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

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Evaluation Report

Anne Byrne, MS
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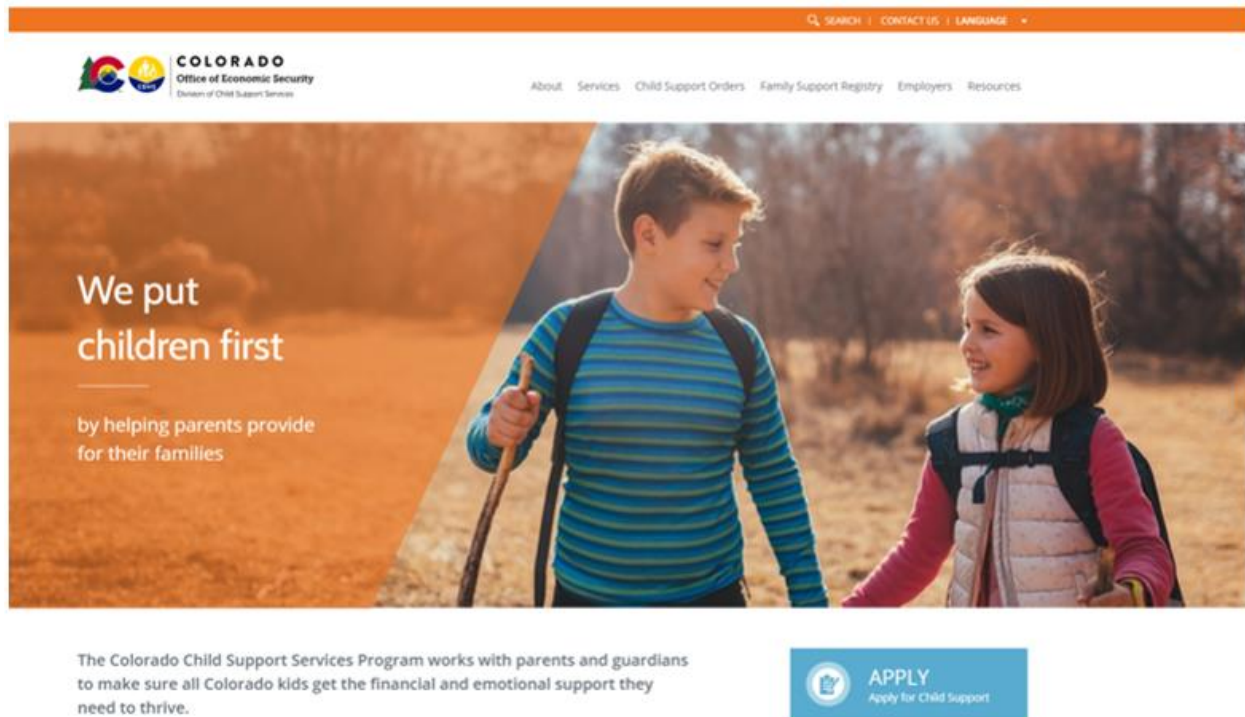
INTERVENTION I EVALUATION REPORT: WEBSITE REDESIGN

Grantee Agency: Colorado Division of Child Support Services

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Title of Intervention: *Website Redesign*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colorado's Child Support Services (CCS) 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 a Search Engine Optimization campaign. The objectives of this first intervention were to increase the number of 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 The site was outdated and not accessible on mobile devices.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 effects, this intervention focuses on the effect 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. These increases may be a result of the intervention, but without a true randomized control trial, we cannot suggest causation.

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 a viewer in a search also used the terms. There was small but steady growth during the intervention in the number of times the website appeared in child support related searches and number of 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-public assistance (TANF) 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 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.

Because 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 to implement 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 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 was 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 *CSS*	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 *Amanda Terkildsen and* *Keri Batchelder*	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 *Representatives of County and* *state Child Support Offices*	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 *Spearca, Center for Policy* *Research*	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 developing the SEO campaign. Manage all communications initiatives related to the intervention. Develop strategy for intervention implementation. Provide regular monitoring services of intervention performance.
Stakeholders *CDHS Leadership, Family Voice* *Council*	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 was to increase the number of child support applications received. The specific objectives of the intervention were to:

- Increase the number of visits to the child support enrollment website by 10%
- 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, and 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:
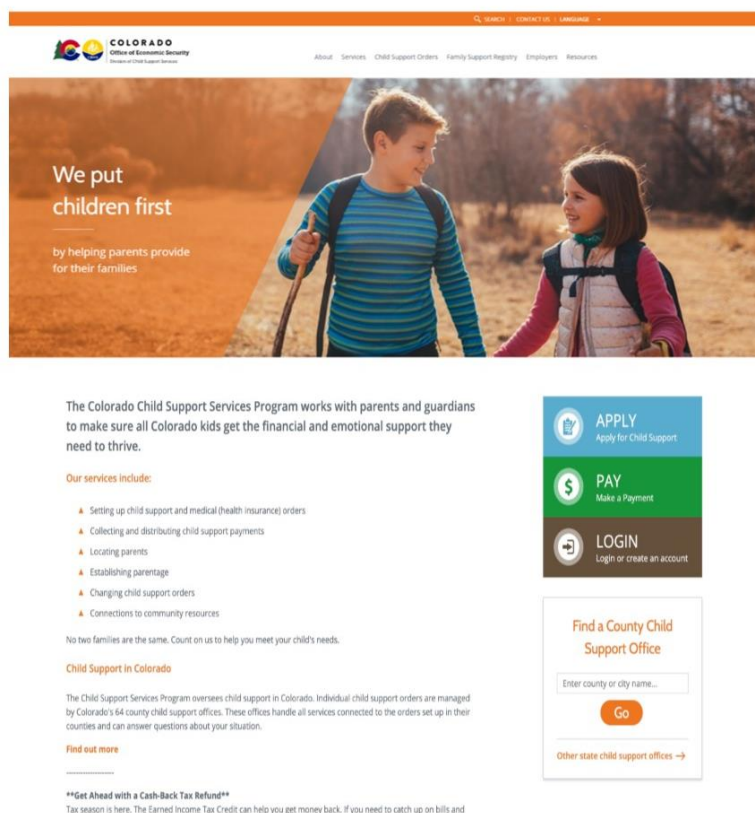
The CSS website redesign was coupled with a robust Search Engine Optimization (SEO) campaign. SEO is the process of maximizing visitors to a particular website by ensuring that the site appears high on the list of results returned by a search engine. Spearca began this process by conducting general search 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.

We expected that the redesign of the website and implementation of an SEO campaign would increase the number of visits to the CSS website. We anticipated that 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 on the website and 2,000 users on 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 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 as 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 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 to 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 came from administrative data, customer inquiry data from counties and website data from Google Analytics.

Google Analytics provided the data on website reach and traffic. Specific metrics and their definitions from Google Analytics[1] include:

- Users – The number of new and returning people who visit your site during a set period of time
- New users – A new visitor to a site during a set period of time
- Pageview – An instance of a page being loaded (or reloaded) in a browser. *Pageviews* is a metric defined as the total number of pages viewed
- Sessions – The period of time a user is active on your site or app
- Session duration –The average length of a Google Analytics session in a particular time period
- Average pages per session – The average number of pages viewed in a session in a particular time period
- Behavior flow – A visualization of the path a user follows from page to page or from event to event

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[1] https://support.google.com/analytics/topic/6083659?hl=en&ref_topic=3544906

- Application downloads – CSS enrollment forms accessed via downloads from the website
- Search activity – Information on the number of times CSS' website appeared in an organic search and terms used searches

The CSS website enabled the use of Google Analytics in January 2019, so baseline data for August 5 to November 4 of the previous year are 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 the objectives of this first intervention were to increase the number of visits to the website and to increase the number of child support applications downloaded, the overarching goal of the digital marketing project was to increase the number of non-public assistance (TANF) child support applications submitted. As a result, 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, 2018 to November 4, 2018 and the intervention period of August 5, 2019 to 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 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 comparison of data from the intervention period (August 5, 2019 to November 5, 2019) to a single baseline period was limited by the availability of data across all the outcome measures. Comparison of all data from the same calendar period in the previous year (August 5, 2018 to November 5, 2018) would have been preferable, but neither Google Analytics nor data collection of county contacts was available for this period. This prompted establishment of various baseline comparison periods for different outcome measures, which are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Outcome Measures, Intervention, and Baseline Comparison Periods		
Outcome Measure	Intervention Period	Baseline Comparison Period
Google Analytics	September and October 2019	June and July 2019
Administrative Data	August 5–November 4, 2019	August 5–November 4, 2018
County Application Inquiry Logs	September and October 2019	June and July 2019

Research Questions

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

Sample Size

This intervention reached 2,312 users on CSS Apply for Services website.

Intervention Results

The redesign of the website appears to have been associated with 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 period. 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 and contacts to selected counties decreased.

WEBSITE REACH INDICATORS

The number of users to the Apply for Child Support page of the CSS website increased 88% from the baseline (1,124) to intervention periods (2,313) (Table 3). 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). Organic search refers to the number of times a webpage is listed on a general internet search.

Table 3. 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. The increases may be associated with the intervention, but without a true randomized control trial, we cannot suggest causation.

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 include the following: 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, or key terms, 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 are available that illustrate small but steady growth in "child support Colorado" and "Colorado child support" as the search terms prompt to click on the CSS as the following figure illustrates:
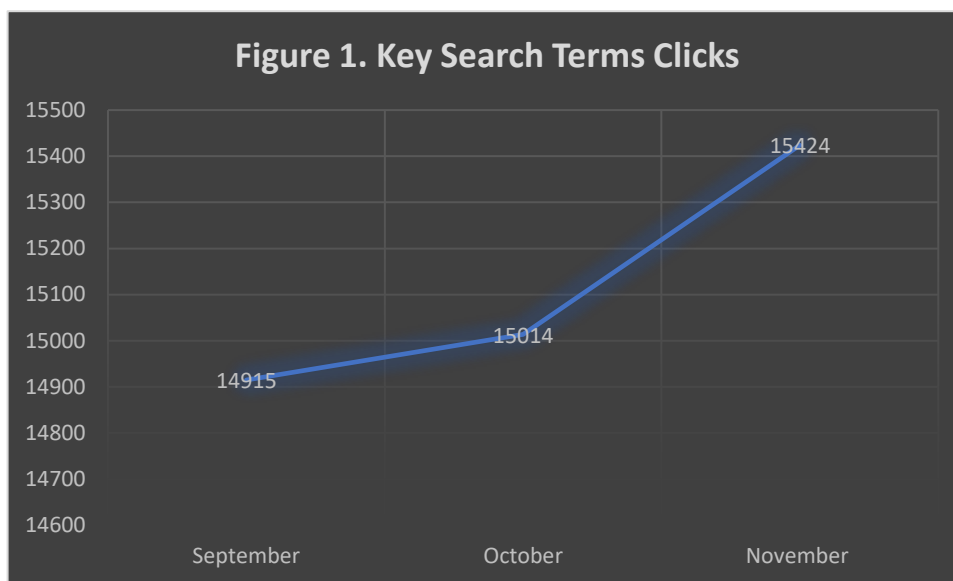
Figure 1. Key Search Terms Clicks

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 suggest increased reach as a result of the redesigned website, but we cannot confirm this.

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 4). All six counties had more applications in the intervention than the baseline period.

Table 4. 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 more people visited county child support office contact pages on the website during the intervention period. The grant program objective of increasing the rate of child support application downloads by 5% was met. The number of downloads increased by 75% from the baseline to intervention periods. The increases may be associated with the interventions, but without a true randomized control trial, we cannot suggest causation.

Table 5. 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 characteristics of child support applicants and family characteristics were very similar within the baseline and intervention periods. The mean age of custodial parents was 34 in both periods, most were female (Table 6), and almost three quarters of cases in both periods involved unmarried parents (Table 7). The mean number of children in both periods was 1.4 (Table 7).

Table 6. Characteristics of Child Support Applicants by Period (Administrative Data)				
	Baseline N=1,016	Intervention N=1,272	Difference	Percentage Difference
Mean Age of Custodial Parent	34.4	34.7		
Number of Female Applicants	903/88.9%	1,117/87.8%	214	-1.2%
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 7. Family Characteristics of Child Support Cases (Administrative Data)				
	Baseline N=1,016	Intervention N=1,272	Difference	Percentage Difference
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 8). 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 conclusion can be drawn from the data available. The data here are 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 8. 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 and feel, and with new 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. However, without a true randomized control trial, we cannot say that the increase is a result of the intervention

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 anticipate 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 redesigned site

because protection of client personal information was a priority. Throughout CSS, its parent agency, and the state as whole, we called on individuals not involved in the planning or development of the intervention 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 we launched the redesigned site, 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 and the marketing contractor. In retrospect, we did not anticipate the complexity of an undertaking such as this within a state government agency.

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.

In the second intervention, we will test two different creative messages. Because the CDHS' Family Voice Council was instrumental in providing feedback for the first intervention (website redesign), we will seek the council's feedback on developing the Facebook advertisements. Family Voice Council and CSS staff will review iterations of the advertisements.

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 compile the intervention social media metrics to ensure the required data are 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 a call to action in one of the Facebook advertisements, the site will redirect the user to a redesigned, user-friendly website that contains clear information on the application process. Ultimatly, we hope the user will apply for child support services.