

FA20 Spring Travel Campaign Performance Review and FA21 Spring Travel Schedule

Office of Marketing and Brand Management

2/7/2020

Basic Description

The University of Southern Maine's Office of Marketing and Brand Management has run a digital advertising campaign to support Admissions-of-state spring travel events offered by the Office of Admissions for the past three years through the Facebook (FB) and Programmatic (DBM) platforms. The schedule of events has not differed significantly over the past 3 years. Advertising is able to geo-target the ads based on the Admission's counselors travel schedule; the focus has been in MA, NH, CT, VT, and RI. Typically, ads precede and follow events for a week in the general geographic location of the events. In 2019, we revised the messaging to promote our RSP program, which is beneficial for out-of-state students.

Overall project objective

In order to review the performance of the Spring 2019 Travel Campaign and make recommendations for Spring 2020, I looked at:

- Click-through-rates (CTR) and web traffic (UPV) attributed to the ads over the past three years.
- The number of initial inquiries and applicants that came into the Salesforce (SF) database starting at the ad campaign inception and ending two weeks after completion.

Findings

Ad Performance Highlights:

How did the ads do in terms of CTR?

- We have seen good growth within the Doubleclick platform.
- Facebook saw a big drop in CTR performance as noted by AdStage in their 2018 Q3 Facebook Ads Benchmark Report. In general, [FB Newsfeed](#) CTR overall experienced a 24% drop from July, 2017 - July, 2018. We have also noticed this within our own analyses. We felt such a drop required that we look into other digital advertising options, and therefore expanded our portfolio to include Instagram to compliment FB and DBM. We also expanded ad mediums to include video and carousel.
- We decreased our spend on FB display for the HS students both in-state and out-of-state audiences, as we have seen a drop over time in CTR. This decline has continued into the 2019 Spring Travel campaign. The continued decrease in CTR should not be attributed to a decrease in spending.

Click-through-rates for DBM and FB - 2017-2019

Below are the Spring Travel Ad metrics for digital display 2017-2019

Source	FiscalYear	CTR
DBM	2017	0.11%
DBM	2018	0.02%
DBM	2019	0.16%
FB	2017	0.95%
FB	2018	0.44%
FB	2019	0.33%

Facebook and Programmatic Display Ad Spend from 2017-2019

Source	FiscalYear	Cost
FB	2017	\$4998.94
FB	2018	\$4999.59
FB	2019	\$1004.92
DBM	2018	\$10000
DBM	2019	\$10000

FB Display Ad Budget - 2017-2019

Source	FiscalYear	Cost
FB	2017	\$4998.94
FB	2018	\$4999.59
FB	2019	\$1004.92

Source	FiscalYear	Cost
IG	2019	\$1309.65

The remaining 2019 spring travel budget was reallocated to expand into Instagram with display, video, and carousel ads, as well as video and carousel to Facebook. The results are shown below.

- Note that Instagram display ads performed above the national benchmark of 0.16%

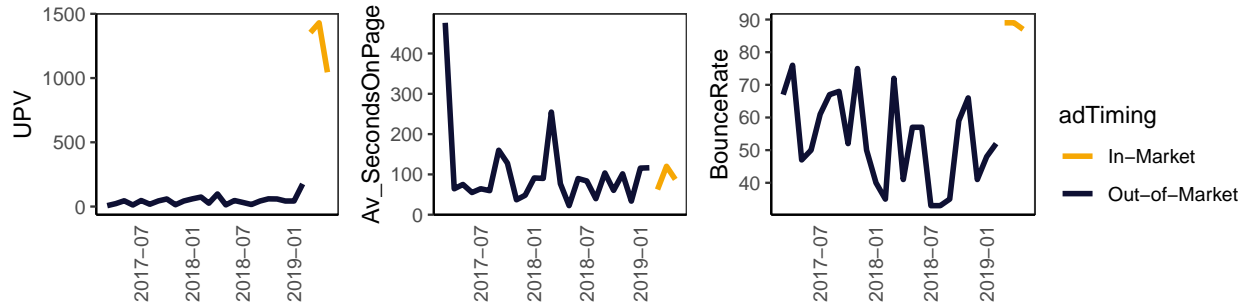
Web Traffic

Web visits from out of state to HS landing page

This is the first season we developed messaging for the [RSP landing page](#) and sent users to the RSP web page. Based on the graphs below, we know we increased traffic over previous years to the RSP page. UPV to this page, from the RSP travel ads totaled 1,821 visits.

- Until 3/1/2019, all traffic to this page came from organic sources and was not at all robust. There was a remarkable change in Unique Pageviews (UPV) once the campaign deployed. The following three plots track differences in web metrics.
- The first plot shows the difference in the number of unique pageviews since March 2017. These increased exponentially once ads went live. Prior to the ad run, the page saw very little traffic.

- The second plot shows the the average time on page (among those who have not bounced); this has essentially remained the same since the ads have been driving traffic here.
- Bounce rates (BR) to a web page for digital ad visits tend to be much higher than organic visits. In this case, our BR for the RSP ads are lower than our typical ads - 89% vs. in the low-mid 90's.



Bounce Rates

adTiming	UniquePageviews	Avg_Time_On_Page	BounceRate
In-Market	3829	00:01:25	89%
Out-of-Market	1102	00:01:30	53%

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Inquiries and Applications

To measure the effectiveness of the ads, we can look at how many **new** inquiries and applications were generated during the campaign, starting at the date of ad deployment through two weeks after the end of the ad run.

Of all of the counties in the New England states, excluding Maine, there are 14 where USM has had a digital marketing presence during the last three Spring travel campaigns. Below are the inquiry and applicant numbers for them during the campaign season.

Geo-Targets 2017-2019

Targeted 2017, 2018, 2019

State	County	Inquiries 2017	Inquiries 2018	Inquiries 2019	Applicants 2017	Applicants 2018	Applicants 2019
CT	Fairfield	67	86	67	4	6	9
CT	Hartford	103	112	72	15	13	10
CT	New Haven	84	117	37	6	3	7
MA	Essex	178	203	156	41	45	26
MA	Middlesex	247	286	137	27	58	26
MA	Worcester	156	142	79	27	15	10
NH	Hillsborough	121	117	86	26	28	14
NH	Rockingham	94	126	84	18	43	14
NH	Strafford	51	64	39	17	14	15
VT	Caledonia	12	13	9	1	4	4
VT	Chittenden	31	37	23	10	10	7
VT	Rutland	15	16	12	2	4	6
RI	Providence	127	111	94	9	3	7
RI	Washington	23	25	16	2	2	2

Conclusions

- This campaign shows positive results in terms of advertising performance for DBM and IG. Furthermore, the high number of UPV, the same level of engagement (ToP) for organic visitors, and a lower than typical BR, the messaging is pertinent to out-of-state high school students.
- We have seen a continued decline in FB activity for the HS audience. We decreased our spend on FB display for the HS market, as we have seen a decline over time in CTR. This decline continued with this Spring Travel campaign. We will be requesting Rinck to remove FB from HS efforts unless there is a clear and specific reason to do so.

- Regarding the number of initial inquiries and applications during the ad campaign, the year over year decrease warrents discussion. It is difficult to say if initial inquiries and applications during the travel campaign is the best measurement because the targeted audience is just beginning the college search.
- The linked FY20 Spring Travel Schedule, [FA21 Spring Travel Schedule for Digital Ads](#) is available. We have focused our geotargets to areas with multiple events and National Fairs.

[For reference: See Spring 2019 schedule here.](#)