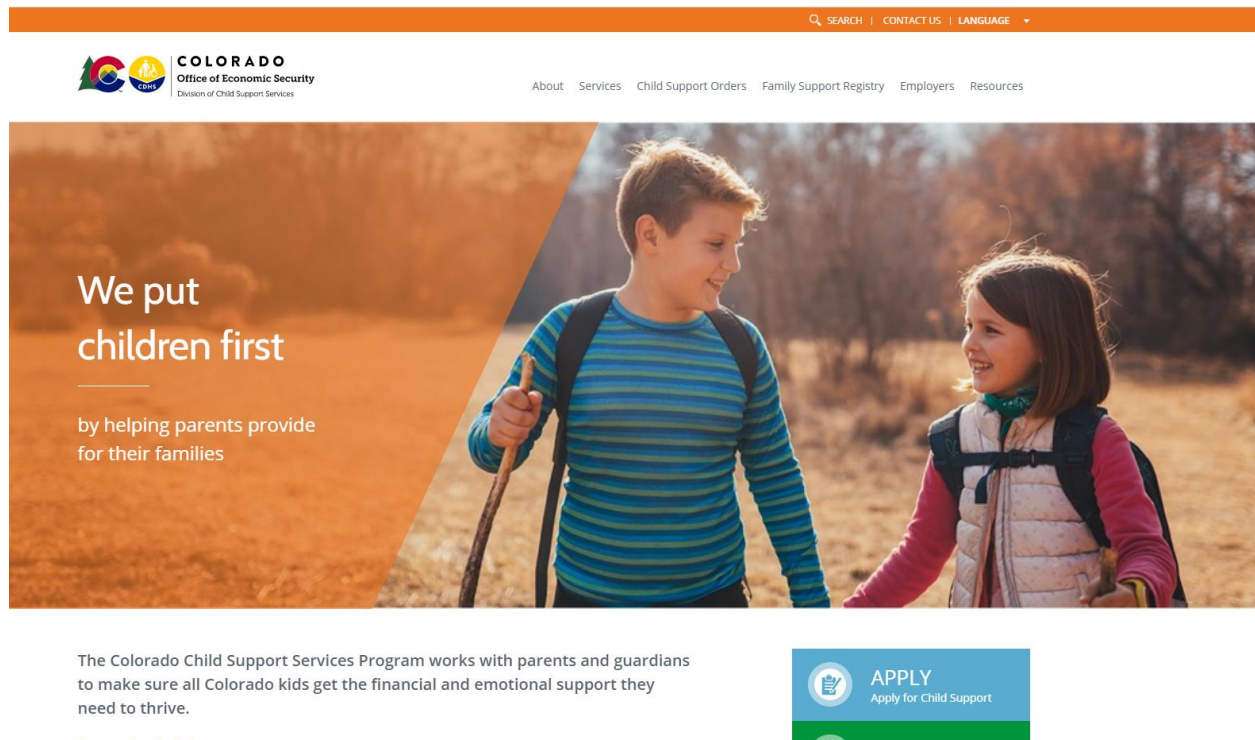


Colorado Child Support Services Program Digital Marketing Project Intervention 1: Website Redesign



Evaluation Report

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INTERVENTION I EVALUATION REPORT: WEBSITE REDESIGN

Grantee Agency: Colorado Division of Child Support Services

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CONTENTS

Executive summary	1
Background	3
Grant Purpose	3
Problem	3
Intervention	5
Goals	5
Development	5
Intervention Description, Target Population, and Timeline	8
Target Population	8
Timeline	9
Outcome Measures	9
Research Question	10
Results	10
Sample Size	10
Results	11
Website Reach Indicators	11
Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Indicators	11
Child Support Application Activity Overview	12
Lessons Learned & Next Steps	15
Lessons Learned	15
Next Steps	16

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colorado's Child Support Services (CSS) was awarded a Digital Marketing demonstration grant from the Office of Child Support Enforcement to investigate the effectiveness of utilizing digital marketing to reach and attract more families to the child support program. CSS has designed and is implementing three, time-bound marketing interventions, including redesign of the CSS website, Facebook-sponsored advertising and internet advertising through website remarketing and geo-fencing, (location-based digital advertising). This report is an evaluation of the first intervention: redesign of the Colorado Child Support website, with Search Engine Optimization campaign. The objectives of this first intervention were to increase users and application downloads from the redesigned website. Both objectives were successfully met.

CSS' strategic plan calls for enhancing the face and public awareness of the child support program and experimenting with digital marketing interventions is a natural extension of this goal. Together with contractors Spearca and Center for Policy Research, CSS created a general plan for the three interventions. An advisory committee with representatives of the six participating counties and CSS departments was convened to review plans and to implement county or department-based initiatives related to the intervention, such as recording inquiries or connecting the interventions to previous website initiatives.

The first intervention, redesign of the website and Search Engine Optimization (SEO), is a cornerstone to the other interventions and an important reflection of CSS' image. The previous CSS website had not been updated since it was developed more than 20 years ago. The site was outdated and not accessible on mobile or tablet devices. Overall, its navigation and design were not user friendly. A previous CSS initiative, the Website Governance Committee, identified key components necessary for redesign, but was hindered by a lack of resources to implement an overhaul of the site. Spearca combined the work of the Website Governance Committee with an extensive website audit to identify functionality issues and outdated content. With feedback and consultation from CSS, Spearca then created new content, navigational tools, and design elements for the website.

The design for the new site included enhanced use of imagery, adherence to Colorado Department of Human Services' (CDHS) brand standards and a call-out box for navigation to the Apply for Child Support webpage and other frequently accessed parts of the website. The redesigned site was set up on a development platform (Drupal) new to CSS and launching it

required the engagement of the CDHS' and the State of Colorado Offices of Information Technology, as well the state's IT contractor. The launch of the site was more complicated than anticipated, and the date of the launch was delayed from original plans. Technical and security issues were eventually resolved, and the newly designed site launched on August 5, 2019.

While the redesign of the CSS website had agency-wide impact, the focus of the evaluation of this intervention is on the impact that the new site had on visitors to the Apply for Child Support webpage and the resulting new application activity. **The objectives of this intervention were to increase the number of visits to the Apply for Child Support webpage by 10% and the rate of child support applications downloaded from the website by 5%. The intervention met both objectives, with users to the webpage increasing by 88% and downloads increasing 75%, compared to a baseline period.**

Analysis of the impact of the SEO campaign was limited by the availability of data prior to the intervention, but the top key terms infused into the website redesign placed CSS' website in first position when the terms were also used by a viewer in a search. There was small but steady growth during the intervention in the number of times the website appeared in child support related searches and clicks through to the CSS website from searches using these key terms.

Analysis also included a review of new child support applications through analysis of CSS administrative data. While not an objective of this specific intervention, increasing new child support applications remained an overall goal of the project, so analysis is included here to establish a framework and baseline for future interventions. The number of new, non-assistance child support applications in the six participating counties increased during the intervention (1,272) as compared to a baseline period (1,016).

Given the myriad of influences that contribute to a child support application's submission, it is inherently difficult to attribute a single influence, including digital marketing, to the number of applications received. Additional evidence of application-related activity adds to the body of information available to measure the effectiveness of an intervention, so this evaluation includes additional metrics on designated application-related activities, including application inquiries to individual counties, and applications initiated on-line. The number of applications initiated on-line more than doubled during the intervention period, while the rate of application related inquiries and contacts to counties decreased.

As a result of this intervention, CSS' new website design is more modern, has increased functionality, and appears to be more effective than the previous site at directing visitors to the Apply for Child Support services page and downloading applications. CSS is now well positioned for the implementation of the next two digital marketing interventions, which include advertisements with directing users to the redesigned website. The quality of future visitors' experience on the website has likely been greatly enhanced by the successful implementation of this first intervention.

BACKGROUND

Grant 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/or to create or improve two-way digital communication and engagement.

Problem

Colorado's child support caseload has been declining over the past few years, in line with the stagnation and decline also seen nationally over the past decade. In 2018, the Colorado Child Support Service (CSS) caseload was 144,827, down 6% since 2014.

CSS recently completed a three-year strategic plan, which addressed declining enrollments in several ways. One action item in the plan is to expand and enhance the face and public awareness of the program. Improving Colorado's child support website to make it easier for parents to apply for and pay child support orders is a key component of that action item.

As the CSS website was developed more than 20 years ago, much of the content and design were outdated, requiring several updates to improve its user-friendliness and functionality. Additionally, the site did not fit in with established CDHS brand standards and was not mobile friendly. Because Colorado's child support system is county-based, an effective CSS website is important to connecting residents to county services.

A team from CSS, including Keri Batchelder and Amanda Terkildsen from the CSS Program and Services Section, together with contractors Center for Policy Research and Spearca reviewed CSS priorities, needs, and experiences with digital marketing to develop the initial plan for the digital marketing grant proposal and implementation. Counties that were participants in CSS' existing 2Gen initiative were considered for participation in the project, based on their experience and effectiveness at collaborating with the state office.

Six of the participating counties were selected to continue with the intervention; these counties represented a mix of urban, suburban and rural areas (Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Delta, Denver, and Montrose). An advisory committee of county representatives, CSS staff, and the grant contractors was established, and meetings were held to refine the plans for the overall project and update of the website. After gathering feedback on website content from the Colorado Department of Human Services Family Voice Council, the CSS and State of Colorado Office of Information Technology departments were engaged with the launch of the site. The digital marketing team and responsibilities for members is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. CSS Digital Marketing Team	
Role	Responsibilities
Project Sponsor <i>CSS</i>	Participate in all planning meetings related to the digital marketing project. Provide review and final approval of communications and evaluation plans. Provide review and final approval of intervention creative.
Project Managers <i>Amanda Terkildsen and Keri Batchelder</i>	Manage all consultants participating in the project. Collaborate with CSS and CDHS staff to review communications and evaluation plan. Collect feedback on proposed creative. Work with DCS to obtain relevant data related to interventions and share with consultants.
Advisory Committee <i>Representatives of County and state Child Support Offices</i>	Review and establish plans for digital marketing interventions. Implement county-based activities related to the project including inquiry logs and links to CSS' website.
Consultants <i>Spearca, Center for Policy Research</i>	Conduct research related to digital marketing mediums and target audience usage. Determine baseline and intervention data needed to evaluate intervention performance. Develop communications and evaluation plans for intervention. Provide copywriting, graphic design and development services for the website redesign. Provide strategy for the development of the SEO campaign. Manage all communications initiatives related to the intervention. Develop strategy for intervention implementation. Provide regular monitoring services of intervention performance.
Stakeholders <i>CDHS Leadership, Family Voice Council</i>	Review proposed creative message and identify any potential concerns related to services and legal issues.

INTERVENTION

Goals

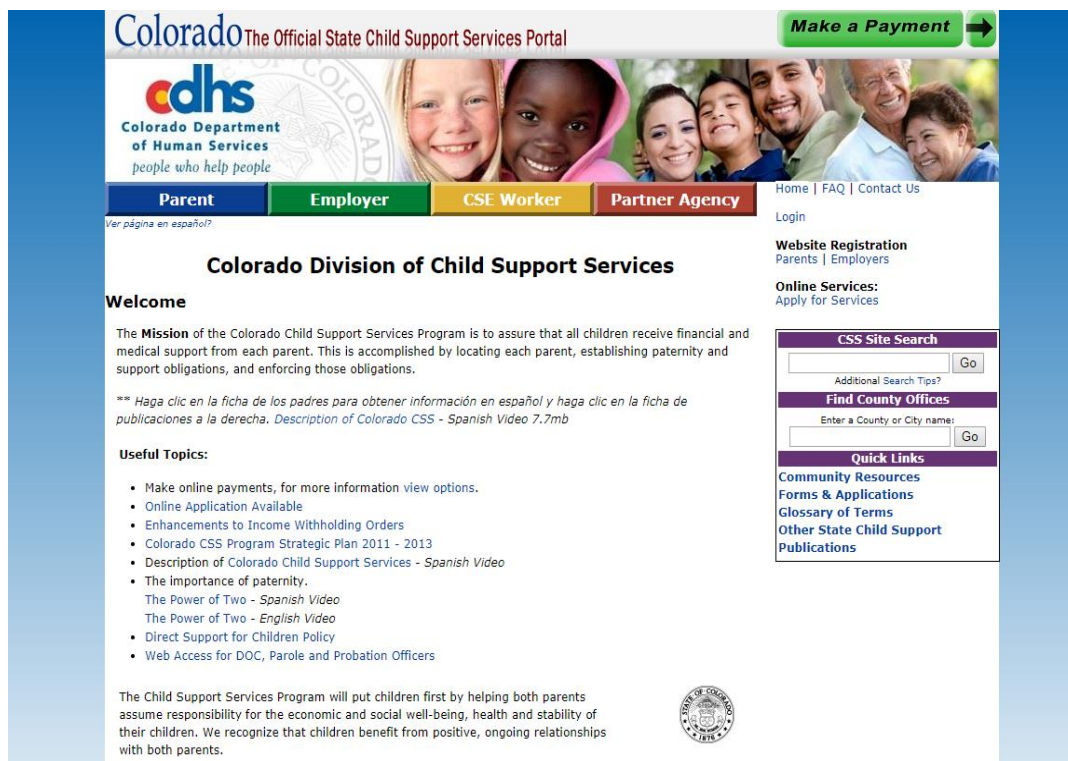
The overall goal of the website redesign intervention is to increase the number of child support applications received. The specific objectives of the intervention are to:

- Increase the number of visits to the child support enrollment website by 10%; and
- Increase the rate of child support applications downloaded by 5%.

Development

During the pre-intervention planning period, CSS' marketing consultant, Spearca Communications, conducted an audit of the existing CSS website. Over several weeks, Spearca reviewed all public-facing content on the CSS website, which included the removal of duplicate and outdated content, and the creation of new materials in collaboration with the CSS team.

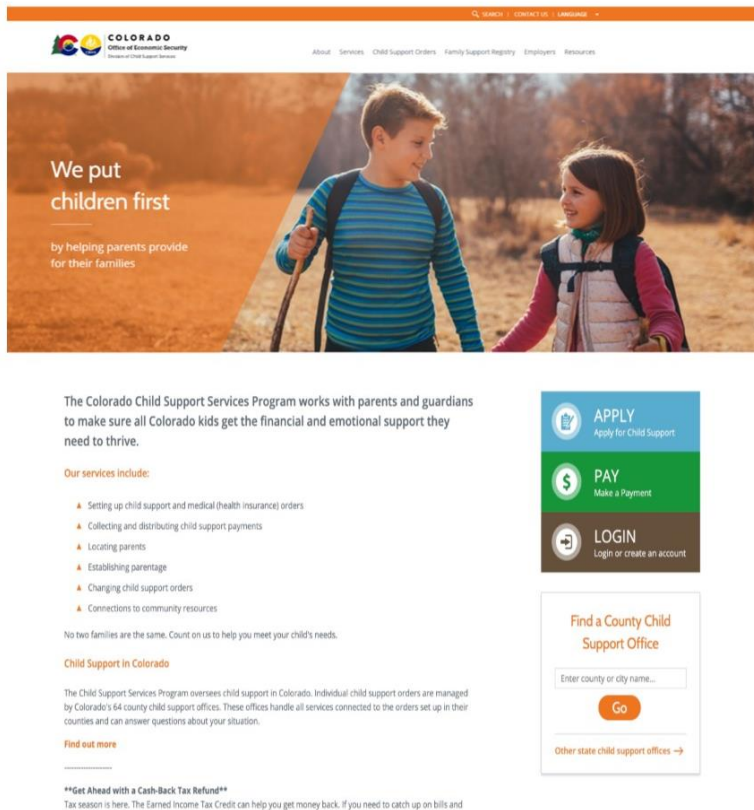
Below is a screen shot of the previous CSS website homepage:



A full redesign of the CSS website followed the content review and rewrite. The redesign offers an enhanced user interface and a clean and modern design. Such enhancements include:

- ✓ A large image with text that promotes CSS as an agency dedicated to helping families provide for their children.
- ✓ Increased use of imagery throughout the site that better reflects the diverse children and families served by CSS as well as Colorado's stunning landscapes throughout the site.
- ✓ Accessible quick links placed in a callout box on every page of the site. This box is designed to help viewers easily find information on topics such as applying for child support, paying an order, logging into an account, or finding a local county child support office.
- ✓ Search fields for locating information on the site, as well as for finding contact information for local county child support offices. A county map of the State of Colorado complements the county search field.
- ✓ Translation options for 50+ languages.

Below is a screenshot of the updated website homepage:



The CSS website redesign was coupled with a robust Search Engine Optimization (SEO) campaign. Spearca began this process conducting general search and rankings reports for child support. It then cross-referenced a list of top performing keywords with new keywords that parents may search for when conducting online research about child support. After analyzing the list of keywords relative to monthly search volume, Spearca created a list of 86 keywords that was infused into content on the CSS website and added to the site's Meta Descriptions and HTML Title Tags. Each keyword has a monthly search volume rate of at least 100.

The redesign of the website and implementation of an SEO campaign were expected to increase the number of visits to the CSS website. Improving the effectiveness of queries that drive individuals to the site and changes to the look and feel of the site would invite engagement, including application downloads, improve navigation and make the site available to mobile users.

Prior to the update of the website, a typical month had 55,000 users for the website as a whole and 2,000 users to the Apply for Child Support page; a 10% increase in users to the Apply for Child Support page would be approximately 200 visitors.

Intervention Description, Target Population, and Timeline

This first intervention, website redesign, included an update to all public-facing pages of the Child Support Services (CSS) website, coupled with an SEO campaign, enabling individuals utilizing the internet to seek assistance or get general information with search results that highlight services provided by CSS, and in turn, encourage enrollment in services. The effective redesign of the website serves as an important foundation to the two digital marketing interventions that will follow.

The redesign of the CSS website is an important stand-alone endeavor, and it is also critically important to the success of the next two digital marketing interventions. Both will involve internet advertising with a call-to-action to visit the CSS website. The success of these interventions depends in large part on the accessibility of the CSS website.

CSS' website serves the dual purpose of an outward-facing information source and as the Family Support Registry (FSR) portal, where individual records and payment for IV-D cases are housed and accessed. Non-IV-D cases can also utilize the FSR portal to manage child support payments. This dual purpose created challenges for this intervention during the redesign and website development process. As the FSR, the password protection section of the CSS website houses personal client information, so security concerns were an issue and ensuring the security of personal information and delayed the launch of the new site.

TARGET POPULATION

The target population for the website redesign intervention is potential child support applicants and users of the Apply for Child Support page of the CSS website. In May 2019, the number of users to this page was 2,313. The overall digital marketing project targets potential child support applicants in six Colorado counties: Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Delta, Denver, and Montrose, but given the statewide reach of this first intervention, analysis includes both statewide and county specific data.

TIMELINE

The original timeline for website redesign intervention was May 20, 2019 – July 31, 2019. Due to technical delays and security requirements, the new site launched on August 5, 2019. The intervention period was three months, through November 4, 2019.

Outcome Measures

The outcome measures for this intervention included administrative data, customer inquiry data from counties and website data from Google Analytics.

Google Analytics is the source of data used for website reach and traffic. Specific metrics from Google Analytics include users, new users, pageviews, sessions, session duration, average pages per session, behavior flow, application downloads and search activity. CSS website enabled the use of Google Analytics in January 2019, which means a baseline of comparable months to the intervention period of August 5 to November 4 in a prior year is not available. Use of Google Analytics data is also limited in this report as records of application downloads from the website were not enabled until June 2019. Based on this limitation, the two months of June and July 2019 were set to serve as the baseline period. The intervention period for comparison was set for a comparable two months of September and October 2019. Google Analytics search console, which tracks search engine activity and is a measure of SEO was not enabled until August 2019, so no comparison of search activity with a baseline is available through Google Analytics.

Since a central goal of the overall digital marketing project is to increase child support applications, CCS administrative data on new applications from the targeted counties is an outcome measure included here. While increasing the number of child support applications is not a specific objective of this first intervention, analysis of administrative data is included to establish a framework for future intervention evaluations and to increase understanding of the demographics of the child support applicants. Administrative data included information on individuals who initiated a child support application in the six participating counties for the baseline period of August 5 – November 4, 2018 and the intervention period of August 5 – November 4, 2019. Applications were screened to include only those not currently receiving assistance (TANF). To eliminate foster care and child welfare related cases, those cases initiated by the county, as opposed to the custodial or non-custodial parents, were excluded.

The number of application inquiries to a county are a measure of application-related activity and may increase with more applications. Participating counties maintained inquiry logs as a measure of application interest and activity. Counties started logging contacts in mid-February 2019 and continued through the intervention period. The protocols for how inquiries are managed differed from county to county, making the compilation of comparable information difficult. As a result, only three county's logs (Boulder, Adams, and Montrose) were used in analysis. The logs were analyzed to compare activity from a baseline period of June and July 2019 to the intervention period of September and October 2019. The periods for comparison were established to align with internet activity periods described below.

Research Question

Is the website redesign associated with the website traffic rate and the number of enrollment applications downloaded?

Is the website redesign associated with changes to the number of applications and application-related activities such as inquiries or contacts with county offices and initiating applications on the website?

RESULTS

The redesign of the website appears to have improved the number of users to its Apply for Service webpage and the number of child support enrollment applications downloaded for the CSS website. The number of users to the Apply for Services webpage increased 88% and the number of applications downloaded from the website increased 75% during the intervention period as compared to a baseline. The number of individuals who initiated an application online to print and later submit more than doubled during the intervention period, while application related inquiries/contacts to selected counties decreased.

Sample Size

There were 4,911 users on CSS Apply for Services website and 2,288 new applications to CSS from the six counties targeted for the digital marketing project during the baseline and intervention periods. The selected county application inquiry/contact logs recorded inquiries from 585 individuals during both periods.

Results

WEBSITE REACH INDICATORS

The number of users to the Apply for Child Support page of the CSS website increased 88% from the baseline (1124) to intervention periods (2313) (Table 7). The number of new users and sessions also increased, but the average session duration and pages per session decreased. More individuals arrived at the Apply for Child Support page from an organic search during the intervention (867) than the baseline period (617).

Table 2. Apply for Services Webpage Traffic and Behavior by Period				
	Baseline June 1 -July 31, 2019	Intervention September 1 - October 31, 2019	Difference	Percent Change
Total Users	1,708	3,203	1,495	87.5%
Number of New Users	1,124	2,313	1,189	105.8%
Number of Sessions	2,222	4,034	1,812	81.5%
Average Session Duration	7:18	4:55	-2.63	
Average Pages per Session	3.9	3.7	-.2	5.3%
Organic Searches	617	867	250	40.5%

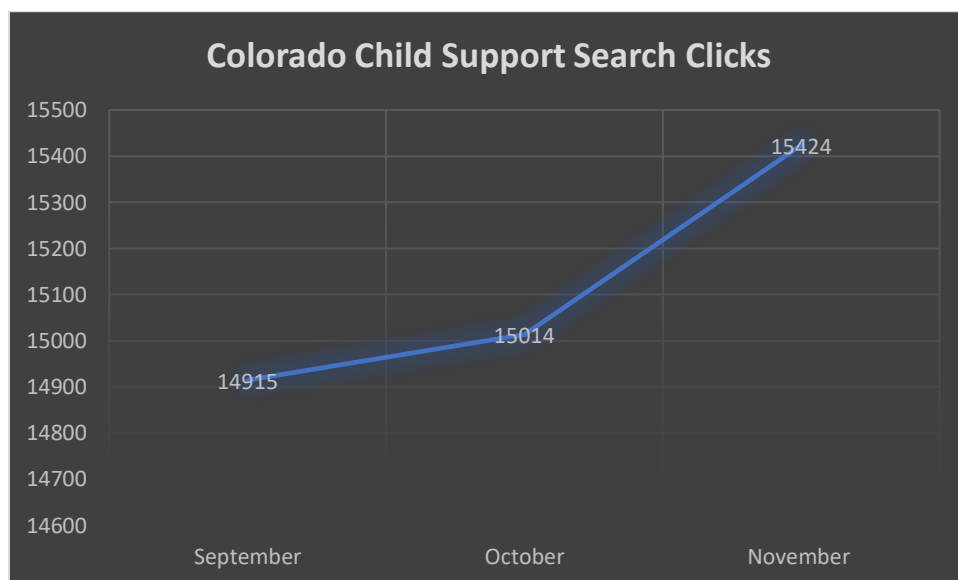
The objective of increasing the number of visits to the child support enrollment website by 10% was met. There were 88% more users and 82% more sessions on the webpage during the intervention period.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO) INDICATORS

SEO is an important contributor to increasing the number of users to a website. Unfortunately, the SEO indicators in Google Analytics were not activated until August, so it is not possible to determine if the SEO campaign had impact relative to a comparison period. An SEO campaign infuses key terms used in viewer's web searches into website content. Google Analytics provides data on the search terms viewers utilize to reach a website. Data includes the number of clicks viewers make to a website when it appears in search results, impressions, or the number of times key terms resulted in a website appearing in a search, the click to impressions

ratio and a position ranking of the website relative to how often the website appeared in the results of a search using key terms.

The first two search terms used in the SEO campaign in this intervention were “child support Colorado” and “Colorado child support.” These phrases were applied liberally throughout the redesign of the CSS website, resulting in position rankings of 1, meaning the CSS website appeared in the first position in search results that used these terms. Data is available that illustrates small but steady growth in these terms as the search terms that prompt viewers to click on and visit the CSS website, as the following chart illustrates:



A fuller analysis of SEO performance would require a comparison period, but additional months of activity with the redesigned website will also provide valuable insight, so this will be explored in evaluation reports of the next two digital marketing interventions.

CHILD SUPPORT APPLICATION ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

The number of child support applications submitted, along with other indicators of application-related activity such as the number of applications begun online and inquires/contacts to county offices were considered as evidence of impact of the redesigned website.

The number of applications received during the intervention period (1,272) was greater than during the baseline period (1,016).

Denver County had the largest number of applications in both periods while Delta County had the fewest (Table 3). All six counties had more applications in the intervention than the baseline period.

Table 3. Child Support Applications Submitted Comparison (Administrative Data)				
County	Baseline N=1,016	Intervention N=1,272	Difference	Percent Change
Adams	237	314	77	32.49%
Arapahoe	294	366	72	24.49%
Boulder	82	90	8	9.76%
Delta	13	28	15	115.38%
Denver	354	435	81	22.88%
Montrose	36	39	3	8.33%
Total Child Support Applications Submitted	1,016	1,272	256	25.2%

The number of applications initiated on the website more than doubled from 119 during the baseline to 356 during the intervention period. More applications were downloaded and there were more visits to the county child support office contact pages on the website during the intervention period (Table 4).

Table 4. Website Child Support Application Behavior by Period (Google Analytics)				
	Baseline N=2,100	Intervention N=4,200	Difference	Percent Change
Number of Child Support Applications Started Online	119	356	237	199.2%
Number of Applications Downloaded	289	507	218	75.4%
Number of Visits to County Contact Webpages	28	189	161	575%

The objective of increasing the rate of child support application downloads by 5% was met (Table 4). The number of downloads increased by 75% from the baseline to intervention periods.

The characteristics of child support applicants (Table 5) and family characteristics (Table 6) were very similar within the baseline and intervention periods. The mean age of custodial parents was 34 in both periods, most were female (Table 5), and almost three quarters of cases in both periods involved unmarried parents (Table 6). The mean number of children in both periods was 1.4 (Table 6).

Table 5. Characteristics of Child Support Applicants by Period (Administrative Data)

	Baseline N=1,016	Intervention N=1,272	Difference	Percent Change
Mean Age of Custodial Parent	34.4	34.7		
Number of Female Applicants	903/88.9%	1,117/87.8%	214	-1.1%
Number of Male Applicants	79/7.8%	97/7.6%	18	-0.2%
Applicant was Custodial Parent (CP)	991/97.5%	1,238/97.3%	247	-0.2%
Applicant was Non-Custodial Parent (NCP)	25/2.5%	34/2.7%	9	0.2%

Table 6. Family Characteristics of Child Support Cases (Administrative Data)				
	Baseline N=1,016	Intervention N=1,272	Difference	Percent Change
Mean Number of Children per Case	1.39	1.37	-.02	
Mean Age of Child(ren)	7.78	8.26	.48	
CP is Father	63/6.2%	88/6.9%	25	0.07%
CP is Mother	871/85.7%	1,071/84.2%	200	-1.5%
CP is Relative OR Guardian	79/7.8%	112/8.8%	33	1 %
Percent of Cases with not married Parents	732/72.1%	905/71.1%		173.9%

The number of application related inquiries or contacts to select counties as recorded through individual county logs decreased (Table 7). While this could be interpreted as decreased application related activity, it could also reflect more individuals getting the information needed on the website. However, neither conclusions can be drawn from the data available. The data is here is limited by the diversity of protocol from county to county in responding to application-related inquiries. Some counties have dedicated staff responding to inquiries; others disburse this responsibility to multiple staff, who respond to a variety of inquiries.

Table 7. County Child Support Application-Related Inquires by Period (Contact Log Data)				
	Baseline	Intervention	Difference	Percent Change
Total County Log Inquiries	308	277	-45	-14.6%
Total Walk-in Inquiries	192	161	-37	-19.3%
Total Telephone Inquiries	80	74	-6	-7.5%

LESSONS LEARNED & NEXT STEPS

Lessons Learned

The redesigned CSS webpage was launched in early August with a new look, feel and navigational tools. Consistent with the objectives of this intervention, the amount of engagement with the Apply for Child Support page increased, as did the number of child support applications downloaded from the site. Information on the characteristics of child support applicants and families during both the intervention and baseline periods indicate that most applications are made by female custodial parents with a mean age of 34 with 1.4 children, aged 7 to 8.

Updating the content and design of a child support agency's website within a larger department within a state government involved layers of engagement, approval and security clearance not fully anticipated when this intervention was planned. The dual role CSS website plays as an information source and client portal presented complications to the update and launch of the reskinned site, as protection of client personal information was a priority. Throughout CSS, its parent agency and the state as whole, individuals not involved in the planning or development of the intervention were called upon to update systems, review protocol, create code and activate tools not previously used. This created unanticipated challenges of adequate human resources, timing and delay in the launch of the redesigned site. Once the redesigned site was launched, unexpected problems arose that required correction from individuals not closely involved in the project. The necessity of relying upon larger systems and individuals without an understanding and commitment to the project required constant monitoring and updates from the CSS project staff, as well as the marketing contractor. In retrospect, the complexity of an undertaking such as this within a state government agency was not fully anticipated.

Overall, the early data suggests the redesigned CSS website has encouraged increased visits and engagement with its Apply for Services webpage.

Next Steps

As the first intervention in CSS' digital marketing project, lessons learned will inform the development and implementation of the next two interventions. CSS selected social media advertising through Facebook as its second proposed digital marketing intervention. Sponsored advertisements will be set up to run through the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) Facebook page. Through Facebook, sponsored ads can be demographically targeted to reach individuals geographically (county/zip code), by demographics such as age, gender, relationship status and general interests/likes. The information gleaned from analysis of new child support applications during the first intervention suggests that unmarried women with children in their mid-thirties are the best demographic to target through Facebook, which will be applied in the second intervention.

Two different creative messages will be tested in the second intervention. Because the CDHS' Family Voice Council was instrumental in providing feedback for the first intervention (website redesign), the council will also be engaged to provide feedback for the development of the Facebook advertisements. Iterations of the advertisements will be reviewed by the Family Voice Council and CSS staff.

In order to tackle the multiple challenges and delays caused by having multiple layers of engagement from various state agencies, Spearca will directly manage the purchase and placement of the advertisements. Spearca will also be responsible for compiling the intervention social media metrics to ensure the required data is available for the next intervention.

The redesign of the CSS website created an important foundation for future digital marketing interventions and access to information for individuals interested in enrolling in child support. When a viewer responds to the call to action of one of the Facebook advertisement, she will be directed to a redesigned, user-friendly website with clear information on the application process, potentially impacting the advertisement influence.