



**LONDON
SPORT**

Using Facebook to recruit new participants for walking groups

The development of a digital behaviour change programme

August 2019



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This report was published in September 2019. This report replaces the Digital Behaviour Change Pilot interim report that was published in November 2018.

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The following partners supported the development of the project and this report:

Sport England, Make Sport Fun, Ramblers Walking for Health, Fresh Egg, 3 White Hats, Facebook, London Borough of Hackney, London Borough of Ealing, London Borough of Harrow, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London Borough of Enfield, London Borough of Wandsworth, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, London Borough of Camden, London Borough of Sutton, London Borough of Haringey, London Borough of Southwark, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, London Borough of Hounslow, London Borough of Bromley, Energise Me, Basingstoke and Deane Council, Fareham Borough Council and Gosport Borough Council.

1. Executive summary

Between June 2018 and June 2019, London Sport ran a digital marketing pilot programme in partnership with 17 local authorities, Make Sport Fun and Ramblers Walking for Health to support hundreds of people to join free walking groups across London.

The pilot project used Facebook advertising supported by text message, email and Facebook Messenger communications to support people to take the first steps to become more active by delivering a digital-led behaviour change journey.

Over a series of campaigns across the boroughs the key outcomes were:

- **7,404** people aged 55+ registered for behaviour change support as part of the campaign.
- **Over 900** of them went on to join a local walking group.

We found that Facebook Advertising was an effective method for reaching and engaging a less active audience. With 71% of people who signed up classed as “less active” (i.e. not meeting the Chief Medical Officer guidelines of 150 mins activity per week).

We were able to measure a shift in activity levels for people who took part in the pilot. Six months after registering 7% of people who were “inactive” at registration had become “insufficiently active” or “active”.

To assess the cost-effectiveness of the approach we tracked two key metrics.

- **Cost per lead:** On average it cost £3.32 per person who registered.
- **Cost per acquisition:** On average it cost £25 per person who attended a walk.

We compared the delivery cost of this programme with costs of traditional physical activity promotional methods (e.g. leaflets and posters) and some other physical activity interventions (e.g. pedometer programmes, brief advice, media campaigns). In comparison, the approach used in this pilot was cheaper to deliver per person and generated similar changes in activity levels.

Based on the learning we have produced the below guidance for running Facebook campaigns to support less active people to join local activity sessions.

STEP 1 - DRIVE ENQUIRIES THROUGH MARKETING

- a) Define your target audience
- b) Make them a relevant and convincing offer
- c) Test different imagery and wording

STEP 2 - RESPOND TO ENQUIRIES

- a) Set up systems to respond quickly via multiple channels
- b) Build-in behaviour change tactics to your follow up messaging

2. Introduction

Between June 2018 and June 2019, London Sport ran a digital marketing pilot programme in partnership with 17 local authorities, Make Sport Fun and Ramblers Walking for Health to support hundreds of people to join free walking groups across London.

The pilot project set out to trial the use of Facebook advertising supported by text message and email communications to reach, motivate and support less active people.

During the project, the approach evolved to include the use of Facebook Messenger, and the scope was expanded from a pilot of Facebook as a marketing channel to the development of a digital behaviour change programme.

This report documents the process that was undertaken and highlights the key results and learnings.

In addition, London Sport have published several additional resources and papers covering key elements of setting up and running digital behaviour change campaigns. These can be found at www.londonsport.org

3. Background

Through consultation with local authority public health and leisure teams in London, we identified a consistent interest in utilising “digital tools and marketing tactics” to engage and support less active residents to become more active.

In particular a desire to move away from using posters and leaflets to promote local activities, to using digital methods with the ability to test and learn what works as well as tracking performance and calculating return on investment.

So, the pilot was set up to give local authorities a simple way of testing the use of Facebook advertising to promote local activities and to learn and share the results.

The programme aimed to answer several key questions including whether it was possible to reach and engage a less active audience via Facebook, and to identify the cost-effectiveness of this approach.

4. Results

In total 17 local authorities took part (14 in London and three in Hampshire) with several variations of the campaign running between June 2018 – June 2019. In total:

- 7,404 people registered for behaviour change support.
- Over 900 of them went on to join a local walking group.
- 71% of people who signed up were classed as “less active”.
- On average it cost £3.32 per person who registered.
- On average it cost £25 per person who attended a walk.



Image 1: The 14 London local authorities who took part in the pilot project. (Not shown Fareham, Gosport and Basingstoke and Deane in Hampshire).

5. Research questions

5.1 CAN WE REACH A LESS ACTIVE AUDIENCE VIA FACEBOOK?

We chose to run the campaign on Facebook due to its ability to target advertising by age, gender, and location. This allowed us to focus the campaign budget on an audience who were most likely to be responsive to our adverts.

However, the functionality to directly target a less active audience or to target proxies of inactivity (e.g. socio-economic status) does not exist. Therefore, there was a concern beforehand that the people who responded to our ads would be those who were already active.

To measure how successful, we were at engaging less active people we used the 'Short Active Lives survey' as part of the registration process. This allowed us to calculate the activity level of the participants at registration. We found that:

- 52% were classed as "Inactive" whilst 18% were classed as "Insufficiently Active". In total 71% who were not meeting the CMO guidelines of 150 minutes.

For the age group in the areas we were targeting you would expect to see around 42% not meeting the CMO guidelines.

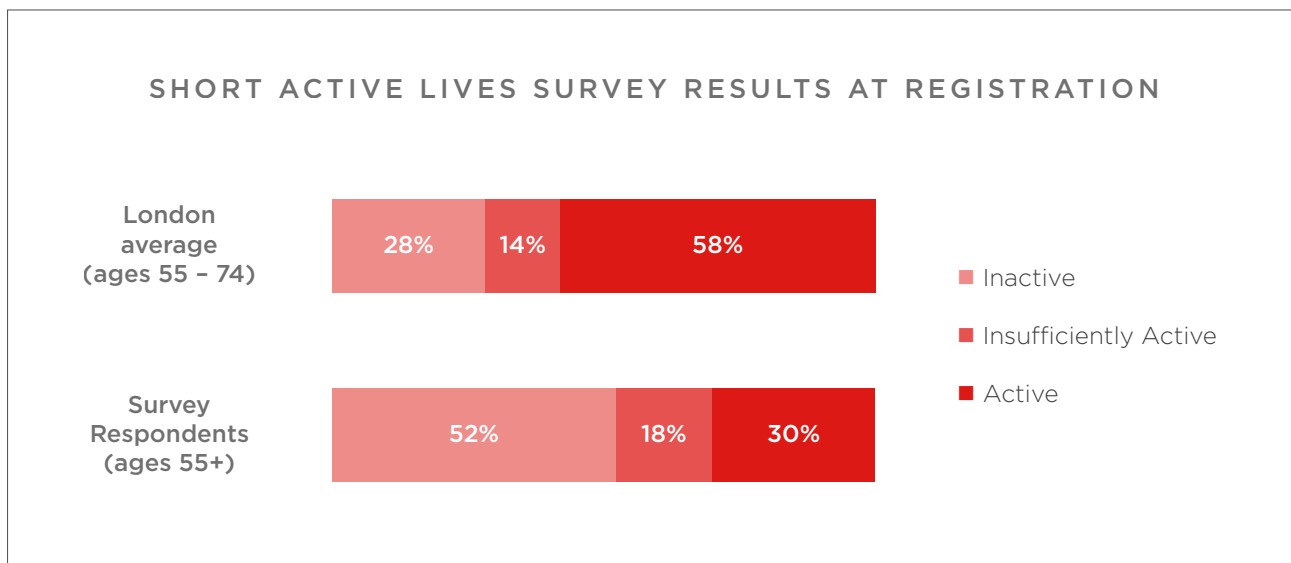


Chart 1: Comparing the activity levels of people who registered as part of the campaign with the London average for this age group.

These results indicate that our pilot was successful at reaching and engaging a less active audience and getting them to sign up.

5.2 CAN WE CREATE EFFECTIVE ADS THAT CONVINCED SOMEONE TO SIGN UP AND REGISTER THEIR INTEREST?

Facebook advertising can be a great way to reach people who might be interested in your activities or services. But it's also a crowded space. With thousands of companies competing to get their message across it can be hard to create an ad that captures attention and prompts action. We tested different images and call to actions as well as trailing the different ad formats (image, video and carousel).

- We found that on average the click-through rate (the percentage of people who see the ad and click on it) was 2.22%.

This compares very favourably with the average click-through rate on Facebook of 0.90%¹. The campaign was also highlighted by Facebook as an exemplar project at a charity and third sector conference in 2018.

"The campaign is fantastic. What really jumps out at me is the success you have seen off a modest budget and the learnings that have already shone through in planning for the next phase.... Your impact on a small budget has been significant" – **Jennifer O'Mahony, Facebook.**

Imagery

For Facebook advertising, we found selecting an image that was likely to capture people's attention and stop them scrolling, was more important than the wording used in the post or the call to action.

We found significant variation in the performance of the adverts based on the images used. As a general rule we found that selecting portrait images that showed participants smiling at the camera generally performed the best.

They didn't need to be actually doing the activity, just in the setting (images of the groups meeting and, in the café, worked well). In fact, if the image showed the activity looking too active then it performed worse.

Surprisingly, we found that the 55+ audience we were targeting responded better to images of people who were younger than them.



Image 2: An image which performed well



Image 3: Another image that performed well

These are the images that worked best across the walking group campaign. For a more in-depth look at what is working with Facebook advertising see the London Sport website.

¹ Source: <https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2017/02/28/facebook-advertising-benchmarks>

5.3 CAN WE SUPPORT THOSE WHO SIGN UP TO ACTUALLY ATTEND A WALK?

Each person who signed up provided us with their postcode and availability, which we then used to suggest local walking group sessions to them..

- We found that 33% of people who signed up wanted to join a weekend walking group. However, only 5% of walking groups currently take place at the weekend.

This meant that we had a significant proportion of people who were interested in joining a session, but we could match them to a local opportunity.

For those who found a session close to them, we provided them with 4 weeks follow up support which included reminders and answering their questions.

- We found that on average 13% of people who signed up went on to actually attend a session.

What was clear was that it's one thing to click on an ad whilst browsing Facebook from your sofa, but quite another to actually find a time that works to join an activity session and then have the confidence to turn up at and meet a group of new people.

We saw many examples of the concerns, worries and barriers that people faced whilst planning to attend.

Are the sessions good for someone who is not very fit?

I am 70 and have arthritis. I have been doing Nordic Walking in Befont Lakes. I would be a bit wobbly without the poles! Are there groups of a similar age? Thank you.

Can't make up my mind cos felt anxious!

Too tired after night shift to come and this Monday I would have come but I'm afraid I cannot do anything in the rain.

I don't drive so would prefer closer walks but will try to get there. Suffering from depression so eager to force myself out and get exercise but Trent park is quite a way and walking to the cafe is quite a way too before I start.

Thank you very much. Hope to see you but Osteoarthritis makes days unpredictable as to mobility.

Haven't been able to make it yet but am trying! Saturdays have been busy for a time but might ease up soon! 👍

Image 4: Examples of some of the messages we received from participants.

This emphasised the importance of delivering a comprehensive behaviour change support programme to help address the real and perceived barriers that people may have before attending.

5.4 DO PARTICIPANTS REMAIN ACTIVE AFTER 6 MONTHS?

This project was focused on recruiting new participants for a walking group session, with the emphasis on retaining the participant on the local scheme. However, we did contact participants after 6 months to see if their activity levels had changed.

- We found that after six months there was a 7% shift from “inactive” to “insufficiently active” and “active”.

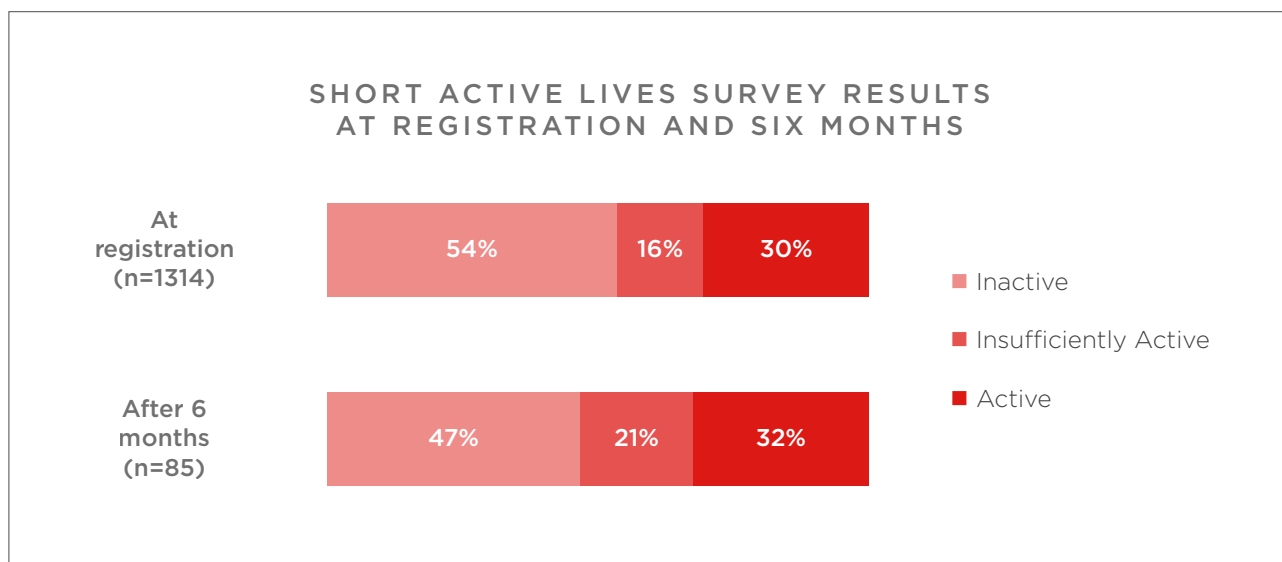


Chart 2: Comparing the activity levels of people at registration and at six months.

5.5 HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO GET SOMEONE TO SIGN UP, AND THEN ATTEND A SESSION?

We tracked the amount spent on advertising and delivering the programme against the number of people who registered.

- We found that on average the cost to deliver the programme was £3.32 per person who signed up.

There was a significant difference in the cost per lead to recruit women to join a walk compared to men.

- We found that on average it cost £3.42 per man who signed up compared to £1.73 for each woman.

Because we also ran campaigns in three boroughs in Hampshire, we were able to compare sign up cost for a rural vs urban audience.

- We found that on average the cost per person who signed up was £2 in urban settings vs £4 in rural.

We then calculated the entire project cost against the number of people who actually attended a walk.

- We found that on average it cost £25 per person who attended a walk.

This is one of the first marketing projects to effectively track the cost to acquire a new participant. Using this as a baseline figure should allow future projects to monitor and improve on this.

5.6 HOW DOES THIS COST PER PERSON COMPARE TO OTHER PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INITIATIVES?

As noted above, there is a lack of accurate data about the cost of physical activity promotional initiatives per person and per person who becomes active.

Research conducted by Make Sport Fun in 2017 calculated that on average marketing using posters and leaflets cost about £48 per person who signed up². The per-person sign up cost for this pilot was significantly cheaper at £3.32 per person.

In comparison to other physical activity initiatives, the approach used in this pilot was cheaper to deliver per person and generated similar changes in activity levels³.

Intervention	Description	% increase in people who become 'Insufficiently Active'	% increase in people who become 'Active'	Delivery cost per person	Source
Brief Advice	Verbal advice, discussion, negotiation or encouragement with or without written or other support or follow up.	0%	8.7%	£9.92	NICE PH44 (2012)
Pedometer	Physical activity consultation plus 12-week pedometer walking programme	0%	54%	£52.50	Baker et al (2008)
Information/ Media campaigns	Project STRIDE - email containing tips on how to achieve 30 minutes of moderate physical activity per day, 5 days a week.	1.6%	3%	£23.06	Sevick et al (2007)
London Sport digital marketing pilot	Facebook ads to targeted audience encouraging to register for info on the nearest walk. 4 weeks of behaviour change follow up including reminders.	5%	2%	£3.32	London Sport data

Table 1: Comparing the delivery cost and change in activity levels with other physical activity initiatives.

² <https://www.makesportfun.com/howto/posters-and-leaflets-dont-work/>

³ Return on Investment for interventions and strategies to increase physical activity (NICE, 2014) <https://www.nice.org.uk/Media/Default/About/what-we-do/Into-practice/Return-on-Investment/NICE-return-on-investment-physical-activity-technical-report.pdf>

6. The two-step approach

Traditionally sport and physical activity marketing has tended to focus on promoting specific sessions (e.g. “Join our walking group next Tuesday on Hampstead Heath at 10 am”).

So, people see the details of the activity, they think it sounds good, and then all their uncertainties, nervousness, and doubts start to come into play, and they don't decide to take part – and then you've lost them.

This means that we often only attract those people who are more confident – those who are already active.

Instead of this one-step process, we used a two-step process.

- Step One – Drive enquiries through marketing
- Step Two – Respond to enquiries

6.1 DRIVE ENQUIRIES THROUGH MARKETING

For step one all we are doing here is trying to get people to make an enquiry in some way, to let us know they are interested. This is a much smaller step than turning up to the activity.

We can then follow up (step two) with them and support them to come along and take part. When we respond, we link people up with the right activity for them and we send them the details of it.

Then, if people have concerns, they come back to us with their questions or if they decide to turn up, they tell us if they are coming along.

Finally, we have a chance to follow up with them again and again weekly sending them details of any future events or reminding them to take part in the activity.

What that does – it leads to those inactive people who were nervous about getting started having enough contact from us to actually come along and take part. This allows you to address people's uncertainty and give them reassurance.

They have a chance to engage with a real person and find out the answers to any of their questions and then they come along and take part.

This two-step process is effective in getting more people into activities, specifically those inactive people or hard to reach groups.

6.2 DELIVERING THE FOLLOW-UP SUPPORT

The simplest way to follow up with someone who registers is by email. It's easy to connect Facebook to your email provider and automate messages when someone signs up.

However, the problem with sending emails is that people don't check their emails that often, and open rates are often 30% or lower.

If you called people on the phone that would probably work well, but it's costly, time-consuming and not the preferred option for most participants.

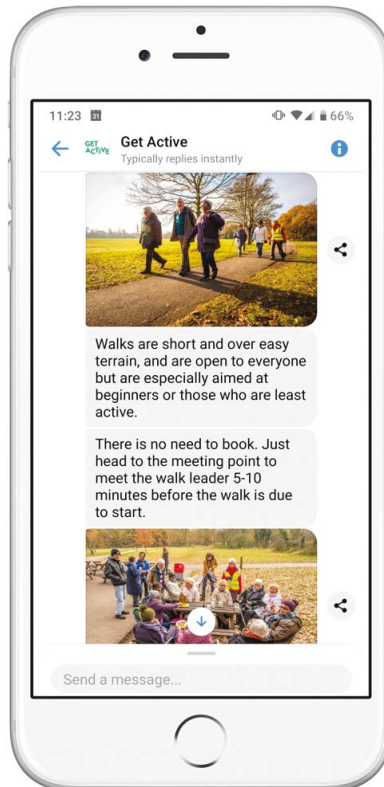
Text messaging (SMS) is a good solution because believe it or not... 98% of all text messages are read and often read within three seconds⁴.

Based on this approach, we started the campaigns using Facebook Lead Ads to get people to register and email and SMS to follow up.

As the campaign evolved, we switched to using Facebook Messenger to deliver follow-up support. This enabled a more seamless experience for the user, as all engagement was conducted within Facebook.

This approach also allowed us to serve richer content in the follow-up messages (e.g. video case studies) as well as allowing us to automate answering some of the most frequently asked questions and increasing the speed at which we could help people find a walk.

Image 5: Example of delivering follow up information in Facebook Messenger



⁴<https://mobilemarketingwatch.com/>

7. Suggested approach for running Facebook campaigns targeted at a less active audience

Based on the learning here are our top tips for running campaigns to support less active people to join local activity sessions.

Step 1 - Drive enquiries through marketing	Step 2 - Respond to enquiries
<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Define your target audienceb) Make them a relevant and convincing offerc) Test different imagery and wording	<ul style="list-style-type: none">d) Set up systems to respond quickly via multiple channelse) Build-in behaviour change tactics to your follow up messaging

STEP 1 - DRIVE ENQUIRIES THROUGH MARKETING

a) Define your target audience - the who, what, and where.

Ask these questions:

- Who is your target audience? What do you know about them? What information can you use to target your campaign? i.e. Age, gender, location, interests.
- What do you want the audience to do? Do you want them to visit your website or view a video? Or do you want them to register their contact information so you can follow up with them?

b) Make a relevant and convincing offer

Match the activities you are promoting to the target audience. For example:

- If you have several walking groups all aimed at women over 55 then that will work well. If you have a few different activity groups for new mums, then you can promote them together.
- If you have 5 cycling groups and some are aimed at over 50s, and some are aimed at families - then you should separate them out into different campaigns.

The call to action in your ad needs to be an offer that is hard to refuse. We've tested these.

- Claim your voucher for a free session
- Download your free 5-day fitness programme
- Sign up today and we'll match you to your nearest walk

The aim is to convince them to give you their contact information so you can follow up with them. In order to do this, they need to see real value in the offer you are making.

c) Test imagery and wording

The first challenge is stopping someone scrolling past your advert. So prioritise testing images to see which work best.

Then test your wording within the ad. The aim of the text in the body of the advert is to keep the person reading until they get to the call to action which convinces them to click the button to sign up.

Visit the London Sport website for our latest findings on imagery and wording that works.

STEP 2 - RESPOND TO ENQUIRIES

d) Set up systems to respond quickly via multiple channels

When someone registers their contact information with you, they will be expecting an immediate confirmation. This is the start of your interaction with them so be clear about what you are offering and how you will next contact them.

You'll then need to have an automated system or resource to continue to engage with them and answer their questions

The tools that we tested within this pilot were:

- Facebook Lead Ads (to collect contact information)
- Zapier (to connect Facebook lead ads to other services)
- MailChimp (email automation system)
- Burst SMS (text messaging automation system)
- ManyChat (set up and manage a Facebook Messenger Bot)

e) Build-in behaviour change tactics to your follow up messaging

Now that you have an ongoing communication channel, you have an opportunity to provide support and nudges to help someone start to be more active.

In this pilot we tested using reminders the day before an activity, asking people to commit to attend and prompting them to plan how they would get there.

For more information about this whitepaper:

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