

Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program

Sacramento County Department of Child Support Services

December 2021

Approach

Sacramento County's Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) developed digital media interventions designed to increase child support enrollments. Under the OCSE Digital Marketing grant program, DCSS developed and implemented four digital media outreach campaigns targeting low-income parents in Sacramento County between July 2019 and June 2021.

DCSS had three primary goals for the grant: 1) increase the number of new child support applications, 2) identify new ways to connect with potential customers, and 3) build DCSS's capacity to conduct digital outreach and communication.

Suggested Strategies



Be intentional in choosing your target population.



Use advertising platforms that allow more precise audience targeting.



Build campaigns where the instructions are clear and actionable. Minimize steps the audience has to take independently.



Recognize tradeoffs between narrower targeting and overall reach of the campaign.



Recognize the limits of your intervention. Without tracking parents from viewing an advertisement to submitting a child support application, you cannot tie trends in enrollments or applications to the campaign.

KEY PROJECT STAFF

DCSS

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Background

Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support 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, was a 24-month demonstration project with the goal of researching how digital marketing can 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. Due to COVID-19, OCSE extended the grant period by an additional 12 months.

DCSS budgeted \$3,000 for each of the four 30-day campaigns developed under the grant. All four campaigns featured video advertisements with the following tagline:

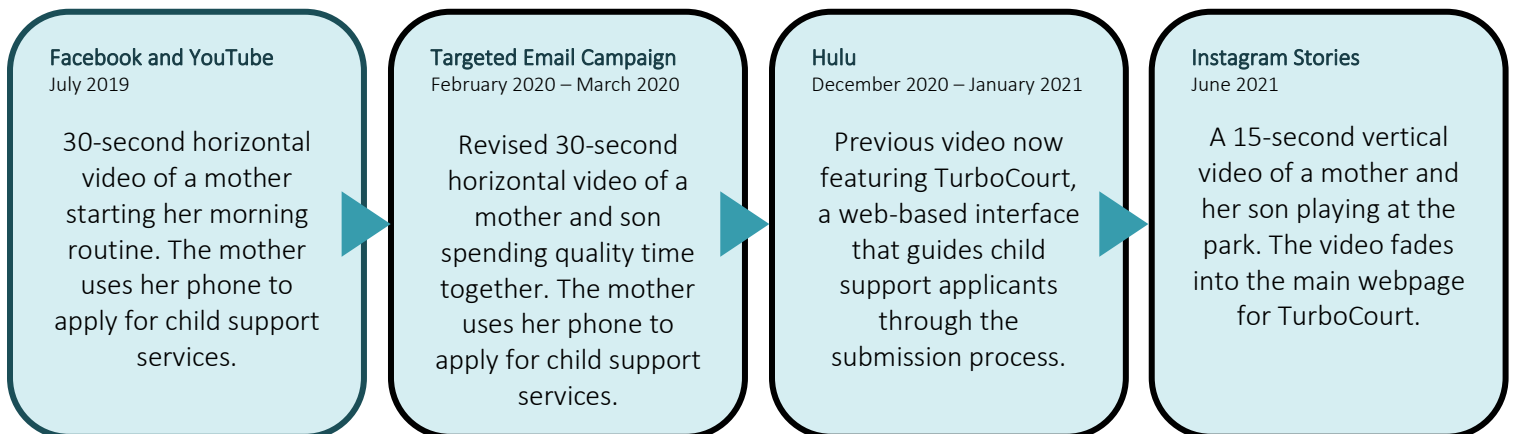


Message

“We can’t help with everything, but we can help with your child support.”

DCSS modified the video after each campaign based on feedback from viewers of the advertisements and the performance of the campaign.

Figure 1. Description of the Four Video Advertisements



The Four Interventions

INDICATORS

IMPRESSIONS. The number of times the campaign was delivered to its audience.

CLICKS PER THOUSAND IMPRESSIONS. The number of clicks divided by the total number of impressions, multiplied by 1000.

Facebook and YouTube Video Advertisements | July 2019



Facebook

Targeted to parents ages 18-65+ without graduate or professional degree in Sacramento and nearby counties.

Impressions 262,591

Clicks 2,425 clicks to DCSS's online application

Cost \$2,390.90

The first test compared the same video advertisement and budget on Facebook and YouTube.

The Facebook advertisement was set to maximize link clicks, while the YouTube advertisement was set to maximize views.

YouTube

Targeted to audiences with family-focused lifestyles and hobbies

Impressions 379,234

Clicks 672 clicks to the video itself. 15 clicks to DCSS's online application

Cost \$3,040.07

Targeted Email Campaign | February 2020 – March 2020



Targeted to parents in Sacramento County receiving CalFresh or Medi-Cal

Impressions 10,428

Clicks 117 clicks to DCSS's online application. 79 clicks to the video advertisement. 24 clicks to DCSS's website.

Cost The only associated cost was staff time.

DCSS partnered with the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance (DHA) to send an email to parents receiving CalFresh (SNAP) or Medi-Cal (Medicaid). DCSS designed the email using GovDelivery, a digital communications tool for government agencies.

Hulu Advertisement | December 2020 – January 2021



Targeted to parents ages 25-49 in Sacramento and nearby Counties

Impressions 81,703

Clicks There was no clickable link in the advertisement

Cost \$2,999.98

For the third intervention, DCSS delivered the video advertisement to Hulu's advertisement-supported customers.

Instagram Stories Advertisement | June 2021



Targeted to parents ages 18-64 without graduate or professional degrees in Sacramento and nearby counties.

Impressions 98,999

Clicks 479 to DCSS's TurboCourt application

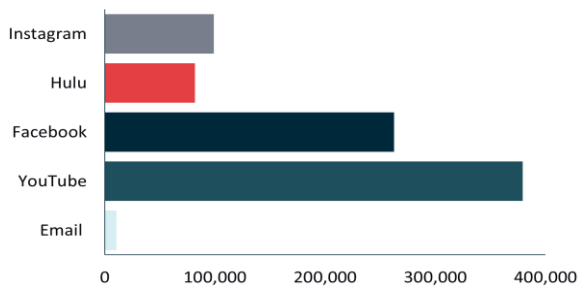
Cost \$2,883.30

DCSS placed the fourth advertisement on Instagram Stories. Advertisement recipients were randomly offered one of two different call-to-actions that would direct them to the TurboCourt application service for DCSS:

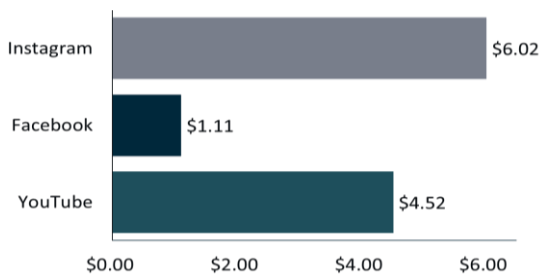
Apply Now – or – Sign Up

Outcomes

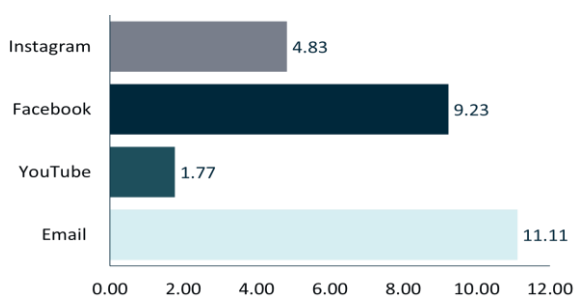
Audience. The targeted email campaign had the narrowest audience: it was only delivered to parents in Sacramento County receiving CalFresh or Medi-Cal. Facebook and Instagram had a relatively clear understanding of their audience, whereas YouTube delivered over half of the impressions to users with unknown demographic characteristics. Hulu did not report demographic information on the advertisement's viewers.



Impressions. Impressions varied by platform, with YouTube delivering the advertisement to over 36 times the number of email recipients.



Cost per Click. DCSS spent approximately \$3,000 each on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube advertisements. The email campaign had no direct costs aside from associated staff time. The Hulu ad had no links, so we could not calculate a cost per click.



Clicks per Thousand Impressions. The Facebook advertisement, email campaign, and Instagram Stories advertisement all allowed users to navigate directly from the advertisement to DCSS's application page. The email campaign had the highest rate among the campaigns.¹

Voluntary Case Openings. Across all interventions, our goal was to improve parents' awareness of and access to DCSS services to increase case openings. The available data do not allow us to attribute any changes in application trends to these interventions.

¹ The Hulu advertisement did not contain a clickable link and clicks on the YouTube ad only navigated viewers to the video itself on DCSS's YouTube page.

Tradeoffs

The differences between YouTube and the email campaign emphasize the tradeoffs that agencies might make when conducting a digital media campaign. DCSS's goals for the grant were to increase voluntary case openings and to increase awareness of the agency and the support services it offers to parents. Email campaigns appear to be best suited to increasing case openings, as they allow for a more targeted audience. Conversely, social media platforms such as YouTube have broader reach and can support increased awareness of child support services among potentially eligible parents. Some social media platforms, such as Facebook, can support both goals with their more refined targeting options, detailed analytics, and the ability to embed clickable links.

Lessons Learned

At the beginning of this project, Sacramento DCSS did not have a digital presence aside from its website. DCSS now has a Facebook page, a YouTube channel, and an Instagram page. Although DCSS has a modest following at the present time, the agency plans to integrate digital outreach with its traditional outreach efforts to increase its reach throughout the community. These are some of the lessons DCSS learned in the past three years:

- **Be intentional in designing a digital media strategy.** Select digital media platforms that align with your agency's specific goals.
- **There is a learning curve to each digital media platform.** Identify the platforms that support your agency's communication needs before investing staff time and resources.
- **Establish a consistent brand and align each material across all platforms with that brand.** An agency's digital presences should fit its brand in other contexts. This includes messaging that is consistent with written materials and with what staff messaging to parents and other community members about the program.
- **Develop long-term communication strategies and allocate resources to support these strategies.** Investment in digital platforms requires a long-term commitment to providing content aligned with agency goals. This means consistently posting content relevant to the target audience as a way to build and sustain an organic follower base.
- **Paid social media campaigns can increase awareness of an agency's services.** Digital media platforms can support an agency in reaching parents eligible for child support services who might not be aware of the agency and the services it provides.
- **Plan ahead for interagency cooperation.** The development and implementation of cooperation agreements can be a lengthy process. Agencies must allocate time for agreements to be fully executed before implementing joint activities. These are critical in supporting efforts to target specific populations for digital marketing outreach efforts.

- **Ensure all platforms and campaigns are mobile-friendly.** The vast majority of digital media users interact with platforms using a mobile device. Any published products should perform similarly on mobile, desktop, and television devices.

Next Steps

OCSE recently awarded another grant to DCSS for the My Empowerment (M.E.) Project as part of the Charting a Course for Responsible Parenting and Economic Mobility-Cohort 2 demonstration. This project will address the racial disparities in teen pregnancy rates in Sacramento County. Black and Hispanic teens in Sacramento are three and four times, respectively, more likely to experience a teen pregnancy than their white peers. The M.E. Project will focus on increasing young people’s knowledge of the importance of first completing their education, establishing a career and being in a healthy relationship prior to making the decision to have a child. Sacramento DCSS is excited to collaborate with community organizations and the youth they serve to develop a peer-to-peer educational program. DCSS has again contracted with MEF Associates to evaluate the M.E. interventions.

Impact of COVID-19

Aside from the first intervention, which took place in June 2019, the remaining three interventions all took place during the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Like other public agencies, Sacramento DCSS diverted resources from special projects to focus on learning and adapting to the evolving circumstances to continue to provide uninterrupted services to the public.

Once we established a sustainable and safe customer service model for our staff and customers, we resumed grant activities. We considered how the pandemic affected families in the design of our interventions. For example, we placed the third advertisement on Hulu because we understood that families were spending more time at home and use of streaming services had increased since the start of the pandemic.

Learn More About DCSS’s Digital Marketing Grant

More detailed information on the project is available on MEF’s website. Visit the [project page](#) to read about each intervention. For more information about Sacramento County’s Department of Child Support Services, visit its [website](#).



Engel, Jordan, Lizeth Ortega Luna, and Asaph Glosser. “Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program,” December 2021.