



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

INTERVENTION 2: CSB WEBSITE UPDATES

EVALUATION REPORT

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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 with the goal of researching 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 is implementing the CSB Digital Marketing Outreach Project in fulfillment of the grant. Indiana is focusing 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, digital marketing, chat, and two-way communication. The goals of the project include increasing:

- A. General awareness about the child support program
- B. The number of families served by increasing the child support caseload
- C. Access to the child support program through new two-way digital communication

PROBLEM TARGETED BY INTERVENTION 2: CSB WEBSITE UPDATES

Based on surveys, focus groups, Behavioral Interventions in Child Support (BICS)/Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) projects, expert recommendations, and analysis of website traffic acquired during the planning phase, there was an indication that the child support program website content had a negative influence on participation in the program. This may have been a result of:

- Difficulty locating information
- Fears that an application would be denied / rejected
- A perception that the application process is excessively burdensome
- Confusion about our terminology

Intervention 2 was designed to test potential solutions to these problems with small, targeted content changes.

The Digital Marketing grant team was formed during the planning phase and included the Core Project team led by the Project Director/Principal Investigator, the Evaluation team, and the Data Services team. This team defined and prioritized the problem through a series of collaborative internal discussions intermixed with formal outreach to external experts. Factors such as implementation effort of content updates, timing and approvals, and availability of tools were taken into account.

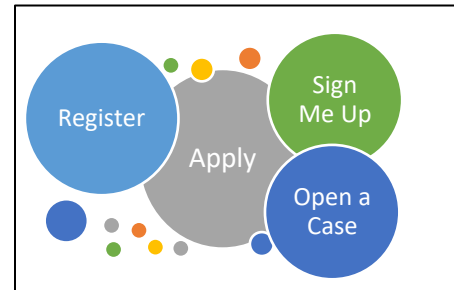
Prior to the intervention our team engaged with multiple experts, to analyze and suggest improvements to our website content that would promote a positive user experience with the aim of fueling increased participation in the program. Our team also believed that phrasing used for the links to our online applications, such as "Apply for Child Support Services" was negatively influencing participation in the program. Specifically, the word "Apply" was believed to be a deterrent since it implies the possibility of services being denied.

INTERVENTION 2: WEBSITE UPDATES

Intervention 2 focused on making changes to the Indiana Child Support website that aimed to have a positive influence on participation and to determine if the user experience and content phrasing was related to navigation and engagement. The team, through a series of collaborative discussions held over three months, brainstormed road tests for each intervention. During these collaborative discussions, we selected three independent road tests for the second intervention that continued the testing of words and their influence on behavior that we began in intervention 1. These road tests were of small, targeted changes to the website, with three new phrasings for the links to our online application.

ROAD TESTS 6, 7 & 8 – APPLICATION LINKS

The team worked with our agency’s internal webmasters to change the wording on the links to our online application. We conducted three tests for four weeks each. During the first four weeks, we changed the links from “Apply for Child Support Services” to “Register for Child Support Services.” Then during the second four weeks, we changed the links to “Sign Me Up for Child Support Services.” During the third four weeks, we changed the links to “Open a Case with Child Support Services.” The changes targeted all visitors to our Child Support webpage, approximately 15,000 visitors per month, to determine how the wording of the links was related to the click-through rate to the online application. The team decided on the four-week durations instead of full-month durations to ensure uniformity in the measurements from the road test and pre-intervention periods.



Using Google Analytics and SiteImprove, the team measured the population of visitors to the Child Support webpage, and the number of visitors who subsequently clicked a link to the online application. We used these two measurements to calculate the click-through rate for the online application, which is the ratio of application link clicks over the population of visitors. The team also captured these measurements for congruent four-week periods in each of the 12 months leading up to the intervention. Each congruent measurement was aligned to the same day of the week, which ensured that the measurements all had equal days of the week. For example, Road Test 6 began on the first Monday of July 2019, so each congruent four-week measurement began on the first Monday of its corresponding pre-intervention month. Likewise, Road Test 7 began on the first Thursday of August 2019, so each congruent four-week measurement began on the first Thursday of its corresponding pre-intervention month, and Road Test 8 began on the second Monday of September 2019 and thus each congruent four-week measurement began on the second Monday of its corresponding pre-intervention month.

To minimize seasonal impacts, we averaged these pre-intervention values and used them to calculate the pre-intervention click-through rates. We then compared these click-through rates with the road test click-through rates to determine the outcome and whether it was affected by the wording of the application links.

RESULTS



We used the wording “**Register for Child Support Services**” for the online application links from Monday, July 1, 2019 through Sunday, July 28, 2019 and reached 14,987 visitors to the Child Support webpage. Of these visitors, 11.22% clicked the link to the online application. This was a 5.76 point (105.61%) increase over the congruent pre-intervention average of 5.46% and met the 1% threshold to be an outcome of interest.

We then used the wording “**Sign Me Up for Child Support Services**” for the online application links from Thursday, August 1, 2019 through Wednesday, August 28, 2019 and reached 15,487 visitors to the Child Support webpage. Of these visitors, 11.29% clicked a link to the online application. This was a 5.81 point (105.95%) increase over the congruent pre-intervention average of 5.48% and met the 1% threshold set for outcomes of interest.

For the last road test, we used the wording “**Open a Case for Child Support Services**” for the online application links from Monday, September 9, 2019 through Sunday, October 6, 2019 and reached 14,703 visitors to the Child Support webpage. Of these visitors, 10.63% clicked a link to the online application. This was a 5.19 point (95.57%) increase over the congruent pre-intervention average of 5.44% and met the 1% threshold set for outcomes of interest.



Due to use of a pre/post comparison quasi-experimental evaluation method, we could not control for all possible external factors that may have impacted the results of the road test. The team tried to minimize external factors by working with the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) Director of Communications to ensure that there were no external media campaigns during the intervention. The team also worked with the Child Support Bureau Director of Outreach to ensure there were no recruiting efforts that might drive an increased click-through rate to the online application during the intervention. It is important to note that road test 8 could have been impacted by Child Support Awareness Month events that occur every September and may have boosted the traffic and click-through rate measured. In addition to uncontrolled external factors, there may have been impact from the permanent change to the website template that occurred in the previous intervention. The change included a relocation of the left side navigation, which contained one of the application links, to a menu button at the top of the page, requiring an extra click to view. This may have resulted in lower click-through rates during the road tests.

ANALYSIS

While we can't conclude with certainty that the increase in click-through rate was solely the result of the application link change, the results suggest a relationship between the increased click-through rate and the use of the wording "Register for Child Support Services," "Sign Me Up for Child Support Services," and "Open a Case with Child Support Services" instead of "Apply for Child Support Services." From this correlation, the team has inferred that wording of content likely has an influence on the actions of visitors to the Child Support webpage.

LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

Our biggest takeaway overall is that the words we use in child support could have an influence on our customer's behavior. Targeted changes to our digital marketing content based on research and experimentation could possibly drive positive behavior and potentially drive increased participation. Our team is planning to take additional steps in upcoming interventions to continue evaluating a variety of words used to guide potential participants. Our first two interventions focus on increasing positive behaviors. The team recommends additional interventions to identify which words might be barriers, drive negative behavior, and target those words for elimination from our digital marketing content. Finally, we have reinforced our belief that traffic to our online application is one of many facets of the child support journey.

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

CHAT

Any informal digital conversation between a non-participating citizen and an Indiana Child Support resource.

DIGITAL MARKETING

Any advertising with a digital component intended to promote the Indiana Child Support program.

GOOGLE ANALYTICS

Google Analytics 360 is an integrated data-and-marketing analysis product that analyzes consumer behavior and interactions with digital properties. The Indiana Department of Child Services began using Google Analytics 360 as a replacement for SiteImprove in August of 2018.

SITEIMPROVE

SiteImprove is an integrated data-and-marketing analysis product that analyzes consumer behavior and interactions with digital properties. The Indiana Department of Child Services switched to Google Analytics 360 in August of 2018.

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Any process in which an Indiana Child Support resource can send, receive, and respond to information to/from a citizen.

WEBSITE UPDATES

Any change the HTML documents or web services that influences citizen interactions with Indiana Department of Child Services web content. (<http://www.in.gov/DCS/>)