

Summary Report of Help Me Grow Follow Up Texting Intervention

Intervention Objective

The Maxwell X Lab partnered with Help Me Grow (HMG) to test if a texting campaign that leverages the importance of timing can better encourage parents to respond to the HMG team more consistently. The goal of the project was to improve parents' response rates to HMG contact and connect the parents with social services that they need for their children's growth and development. We implemented this project in October 2021 through February 2022.

Prior to the implementation of this project, the HMG team initiated a marketing and outreach strategy to meet families in person and register them in their database. During these outreach events, staff interacted with families and received their consent to be contacted via text message to determine the exact support they needed from HMG. After collecting the contact information for these parents, HMG staff sent a follow up message using their own personal phones that aimed to gather additional information on the specific support they needed. Unfortunately, the HMG team received no responses to their follow up messages despite parent's expressing interest during the outreach events. The HMG team was engaged in this strategy for four months from June to September 2021. For the purposes of this analysis, we consider this the pre-intervention period. To counter this problem of low response rates, the X Lab began working with HMG in October 2021 to test alternative text message strategies that aimed to improve the response rates. In particular, we focused more on the timing of the text message delivery to parents. For the purposes of this analysis, we consider October 2021 to February 2022 as the intervention period.

Intervention Description

Texting nudges have been shown to motivate or change behaviors (Boksmati, Butler- Henderson, Anderson, & Sahama, 2016; Castleman & Page, 2015; Dale & Strauss, 2009; Sanders et al., 2019; York et al., 2019). However, the text messages sent from the HMG team during the summer of 2021 were not eliciting the desired responses. One possible explanation involves the time in which the messages were sent. During the summer, the HMG team was sending messages during their workday, when the parents were likely working as well or engaged with their children. We hypothesized that parents simply did not have the time to answer during the day and forgot to follow up in the evening.

Based on that hypothesis, the X Lab designed a texting campaign that leveraged the timing of message delivery to encourage greater responses from parents. We programmed a texting software, Simple Texting, to deliver follow-up texts at 8:30pm on the first weekday after the parent's contact information was registered in the HMG database. We decided on 8:30pm because it was potentially

a time of day when young children have gone to bed, and parents have the chance to use their phones. X Lab collaborated with HMG staff to determine the exact content of the initial follow up texts. During the outreach events, parents were asked what services they wanted to learn more about from Help Me Grow. Their choices were community resources, learning activities, developmental screenings, diapers, or all of the above. Depending on the parent's interest, a standardized text message was sent as a follow up. The text messages were behaviorally informed, including personalization and a specific request that is more likely to prompt a response. For example, if a parent expressed interest in community resources, they received the following text message:

"Hi <NAME>, it's Summer from Help Me Grow! I am excited to connect you with resources for your little one. I'll need your zip code to begin finding organizations in your community. Please reply with your zip code to get started. Thanks!"

If the parent responded immediately to the scheduled text, we also scheduled an immediate thank you text. Our thinking behind this decision was that it helps the parents feel like there is someone on the other end of the phone number who is invested in their questions.

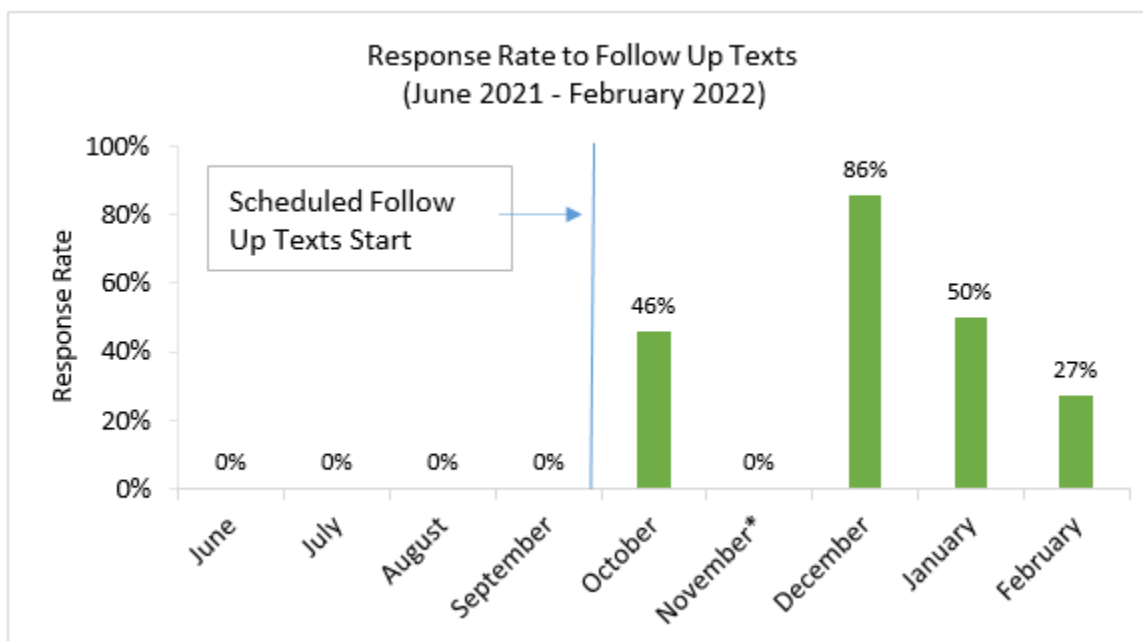
"Thank you for sharing your zip code! I'm excited to connect you and your little one with these important resources. I'll follow up in a day or two. Have a great day!"

For parents that did not immediately respond, we sent two follow up texts. One was sent three days after the initial text, and the second was sent six days after the initial text. This also allowed us to determine the effectiveness of follow up messages.

In addition to scheduling and implementing the texting campaign, the X Lab also conducted two training sessions with the HMG staff to ensure that everyone was able to use the texting software. This was particularly important as the staff needed to take over after the parents responded to the scheduled campaign texts. There were some difficulties with the use of the software initially, but after the two training sessions, the staff was significantly more prepared and comfortable using the texting software to engage with parents.

Results

The intervention, where we leveraged the timing of message delivery, ran from October 20th, 2021, to February 20th, 2022. Prior to X Lab's intervention, HMG hosted 34 community events through the summer and collected phone numbers at all of the events. During the intervention period, HMG hosted eight outreach events. Given the different frequency of events in the two periods, the results below are presented in terms of response rates instead of raw numbers¹. We are analyzing whether there was a change in the response rates (number of responses/total phone numbers collected) between the pre-intervention period and the intervention period.



*There were no community events held in November.

Figure 1. Response Rates to Follow Up Texts from June 2021 to February 2022

As Figure 1 demonstrates, there was a significant uptick in response rates following the implementation of our timed and scheduled follow up text using the Simple Texting software in the intervention period. Though there was a month where the response rate remained below 50%, the intervention resulted in a clear and consistent improvement in engagement and responses when compared to the summer period when there was no response from parents.

Among those who did respond to our messages during the intervention period, 86% responded immediately after the first message, and the remaining 14% responded after our additional follow up messages. Furthermore, among those who did respond to our text messages, the majority sent their responses at night after receiving our text (between 8:30pm-12:00am) or early morning the next day (4:00am-9:00am). This finding suggests that the timing of the text messages did matter, as parents were more likely to respond after their children had gone to bed or before the parents went to work. The findings are suggestive of the importance of leveraging timing when engaging with parents, especially working parents.

Take-Aways

The results of the scheduled and timed texting campaign were successful and can potentially provide Help Me Grow with a better strategy to engage and develop relationships with parents who need help and support for their children. The HMG team is already utilizing the results of this initiative for their other interactions with parents. For example, the team recently used the Simple Texting campaign

feature to send scheduled survey prompts which has improved the number of completed surveys. We hope that HMG can use this finding to continue to find ways to better reach and support parents with their children's growth and development.

¹ For additional context, there were a total of 44 new contacts collected in the intervention period. Of those contacts, 5 of them were invalid numbers, leaving 39 eligible phone numbers to send our follow up messages. We had 21 people respond to our follow up messages out of the total 39 new contacts. Unfortunately, we do not have the raw numbers for the pre-intervention period and are therefore unable to compare the two periods.

References

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