



Office of Child Support  
Michigan Department of  
Health & Human Services

Federal award project title:  
**LISTEN: Learn, Innovate, Improve  
Strategies for Technology and  
Engagement**

Grant period  
**9/2018-9/2021**

# Child Support Digital Marketing Demonstration Project

## Final Summary

### Objectives

**Primary goal:** to increase the proportion of non-referral online child support applications received during the intervention period by 5 percentage points.

**Secondary goal:** to test three messaging strategies for effectiveness.

### Key Findings



We did not reach our goal of a 5 percentage point increase in application proportion.



Those who interacted with our ads did not demonstrate a clear preference for one of our three messaging strategies above the others.



Mobile ads proved to be the largest and most cost-effective source of ad impressions. However, users from mobile were less likely to click through to our portal or download information.

### Target Audience

Low-income unmarried women 18-44 with children

Geographic target:

Berrien, Calhoun, Chippewa, Genesee, Kent and Saginaw counties (rounds one through three)

Statewide (round four)



Users who came to our dedicated landing page through Google paid search ads were more likely to click through to our portal, which was our Google Analytics goal.



Further audience is necessary, particularly on messaging and the preferred channels for our target audience.



## Background

The Digital Marketing Demonstration Project, 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, was 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 Office of Child Support (OCS), a part of Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), was one of the 14 child support agencies selected to participate in the project.

## Approach

Working with the marketing vendor Brogan & Partners, this project was initially designed as three-month rounds of targeted digital marketing interventions, focused on mobile devices. Three rounds were originally planned and a fourth, statewide, round was added in the final year of the project.

Changes to TANF eligibility requirements mean that many families in Michigan are no longer referred into the child support program as assistance recipients and may not be aware of what child support services are available to them. This grant opportunity has allowed OCS to research methods to reach these families, which will maximize the impact and cost-effectiveness of future digital marketing efforts.

Three different messaging strategies were tested in the first three rounds, and then the best-performing ads from each strategy were tested "head-to-head" in the final state-wide round. The development of the messaging strategies was informed by previous research on child support messaging undertaken by the California Department of Child Support Services.



## Focus on mobile

Available data shows our target audience members are heavy users of mobile devices and platforms. Therefore, the project was designed to focus on users who fit into our demographic profile on three mobile channels:

- 1. Mobile ads**  
Adds were delivered on mobile apps and browsers to users using predictive targeting.
- 2. Facebook ads**  
Ads were delivered to Facebook users using the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Facebook account.
- 3. Google Paid Search**  
Keywords were refined to deliver an ad which would direct searchers to our landing page.

A landing page was developed specifically for this grant on the OCS section of the MDHHS website. All advertising directed to this page, and a Google Analytics goal was set up to measure the referral source of traffic to this landing page.







## Three different messaging strategies

This grant project provided an opportunity to test and build upon recommendations on child support messaging undertaken in California. With a sequence of marketing interventions on identical channels, different messaging strategies could be tested to see which prompted the actions sought — clicking an “Apply for child support” button on the dedicated landing page.

The first messaging strategy, Happy Families, was the baseline measure, as it represents the current messaging used by OCS. Helpful Services was based on the recommendations from California. The third, Value and Services, was a hybrid of the two.

# 1.

### Happy Families

Focus is on why child support services are important.

- Every child needs financial and emotional support.
- Every child has the right to support from both parents.
- Even when parents do not live together, it is important they work together to support their child.
- With the involvement of both parents, children get the chance they need and deserve to reach their full potential.
- Child support is the “right thing to do.”

Images: Smiling child and parent

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For happier, healthier lives, children need emotional and financial support...from mom and dad.

 MICHIGAN.GOV/APPLYFORCHI...  
**Michigan Child Support**  
To get help, enroll now. [LEARN MORE](#)

“Why we do it.”





## 2.

### Helpful Services

Focus is on benefits OCS provides to parents/guardians.

OCS:

- helps parents and guardians get the support they need to care for their children.
- helps you navigate the complexities of the system.
- provides professional, non-judgmental services.
- provides a “middle ground” for mothers AND fathers.

Images: busy, working parents

## 3.

### Value and Services

Focus is on the practical value child support brings to everyday life, and how OCS can help you.

- Having child support means more money for the expenses of raising a child: groceries, healthcare, clothes, sports equipment or even college savings.
- Applying for child support can seem like entering a maze. Need help? Michigan’s Child Support Program can guide you through.

Images: parents shopping with kids, kids getting healthcare.

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Being a single mom is a full-time job. But help is here. Single moms can apply for support for themselves and their children.

Support for single moms and children.

michigan child support  
MDHHS

MICHIGAN.GOV/APPLYFORCHI...  
Apply for Child Support  
See the steps to enroll. [LEARN MORE](#)

“We are here to help.”



“What’s in it for you.”

## Challenges

During 2020, many Michigan citizens were facing hardship, grief and economic instability due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The third round of digital marketing interventions was scheduled for April of 2020, and this was put on pause until the fall. The fall brought its own complications, with a contentious presidential election and a second wave of COVID-19.

Due to the pandemic, child support systems were also stressed. Unprecedented levels of unemployment meant many child support payers were either unable to pay or looking to modify their payment. County offices and courts were closed through part of the year, and OCS staff transitioned to remote work.

MDHHS's Facebook page saw a flood of negative comments from users airing grievances about the pandemic. Because of this we decided to not post unpaid content after the second round of interventions.

While every project has surprises and challenges, 2020 was exceptional and raises questions about the quality of the project's data and replicability. Citizen's thoughts, feelings and reactions were likely different than in previous years.

## Next steps

While data collected through this project did not always provide a clear answer on some questions, it does point to areas where further audience research is necessary.

- What do Michigan residents know or not know about our services?
- Where does our target audience "hang out" online, if at all?
- What channel do they prefer to hear from us on?
- What messaging resonates and prompts desired actions?

While funds for these activities presently are not available, OCS will seek opportunities to budget for them and look for low-cost ways to gather this market research.

OCS appreciates this grant opportunity and views it as the first steps on a journey into digital marketing. The insights received will inform our future efforts to connect with our participants. As our grant cohort moves forward, OCS staff will look for opportunities to be involved in further learning and engagement.

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