by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, is a 24-month demonstration project to research how digital marketing may help the child support program more effectively reach and serve families. In September 2018, OCSE awarded funds to 14 child support agencies to test digital marketing approaches and partnerships to reach parents that could benefit from child support services, and create or improve two-way digital communication and engagement with parents.

The Indiana Child Support Bureau (CSB) was selected as one of the grant recipients and implemented the CSB Digital Marketing Outreach Project in fulfillment of the grant. Indiana focused on four different components across multiple interventions designed to test the efficacy of digital marketing and digital tools to raise awareness about, and engage eligible families in, the Indiana Child Support Program. The four components consist of website updates, chat, texting (two-way communication) and digital marketing. The goals of the project include increasing:

- A. General awareness about CSB's Child Support Program
- B. The number of families served by increasing the child support caseload
- C. Access to CSB's Child Support Program through new two-way digital communication

PROBLEMS TARGETED BY GRANT

CSB believes there is a general lack of awareness about, and possibly a hesitation to engage with, the child support program among custodial parents that could benefit from child support services. The Indiana Digital Marketing grant team tested the efficacy of website wording changes, new two-way communication and digital marketing to increase engagement of eligible families and raise awareness about the Indiana Child Support Program.

During the initial phase of the project, CSB conducted focus groups with potential eligible custodial parents and with county prosecutors to better understand barriers to entering the program and define areas where innovation may increase participation. CSB used this information to help define the general problems the grant wanted to address and help the team determine the focus of each intervention.

Problems this grant project addressed:

- Low level of awareness about the program among potential participants
 - The team believed there are a lot more people who could benefit from the child support program in Indiana but lack of knowledge about the program and its benefits deter people from enrolling
- Wording used to describe our program hinders people from enrolling
 - The team hypothesized that the wording we use on our website and in our print material affects whether potential participants pursue joining the program.

- Lack of modern two-way communications deter people from interacting with the program
 - The team believed that using texting and online chat would enhance the interaction between the program and participants.
- Determining what aspects of a digital ad resonates best with potential participants
 - The prevalent theory in the child support world is that the image in an ad or marketing material is more effective. The team went into our research thinking we could validate this and there would be a certain type of image (of children, sports, money, etc.) that would prove to be the best to reach potential participants.

INTERVENTIONS AND EVIDENCE-BASED FINDINGS

Indiana conducted seven interventions, from April 1, 2019 – August 29, 2020, that focused on the goals of the project. Below is an overview of the seven interventions:

Intervention 1 - Website Updates

Project Description: Intervention 1 made small wording changes to the Indiana child support website, changed the website template, and decreased the online application from six pages to two. We experimented with four modifications during the intervention:

1. Changed the Indiana child support call center name from the “Kidslines” to the “Child Support Customer Service Center (Kidslines)”
2. Used different phrases (“Enroll Now” and “Get Started”) to see if these phrases, versus the word “Apply”, entice more people to click on the online application
3. Changed to the look and feel of the website template
4. Decreased the child support application from six pages to two

Target Population: Anyone going to the Indiana Child Support website (about 15,000 unique visitors per month) to look for information about child support services

Timeline: 90 days, from Monday, April 1, 2019 through Sunday, June 30, 2019

Research Questions:

1. Do small changes to a website (such as wording changes) or wholesale changes make a difference in whether a potential participant will engage in the program?
2. Does a shorter application result in more completed applications and therefore an increase in cases opened?

Outcomes Measured: For research question #1, the team measured unique visitors to the application page and, more specifically, how many application downloads were initiated (for wording changes) and bounce rate for the wholesale change to the website. For question #2, the team measured application downloads and new cases created.

Results: Changing the Kidslines name and changing the website template did not seem to affect user interaction. Decreasing the application size from six pages to two did not have the desired result of increasing the number of cases either. Using different words other than “Apply” did have an effect and the team saw an increase in activity when other terms were used.

Analysis: The team felt this intervention was a success in answering our intervention questions. The team realized that a wholesale change of the website did not drive users to more interaction with the program, but small targeted wording changes did seem to have an impact. Even though the “Kidsline” experiment did not show great results, the experiment with changing the way we talk about “Apply” did. This experiment came about after reviewing the survey results and the focus group responses when the team discovered that some people thought they would not qualify for the child support program. In hearing this, the team discussed why people would think this and determined that the child support program has potential participants fill out an application to get into the program. Filling out an application usually means that a person can be denied what they are applying for (i.e. loans, WIC, SNAP, jobs) but an application for child support is more of an enrollment into the program versus a determination to qualify for the program. The decrease in the application page size from six to two did not have as much affect as the team had first thought but after further analysis, the team realized many more steps in the application process needed reviewing and updating, and changing just one aspect of the process saved the applicant some time, but not that much.

Intervention 2 – Website Updates

Project Description: Intervention 2 built upon the findings from Intervention 1 that showed the word “Apply” might not be the best word to use for user engagement. This intervention tested three new words or phrases: “Register”, “Sign Me Up”, and “Open A Case”.

Target Population: Anyone going to the Indiana Child Support website (about 15,000 unique visitors per month) to look for information about how to receive child support services

Timeline: 90 days, from Sunday, July 28, 2019 through Sunday, October 6, 2019

Research Questions:

1. Does the phrasing used to link to the online child support application, such as “Apply for Child Support Services”, negatively or positively influence participation?
2. Specifically, is the word “Apply” a deterrent since it implies the possibility of services being denied?

Outcomes Measured: The team measured unique visitors to the application page and how many application downloads were initiated.

Results: Using different words, other than “Apply”, did have an effect and the team saw an increase in activity when any other term was used. The team took this finding one step further and assumed that the word “Application” was also a deterrent. As a result of this intervention, Indiana Child Support removed the words “Apply” and “Application” from our website and our documents and replaced them with “Enroll” and “Enrollment Form” to better reflect that people enroll in the program and cannot be denied services.

Analysis: This intervention allowed us to test whether the first intervention result for changing the word “Apply” was a fluke or a real finding. With the results from this intervention, the team realized that “Apply” is not the best term to use if we want people to engage with our program.

Intervention 3 – Website Updates

Project Description: Intervention 3 focused on changing the Indiana Child Support website to find out if content phrasing influences navigation and engagement. This intervention changed the wording on the link to the enrollment form (formerly the application). The old wording used the word “Apply” but the new wording used the term “Getting Started” to draw people in. This is because “Get Started” tested well in the first intervention. For this intervention, the team wanted to test if a technical term (“IV-D”) or agency terms (“Prosecutor” and “DCS”) helped or deterred users from interacting with the program. The intervention tested four phrases on the link:

- “Getting Started with Child Support Services”
- “Getting Started with IV-D Services”
- “Getting Started with Prosecutor Services”
- “Getting Started with DCS Services”

The link directed a user to the online enrollment form. The technical term “IV-D” was chosen because it is how child support typically is referenced to at the federal and state level. The agency terms of “Prosecutor” and “DCS” were chosen because the county child support offices are run by county prosecutors and the Department of Child Services (DCS) is the state agency that oversees the CSB.

Target Population: Anyone going to the Indiana Child Support website (about 15,000 unique visitors per month) to look for information about how to receive child support services

Timeline: 90 days, from Sunday, December 1, 2019 through Friday, February 28, 2020

Research Question: Does the way we reference child support services and the agencies it is associated with positively or negatively influence participation?

Outcomes Measured: The team measured unique visitors to the enrollment page and how many enrollment form downloads were initiated.

Results: Referring to services as “Child Support Services” did much better with user engagement than referring to the program by the technical term (IV-D) or agency that child support is associated with.

Analysis: The team hypothesized that technical and agency terms were deterrents to user participation and the intervention results were in line with our thinking. The team believes the terms “IV-D”, “Prosecutor”, was confusing to the average person or the terms are associated with government entities who handle more than just child support (“Prosecutor” is known for criminal prosecution and “DCS” is known more for child protective services). This association is believed to be a deterrent to public engagement.

Intervention 4 – Website Updates

Project Description: Intervention 4 built upon intervention 3 and focused on making changes to the Indiana Child Support website with the goal of finding out if content phrasing influences navigation and engagement. The team again used “Getting Started” as the catch phrase but, for this intervention, the team wanted to test if a technical term (“IV-D”) or agency terms (“Prosecutor” and “DCS”) in front of the words “Child Support Services” helped or deterred user engagement. The team

also added a new agency term, “CSB”, to the intervention because CSB is the agency in Indiana that oversees the child support program statewide. CSB is the agency the team works for and our hypothesis at the beginning of the intervention was that CSB would not be a deterrent because CSB is only associated with child support. The intervention tested five phrases on the link:

- “Getting Started with Child Support Services”
- “Getting Started with IV-D Child Support Services”
- “Getting Started with Prosecutor Child Support Services”
- “Getting Started with DCS Child Support Services”
- “Getting Started with CSB Child Support Services”

The link, when pressed, directed a user to the online enrollment form. Again, like in intervention 3, the technical term of “IV-D” was chosen because this phrase is how Child Support is referenced at the Federal and State level. The agency terms of “Prosecutor” and “DCS” were chosen because the county child support offices are run by county Prosecutors and the Department of Child Services (DCS) is the State agency that oversees the Child Support Bureau (CSB)

Target Population: Anyone going to the Indiana Child Support website (about 15,000 unique visitors per month) to look for information about how to receive child support services

Timeline: 90 days, from Sunday, July 28, 2019 through Sunday, October 6, 2019

Research Question: How does the way the child support agency is referenced and associated influence participation?

Outcomes Measured: The team measured unique visitors to the enrollment page and how many enrollment form downloads were initiated.

Results: Referring to the program as “Child Support Services” seemed to engage users more than referring to the program by the technical name or agency that child support is associated with in Indiana.

Analysis: The team hypothesized that technical and agency terms were deterrents to user participation and the intervention results were in line with our thinking. However, we hypothesized that putting “CSB” in front of “Child Support Services” would do better than not including “CSB” but this hypothesis proved false. Although “CSB” did better than the other technical and agency terms, it was also a deterrent to user engagement. Again, the team believes that the terms were either confusing (“IV-D”), or they were associated with topics other than child support (“Prosecutor” with criminal prosecution and “DCS” with child protective services). As for “CSB”, we believe the poor performance was related to either confusion or association with the government, as the term “CSB” is probably not known to everyone.

Intervention 5 – Two-Way Communication (Texting): Stopped due to COVID

Project Description: Intervention 5 tested whether a texting option for potential IV-D participants would have a positive impact on participant engagement.

Target Population: 4,642 participants who had never received IV-D services, were not interstate cases, had a youngest child under 15 years old, did not have an incarcerated non-custodial parent, and were only receiving 25% - 99% of their child support payments

Timeline (Scheduled): 90 days, from Sunday, March 1, 2020 through Saturday, May 29, 2020

Research Question: Would a new two-way communication, texting, have a positive impact on participant engagement?

Outcomes Measured: Number of texts received and the number of conversions from non-IV-D to IV-D

Results: Of the 2,321 postcards sent to the control group (the group that did not get the texting number), 50 (2.15%) converted from non-IV-D to IV-D. Of the 2,321 postcards sent to the experimental group (the group that did receive the texting number), 160 (6.89%) texts were received and 63 (2.71%) converted from non-IV-D to IV-D.

Analysis: Since the intervention was stopped early, we do not have all the information we were hoping for. The initial reaction we received from texting was very promising and the team continued to receive texts at the phone number provided for months after the intervention ended. The conversion of participants who received the text was higher than the participants who did not, but there is not enough data here to make a definitive conclusion.

Intervention 6 – Two-Way Communication (Chat): Cancelled due to COVID

Project Description: Intervention 6 tested a chat solution aimed at improving participation and determining the impact of online chat on user engagement.

Target Population: Anyone going to the Indiana Child Support website (about 15,000 unique visitors per month) to look for information about how to receive child support services

Timeline: Did not start – cancelled due to COVID

Research Question: Would a new two-way communication, chat, have a positive impact on participant engagement?

Outcomes Measured: None – cancelled due to COVID

Results: None – cancelled due to COVID

Analysis: None – cancelled due to COVID

Intervention 7 – Digital Marketing

Project Description: Intervention 7 was a digital marketing campaign designed to determine the impact of varying digital ad content (image, tagline, message, agency reference and call to action) on user engagement with the goal of having a positive impact on participation and enrollment

Target Population: Parents ages 18 – 54 in five Indiana counties, across 56 zip codes, representing rural, urban and suburban areas with a total population of 450,802 citizens

Timeline: 62 days, from Monday, June 15, 2020 through Saturday, August 15, 2019

Research Questions:

1. Which digital marketing ads are successful in reaching potential participants?
2. What part of an ad has the most impact on user engagement?

Outcomes Measured: The team measured click through rate of each ad, the number of users who took the secondary action of clicking on the downloadable enrollment form, and the number of new cases created for the participating counties compared to the non-participating counties.

Results:

- Total Spent: \$117,000
 - Impressions (ads): 24,325,701
 - Number of Clicks: 25,300 (Click Through Rate: 0.1%)
 - Enrollment Downloads: 5,391 (conversion cost per download: \$21.70)
- Statistical significance was only achieved in the random control trial for the Tagline component
 - Of the Tagline variants, “Comfort” showed a 13.59% deviation above the control and >10% deviation compared to all other variants ranking as the top variant even in different geographical areas
- The 5 participating counties also saw a combined 9.70% increase in year over year new IV-D enrollments for the 2 months of the intervention, whereas, the rest of the state saw a combined decrease of 26.59%
- Allen county, which represented our large urban suburban areas, had a 9.80% increase in year over year new IV-D enrollments for the 2 months of the intervention, whereas, the our other similarly large counties, in the state, saw a combined decrease of 40.19%

Analysis:

- Tagline seemed to be the only component of a digital ad that mattered
 - There is a historical precedent for this in major brands and ad campaigns such as Nike (“Just Do It”), California Milk Processor Board (“Got Milk?”), Wendy’s (“Where’s the Beef?”), and many more.
 - This was unexpected as the team thought that an image or the call to action would have produced better results.
- The word “Comfort” resonates best with audiences and ads should be developed to associate Child Support with this emotion.
- The increases in new IV-D enrollments for the 5 participating counties shows the impact of digital marketing, especially when we consider these increases occurred during COVID that caused decreases for non-participating counties across the state and the state as a whole.
- Sustained annual digital marketing could be a highly effective strategy for curbing the overall decline in the child support program.

IMPACT OF COVID

COVID caused the Indiana Child Support Bureau to commence telework on March 18, 2020 and the governor for Indiana declared a “stay at home” order on March 23, 2020. The order shut down the county child support offices which greatly reduced access to child support services, especially to those who wanted to sign up for new services. Signing up for new services is a manual process where a potential participant completes a paper enrollment form and most counties only accept the original paper forms. The team believes that COVID did not decrease the demand for child support services but, on the contrary, increased demand because of the rise in unemployment and other uncertainties. The Indiana Digital Marketing grant had the final four interventions affected by COVID:

- Intervention 4 (website updates) started on March 1, 2020 and stopped when COVID shut down the state. It was ultimately restarted on June 1, 2020 and ran for 90 days, ending on August 29, 2020.
- Intervention 5 (Two-Way Communication – Texting) started on March 1, 2020 and ended on May 30, 2020 but because of COVID we could not trust the outcome of the experiment or do any of the follow up needed, so this intervention was cancelled.
- Intervention 6 (Two-Way Communication – Chat) was supposed to start in May 2020, but the software was delayed because of COVID. When the team received the software, statewide protocol changes were put in place that prevented the team from deploying the code onto the child support website and, ultimately, this intervention never started.
- Intervention 7 (Digital Marketing Ads) was also delayed because of COVID but ultimately was started on June 15, 2020 and ended on August 15, 2020. Originally, the intervention was going to be scheduled for 90 days but because of COVID it was cut down to 62 days.

The team believes that the results we obtained during our pre-COVID interventions are very valuable and still valid in our current COVID world. The words “Apply” and “Application” have been removed from our website and we are looking into removing agency and technical terms from the website too, where appropriate. For the interventions run after the COVID, the team feels that results of these interventions were not affected by altered participant actions. We believe that we would have had the findings about the best wording to use and the importance of using the tagline in a digital marketing ad with or without the presence of COVID.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED AND OTHER GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Lessons Learned

- Don’t assume the answer before you run the experiment. The team did not think that our agency name CSB (Child Support Bureau) would be a deterrent in getting people to engage with the child support program and we almost did not test it in Intervention 3 because of our assumption. When we tested it in Intervention 4, the result was that CSB is a deterrent, just like other agency terms.
- Don’t get hung up on individual opinions. For a controlled experiment, test all opinions because you do not know what will work and what will not. At the beginning of the research phase, when

the Tagline “Money cannot buy love, but it can provide comfort” was presented to the team, most team members did not like it. We kept it in the experiment, and it turned out to be the best tagline of all the digital ads.

- Use an iterative approach, such as Agile Scrum, for your day-to-day project management work. Agile Scrum, usually associated with IT projects, it is a very good framework to organize work, keep people on track and allows you to change direction if need be. Meeting daily to talk about the status of items being worked on and then meeting weekly to set the work items for the next week kept our team focused on task for what we needed to do.

General Conclusions

- Words are important
 - Participants enroll in our services and they cannot be denied, so using words like “Enrollment Form” and “Enroll” instead of “Application” or “Apply” may result in more requests for child support services.
 - Technical and agency terms may deter people from engaging with the child support program.
 - Changing a few words on a web page may result in better engagement than making a wholesale change to the web site. Little to no money can be spent on updating the message, while a wholesale change could cost a lot of money.
- Texting can be very beneficial. Intervention 5 had a great initial response rate and individuals texted well past the expiration date, which the team believes shows a lot of interest by the general public.
- Digital Marketing ads work
 - The make-up of the ad did not matter that much, as our research determined. The only component of an ad that truly persuaded users from interacting with our ads was the tagline.
 - The ads increased awareness and drove traffic to the enrollment form which translated into increased enrollment form downloads and new cases.

NEXT STEPS

Indiana has removed the words “Apply” and “Application” from our website and will continue to review our website for other words we feel are deterring participants from enrolling in services. We will also look at how we reference the agency and make any changes necessary to refer to the child support program or child support services. Finally, we are taking the knowledge we gained from the digital marketing campaign and plan to work with county offices to make digital marketing part of each county’s outreach program.