

USING DIGITAL MARKETING TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN THE CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAM

EVALUATION REPORT



DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES
COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

Background

PURPOSE

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.

PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

The case participants that identify Spanish as their primary language account for 10 percent of total participants in San Diego County Department of Child Support Services (SDDCSS). By comparison, according to the 2018 U.S. Census Bureau, Spanish-speaking households headed by a single parent with child(ren) under the age of 18 are 42 percent of San Diego County single parent households reported. SDDCSS found this discrepancy as an opportunity to reevaluate its current marketing strategy to provide exceptional customer service to all those in need of our service in San Diego County through three separate interventions including social media, email marketing and Live Chat.

Based on known statistics and metrics, as well as individual experiences of case working staff, there were several beliefs regarding the cause of the issue. Among them was that Spanish speaking parties were less likely to trust a government organization, that SDDCSS did not have a strong social media presence (in English or Spanish), and that there had not been enough concerted effort to engage Spanish speaking eligible parties.

Interventions

GOALS

Increase child support program participation by effectively communicating awareness of the program and streamlining digital enrollment for prospective participants in the Spanish-speaking population in San Diego County.

Social Media Marketing



Email Marketing



Live Chat



Intervention 1 - Social Media Marketing

April 1, 2019 to June 30, 2019

DESCRIPTION

As SDDCSS had no social media presence prior to this intervention, Facebook and YouTube were selected as the first two channels. In addition to these efforts, SDDCSS used the County of San Diego official Twitter profile to send out tweets starting May 6, 2019. Links were created on all social media post and pages to connect to the SDDCSS website to facilitate new digital communications.

SDDCSS launched their new Facebook page on April 1, 2019. Over the course of the intervention, a total of 227 posts were distributed. Examples of Facebook posts include information about child support, benefits of program participation, and information on how to apply for services. All posts directed viewers to the SDDCSS' website to increase traffic and encourage learning and engagement.

Three Facebook paid advertisements were launched to reach out to people who have not previously visited SDDCSS' Facebook page but may have similar interests and/or are in the major demographics of SDDCSS customers.

The YouTube channel was launched at the same time to be utilized as a library of short informational videos about the child support program. The videos could be embedded in various other advertisements and posts and could also be found via a YouTube search.

TARGET

Single parents who reside in San Diego County and have active social media account(s) on Facebook

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the relationship between increasing SDDCSS' social media advertising efforts, increasing traffic to the SDDCSS website, and child support enrollments in the Spanish-speaking population?

Intervention 1 - Results

Facebook Performance

- Facebook ads were shown to **72,106** people.
- **364** followers were obtained in three months.
- **103,633** times people interacted with posts or advertisements.
- **2,192** individuals either clicked “Like” button, commented on, or shared content.

Twitter Performance

- **31,041** people saw SDDCSS tweets.
- **34** favorited tweets and retweeted nine times.

Website Traffic

- **23%** more customers who were comfortable with Spanish visited SDDCSS website compared to previous three months period.
- SDDCSS Facebook page became one of the most popular destinations from the SDDCSS website.

Spanish Caseloads

No noticeable changes were found with new Spanish-speaking cases.

Findings

- Paid ads were effective in reaching prospective customers.
- Tagging trusted community partners in a post increased the number of people reached.
- Simpler images with fewer words and video ads improved customer engagement.

Intervention 2 - Email Marketing

October 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019

DESCRIPTION

We sent eight digital flyers (six paid flyers and two free flyers) by email through a newsletter service known as Peachjar to selected elementary and high schools. Peachjar is a service that partners with school districts to send out digital flyers via email newsletters. In San Diego County, Peachjar has an extensive network within the local school districts, which gives SDDCSS an easily manageable distribution point to reach a large general parent population within its geographic area.

TARGET

Parents of children in elementary through high school in San Diego County

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the relationships between the email campaign and increasing traffic to the SDDCSS website?
- What are the relationships between child support enrollments in Spanish-speaking populations and the email campaigns?

RESULTS

Email Campaign

- Digital flyers were distributed to **235 schools**.
- **330,987** emails were sent.
- **34%** of email recipients opened email.
- **1.9%** of email recipients clicked the link.
- Average Number of Days for School Approval of Flyer: **4 days**
- Average Number of Days It Took for Parents to Open Emails: **4 days**

Received **22%** more Spanish language website visitors

Spanish-Speaking Caseloads

No noticeable changes were found with new Spanish-speaking cases.

Findings

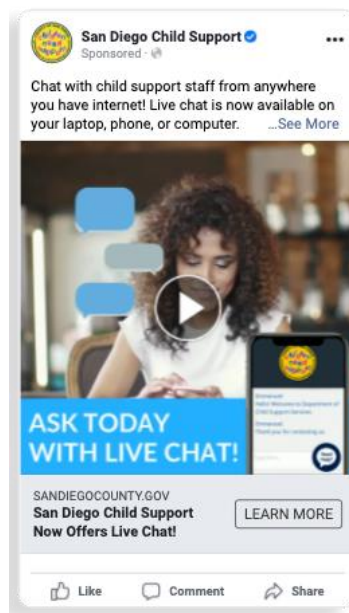
Schools with lower percentages of English as a Second Language learners and free/reduced price meal program participants resulted in higher open rates.

Intervention 3 - Live Chat

April 1, 2020 to June 30, 2020

DESCRIPTION

SDDCSS implemented a Live Chat feature on its homepage so that customers visiting its website could immediately communicate with child support staff in a one-on-one human interaction. SDDCSS designed a set of two Facebook paid ad campaigns to promote the launch of the Live Chat feature and increase Live Chat awareness, usage, and website traffic.



TARGET

Current case participants, prospective customers, and anyone interested in the child support program

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Did the Live Chat Facebook campaign have desired effect of increasing traffic to the website?
- Did the Live Chat Facebook campaign increase Live Chat usage?
- Are there any groups that show more interest towards using the Live Chat feature?
- Would a tailored advertisement increase Live Chat usage?

Intervention 3 - Results

Facebook Campaign Performance - First Advertisement

Date Range: May 1, 2020 - May 19, 2020

Target: Single parents with children under 18 years old segmented by age, gender, spoken language, and region based on the ZIP code in San Diego County

- The first ad was shown to 103,680 people.
- The first ad was displayed 240,508 times on a screen for the target audience.
- **1.7%** of people who saw the first ad clicked the link.
- Cost per Click: **\$0.95**
- Bounce Rate: Percentage of people visitors and that left website without taking any actions
 - English site:**76%**
 - Spanish site:**86%**

Live Chat Usage

Total Chats During Intervention: **444**

New Customers: **9%**

Existing/Returning Customers: **93%**

Weekly Average Usage During First Paid Ad: **33**

Weekly Average Usage During Second Paid Ad: **25**

Weekly Average Usage During Non-campaign Period: **21**

Facebook Campaign Performance - Second Advertisement

Date Range: June 23, 2020 - June 30, 2020

Target: Single parents aged 35 years and older with children under 18 who were living in San Diego County

- The second ad was shown to 63,119 people.
- The second ad was displayed 117,153 times on a screen for target audience.
- **1.6%** of people who saw the second ad clicked the link.
- Cost per Click: **\$1.25**
- Bounce Rate: Percentage of visitors that left website and without taking any actions
 - English site: **86%**
 - Spanish site: **91%**

Website Traffic

During the campaign periods, the Spanish language site received 769 more visitors through two paid ads which resulted in a **77%** increase compared to the three months prior. The SDDCSS Facebook page became one of the most popular destinations from the SDDCSS website.

Findings

- Average Live Chat usage during the Facebook campaigns were higher than the non campaign period.
- The 45 years old and above age group showed the most interest toward the Live Chat feature.
- Tailored advertisement increased traffic to the Spanish homepage.
- Facebook paid advertisement generated traffic but keeping visitors on the website is challenging.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

In the early stages of the pandemic, all offices were closed to the public which produced a barrier to those seeking access to services via in person appointments or walk ins. This effect was countered by SDDCSS through extensive use and promotion of the department's chat feature on their website, teleconferencing through Zoom, texting, email campaigns, and an increase in social media presence. Every possible effort was made to ensure that a customer who needed access to child support services could get what they needed. When the offices reopened to the public, new procedures were developed to ensure that in person visitors could be attended to in a safe and controlled manner.

The economic impact of the pandemic led to a high demand to produce materials related to the rapidly changing situation. Providing customers with up to date information on the status of office closures, the availability of services, and methods of contact became the priority over grant activities and other projects. The intervention timeline was adjusted for the third intervention due to these delays. Evaluation reports were also delayed due to key grant staff taking on emergency responsibilities. However, the grant interventions ultimately made the delivery of pandemic related information easier as new channels of communication were now open and the Communications Team had become more familiar with their use.

As unemployment rose due to the COVID 19 pandemic, SDDCSS recognized that it was necessary to change child support orders for some of its customers. To address this need, SDDCSS hosted webinars on the subject and made them available for customers who were not able to participate in the webinar by posting the recordings on YouTube.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

LESSONS LEARNED

- Centralizing all digital marketing efforts, channels, and findings is the key to obtaining granular data to develop speedy solutions for the underlying issues.
- Setting up the project tracking tools allows SDDCSS to measure and track how the target audience is interacting with SDDCSS digital marketing efforts and how website visitors are converted into customers. Child support customers are still embracing traditional forms of communications such as face-to-face conversations and telephone calls. Integrating online marketing with offline activities is critical to better understand the performance of current and future campaigns for optimization.
- Digital marketing generates large traffic to the website and is highly effective in increasing public awareness of child support programs.
- Email and social media campaigns generate large amount of traffic to the website but keeping visitors on the website and make them perform a desired action is challenging.
- Choosing effective landing pages and redesigning the website to create a simpler, easier to navigate site can lower the bounce rate.

Other child support program agencies will most likely want to know about SDDCSS' experiences using social media for the firsttime, the results from the interventions, and how lessons learned were applied between interventions and beyond. For example, SDDCSS launched their own Twitter profile based on its findings and later launched a redesign of their public website. The efficacy of the platforms used during the grant are also points of interest for any child support program agency trying to branch out through new channels.

NEXT STEPS

First and foremost, SDDCSS will continue to use and improve the platforms used during the three interventions. The grant enabled SDDCSS to become familiar with what the variety of tools and platforms, such as Facebook, have to offer. The process of defining each intervention and setting goals for each campaign provided valuable lessons in goal setting and monitoring. Through the grant, SDDCSS has established better tracking and monitoring practices, and improved project planning and management.

The emphasis on improved tracking of metrics and the organization of data from multiple sources will remain a primary focus of the Communications Team's work. Findings from the interventions prompted the SDDCSS Communications Team to launch a large-scale redesign of their public facing website. Findings indicated that the website had a high bounce rate, meaning visitors arrived at the website and immediately left. While traffic may have increased, engagement and usage remained low. This was attributed to several possible factors such as a lack of mobile-friendliness, difficult navigation to popular sites, and an unappealing layout. The redesign started with a page-by-page audit of the website to assess the necessary changes. While an initial redesign of the website was completed, the process is ongoing. The next step is a continual, iterative process of evaluating the site's performance.

Employee engagement was found to be an important aspect of any customer facing initiative. Because of this, the SDDCSS Communications Team has begun interviewing staff regularly for input, ideas, and feedback as part of its data gathering efforts.

The grant has given SDDCSS significant experience in many areas of digital marketing that previously had not been explored. It has increased the ability of SDDCSS to identify and target its key case participant demographics with tools like Facebook ad manager. Also, the use of visual mediums such as digital flyers gave valuable insights into what images and language were most effective in reaching community members. Based on these lessons, SDDCSS will continue to refine its use of social media and gain more insights on how to best reach the community through these channels with the intent to apply them to new mediums and channels in the future.