

Using social media to reduce anti-social behaviour

Communicating key messages to different age demographics with the aim to reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB).

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Key details

Stage of practice	Evaluated locally
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Anti-social behaviour Community engagement Digital, data and analytics
Organisation	Leicestershire Police
Region	East Midlands
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Education Local authority
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	September 2021
Completion date	November 2021

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people Families General public

Aim

The aim was to use Snapchat as a platform to pass positive messages to young people in areas of high reports of ASB, to reduce incidents. The target areas were ones previously identified as receiving higher volume of calls during key times for ASB, such as Halloween and Bonfire Night.

This campaign was targeted at young people, but was based on welcoming and friendly messages which encouraged safe use and sharing of spaces. Hence, there were no concerns raised over equality or diversity as the target audience was based on age and location.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes were:

- a reduction in ASB during high-volume times
- an increase in community confidence in the police to tackle ASB issues
- an increase in police communication and engagement with young people

Description

Local communities, using feedback tools and ASB call backs, told Leicestershire Police they were concerned over youth-related ASB in certain areas, at specific times. The information obtained using systems and public feedback allowed Leicestershire to accurately pinpoint locations and times, and previous patrols helped them identify those demographics that may be suspects of such behaviour.

Investigating the best ways of contacting those possible suspects included talking to schools and networks (such as the local youth MP). Issues addressed focused on ASB in public open spaces – Leicestershire wanted to encourage their lawful use but advise that some behaviour causes people to fear the areas being subjected to low-level ASB.

Leicestershire have a comprehensive approach to understanding and engaging with its communities. This helps the force to prioritise its activities to address need and vulnerability. For example, they trialled the use of Instagram to reach younger people in the community. To evaluate the success of this approach, they monitored both the reduction in ASB in the areas targeted and the data in relation to hit rates and demographics. The approach was successful, and this tactic has subsequently been used for other events such as Halloween.

After investigating the preferred social media applications used by young people, Leicestershire decided to use Snapchat. Snapchat has paid advertising and unlike other platforms, it is possible to specifically choose the age demographics and geofence an area. The decision was made to geofence the local parks and select all ages between 12–21. This meant that anyone meeting this criterion that walked into the area would get the video.

To make this personable, the decision was made to use a local officer. In the video, the local officer portrayed the message that Leicestershire Police wanted people to use the park, but to be respectful to local residents.

In relation to cost, Leicestershire ran two adverts over Halloween and Bonfire Night, with the adverts lasting for around six days and ending on the day after the event in the early hours. For each neighbourhood policing area (NPA) there was a budget of £75 per advert, with a 70/30 split for Snapchat (70) and Instagram (30). This totalled around £1350 for all adverts across the nine NPAs.

Overall impact

Snapchat analytics revealed:

- the age ranges for viewers (13-18, 18-24, 25-35, and so on)
- how many unique users had seen the video
- how many users stuck with the video the whole way through

The results showed over a 50% reduction in ASB in the target areas and immediate surrounding areas. Officers reported that young people were more engaging with them and had more conversations. The young people recognised their local officer more and interacted with them both in public and in school visits. The community also became aware of it and supported it, as well as seeing fewer incidents. The community safety partnership (CSP) funded this project and were highly supportive of the work.

The trial was extended to the whole force area and each area saw a reduction in ASB incidents. At times, it was hard to compare figures to previous years. For example, if Bonfire Night fell on a weeknight, there tended to be fewer incidents, but overall, Leicestershire were satisfied there was a reduction and the trial was widely supported.

Although some areas were small, overall, there were around 100 fewer ASB incidents reported in one of the periods. The funding all came from CSPs and cost less than a few hundred pounds, but removed hundreds of hours of response time.

Learning

Since these adverts were used in 2021 and 2022, both Facebook and Snapchat are becoming more restrictive for targeting audiences under 18. Leicestershire are now unable to target postcode areas on Facebook as before, and although they still can on Snapchat, it may only be a matter of time before they will not be able to do it on that platform.

For specifically targeting ASB, Leicestershire are currently still using this as a tool in their arsenal when required. More and more restrictions are coming into place for the targeting of young people in advertising and this may reduce the application of this approach.

Creating each advert in a recognisable location meant a significant workload for the digital team to join up with officers all around Leicestershire. Also, with the frequency of officers moving around within police forces, Leicestershire were sometimes unable to use videos from the past. This means they usually have to film more versions and due to their small team sizes and workloads they cannot get this done. Some policing areas also have much less ASB than others, therefore, they may feel their money may be spent better elsewhere.

There are many approaches to budgeting, from setting either a daily spend limit or a limit on the whole campaign. Leicestershire opted for a whole campaign budget. This meant the use of

Snapchat and Facebook, using that budget to spread it out across the campaign without interference. There is usually a minimum spend for advertising, but that is calculated based on roughly how many people are in the targeting area. Leicestershire usually spend £100 per week on campaigns and this is sufficient.

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Tags

Community engagement