

SCHULTZ FAMILY FOUNDATION | ENGAGING OPPORTUNITY YOUTH
9.6.19

TOOLKIT: ENGAGING OPPORTUNITY AND AT-RISK YOUTH

The goal of this document is to offer guidelines and assistance to organizations in creating and implementing strategies that can effectively target and engage Opportunity and At-Risk Youth. The following insights were gleaned through DoSomething Strategic's 2019 research study conducted in partnership with the Schultz Family Foundation.

Who Are Opportunity and At-Risk Youth?

Knowing your audience is key to knowing how to engage them. Whether you have worked with Opportunity and At-Risk Youth in the past or you're just learning about this demographic, we hope the following will provide you with the context you need.

- + **Young people often defy categorization, and Opportunity Youth are no exception.** Although the traditional definition of Opportunity Youth centers on young people who are not in school and also not working, there is a compelling case to consider those who have experienced risk factors—such as homelessness, young pregnancy, etc.—although they may be employed or in school and, therefore, outside of the traditional definition.
- + **Almost all have endured troubling life circumstances, with the plurality experiencing an unstable living situation at one point.** Many who fit into this demographic are currently facing or have faced highly stressful or traumatic life circumstances that may add context to their choices and current situations. Of these, an unstable living situation is one of the risk factors Opportunity and At-Risk Youth self-report the most.
- + **They see their personal circumstances as entirely unique.** This demographic believes their circumstances are highly individual and particular to *them*. Some even feel that there aren't others who can understand what they're going through.
- + **And they expect employers to adapt to these unique situations.** Because they see their situations as so unique, they're looking for ways to tailor the job search process to their own specific needs. While existing engines like *Indeed* are popular among many, there is a frustration around the lack of customizable options—such as the ability to filter by specific hours, types of roles, etc.
- + **They are clouded in self-doubt, particularly throughout the job search process.** This demographic in particular doubts whether they have the skills needed to excel in or even successfully secure a job. Digging further, sometimes their doubt around their skills is actually code for a much broader sense of self-doubt—in themselves as a person. Overall, they're nervous about the entire process of searching for and applying to roles.
- + **They view jobs as a way to “get by,” not as a way to start or grow a career.** Many Opportunity and At-Risk Youth are seeking small gigs and seasonal work that will simply pay the bills and allow them to take care of themselves and/or loved ones. Others have a hesitation to commit to a stable role that would be long-term, both for lack of desire and for personal reasons (i.e. raising a child, health reasons, etc.)

Tapping Into This Demographic

So, what do these insights mean for you and your organization? What actions could these insights help you pilot and implement in order to both reach and engage this target audience?

Messaging Do's

- + **Be authentic.** It's okay to be casual in your tone and voice. Your messaging should illustrate to the audience the kind of brand you are, so don't shy away from showing personality. In fact, now is definitely not the time for corporate language or jargon. However, don't try to be too trendy with language that doesn't feel genuine to your brand—young people will spot this and call it out.
 - This can also include the use of photos, gifs, emojis etc.
 - (See *Social Example 1, Email Example 2*)
- + **Make them feel seen.** When you try to speak to everyone, you don't truly reach anyone. If you want to engage Opportunity and At-Risk Youth, you must tailor your communications to speak directly to them. Do this by honoring their life experiences and showing them you want to understand their circumstances. (See *Social Example 2*)
- + **Make all communications personalized.** Young people, in general, want to know there is an actual person behind the brand. It helps build a deeper connection between the audience and your brand, and it makes your brand more memorable to a young person.
 - Sign off all communications with an alias or the name of a staff member
 - For emails, the sender line could be "Bri from DoSomething.org"
 - For SMS, you could say "Bri here, from DoSomething!"
 - (See *SMS Example 1, a.1*)
 - This can be even further personalized by adding a photo of the sender
 - (See *Email Example 3, b.3*)
- + **Be relevant to them.** Opportunity and At-Risk Youth need to know why the service or product you're offering is actually worth their time, as well as how it will benefit them, so make this clear and to the point. (See *Website Example 1*)
 - Communicate your product's/initiative's value add from the get-go, and seek to instill a sense of urgency in your messaging that will make them understand why they should open a message, read something, or take an action right away.
 - (See *Email Example 1, a.1*)
- + **Utilize SMS.** This demographic, like many other young people, don't use email as their primary mode of communication—even with brands and employers. Reaching them where they are with technology (their phones!) will be vital to maintaining an ongoing interaction. Just don't make it feel too much like spam.
 - Any notification to a young person's phone serves as reminders to take an action
 - There should always be a clear CTA
 - Include any relevant links or shortcodes to make the experience more interactive and easy for the audience to respond
 - (See *SMS Example 1, b.1*)

Tenets for Overall Engagement

- + **Tell them what to do.** Make the call to action for this audience very clear and specific. If they're unsure of what they're being asked, they won't hesitate to turn their attention elsewhere. And make the user experience of completing it as seamless as possible!
- + **Don't overwhelm them with options.** Creativity loves constraints. And young people are especially vulnerable to the 'choice overload' effect. Having too many things to choose from can be overwhelming and lead to decision fatigue, or worse, avoiding a decision altogether. Plus, it feels more personal to a young person if they're provided with a few key options that feel tailored to them.
- + **Provide ways for them to engage IRL.** In-real-life engagement isn't dead—in fact, it's proven to yield even higher conversion rates than digital initiatives. But be sure to offer these opportunities in places where Opportunity and At-Risk Youth already are, adding on to the obvious activations on school campuses. Also seek to be considerate of transportation needed to get there, as this can be a huge barrier for this demographic.
- + **Follow up with them.** As Opportunity and At-Risk Youth are particularly prone to self-doubt, being 'ghosted' by a potential employer or any brand they've taken action is discouraging, and may perpetuate their cycle of being 'disconnected.' Whether you're offering them a service/product or engaging them in a hiring process, it's important to close the loop so these young people understand the outcome of their time and actions.

Social Example 1 from Wendys:



Wendy's 
@Wendys

Following 

When the tweets are as broken as the
ice cream machine. 

Cheeky and clever, shows
playful brand personality

McDonald's  @McDonaldsCorp
Black Friday **** Need copy and link****
[Show this thread](#)

8:59 AM - 24 Nov 2017

286,514 Retweets 764,150 Likes



Social Example 2 from Sephora:



Email Example 1 from DoSomething.org:

Hurry! Our national drive for homeless shelters is ending Inbox x a. 1 Relevant + Sense of Urgency

Ben from DoSomething.org <hi@dosomething.org> Unsubscribe to me b. 1 From a real person

Hurry!
Donate to your local homeless shelter by this Sunday, March 31.
DoSomething members around the country have donated over 20,000 bags filled with daily essentials to benefit local homeless shelters.
You can too...but hurry! Our [Supplies, Sealed, Delivered campaign](#) ends this Sunday. Looking for inspiration? Check out this video of [Dear White People star Logan Browning](#) donating goods with a 12-year-old activist.
Need more inspo? Thanks to the members below, we've got you.

c. 1 Readability

b. 2 Banner with images of real people = human touch!

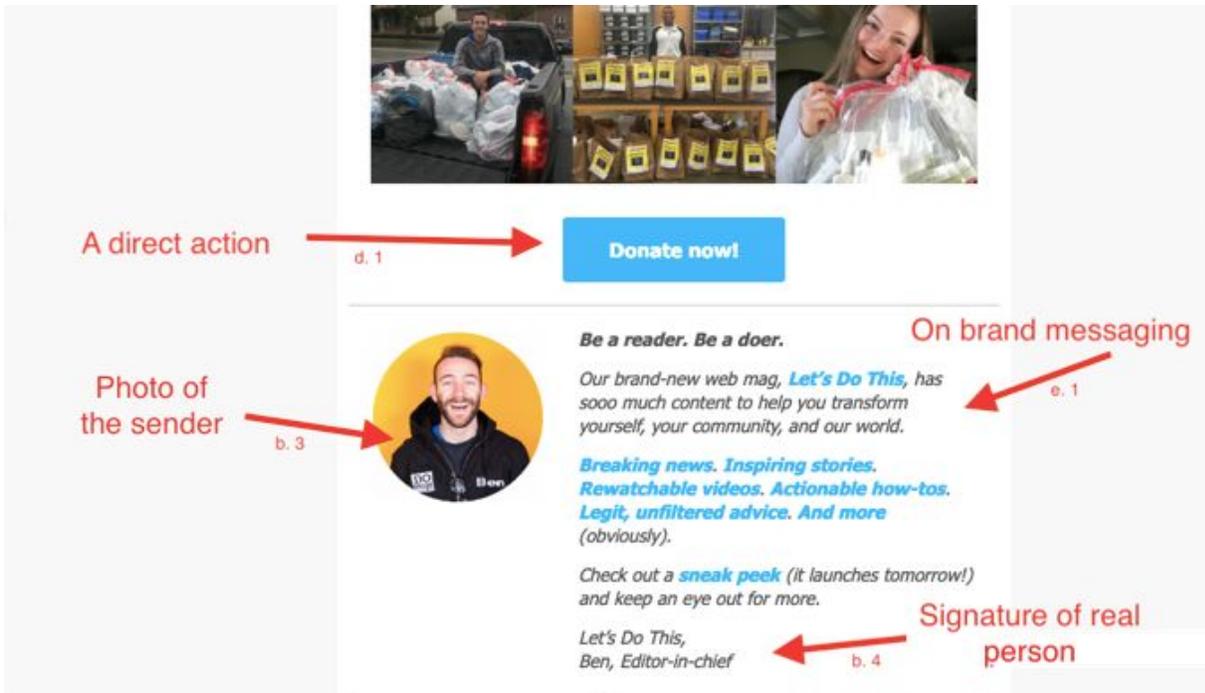
Email Example 2 from DoSomething.org:

Fwd: It may be winter, but you're still  Inbox x

From: Ben from DoSomething.org <hi@dosomething.org>
Date: Tue, Jan 29, 2019 at 7:22 PM
Subject: It may be winter, but you're still 

Use of emojis,
relevant references

Email Example 3 from DoSomething.org:

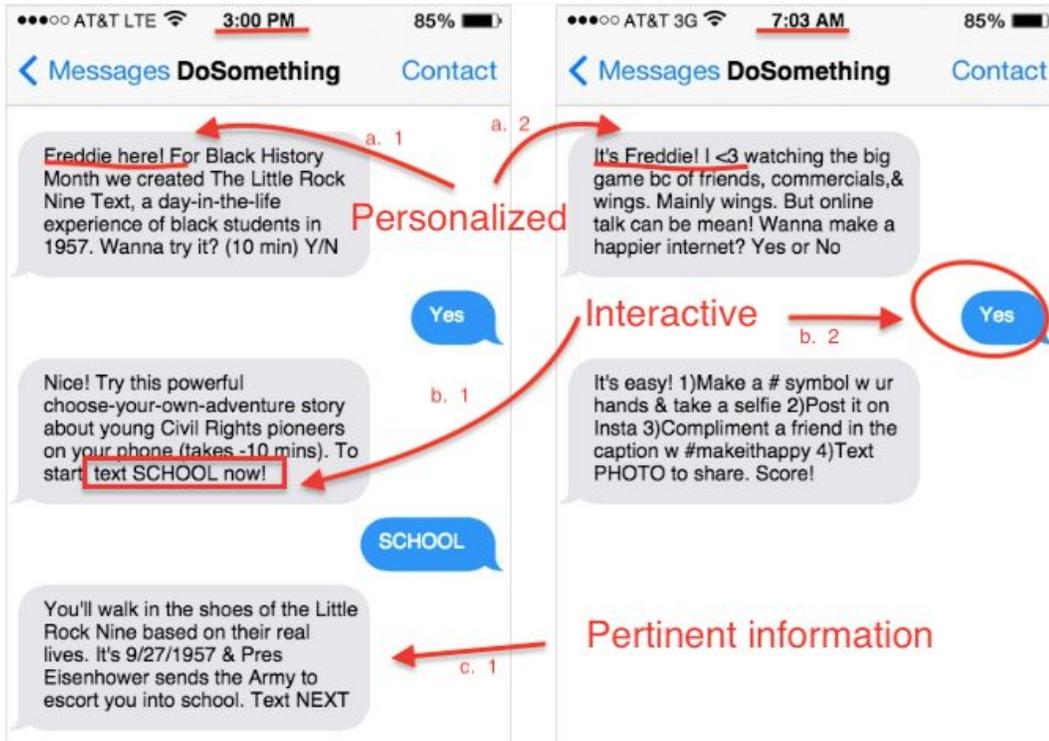


The image shows an email layout with several annotated elements:

- A direct action**: A red arrow labeled 'd. 1' points to a blue button that says "Donate now!".
- Photo of the sender**: A red arrow labeled 'b. 3' points to a circular profile picture of a man with a beard and a black jacket.
- On brand messaging**: A red arrow labeled 'e. 1' points to the text: "Be a reader. Be a doer. Our brand-new web mag, *Let's Do This*, has sooo much content to help you transform yourself, your community, and our world. *Breaking news. Inspiring stories. Rewatchable videos. Actionable how-tos. Legit, unfiltered advice. And more (obviously).* Check out a *sneak peek* (it launches tomorrow!) and keep an eye out for more."
- Signature of real person**: A red arrow labeled 'b. 4' points to the text: "Let's Do This, Ben, Editor-in-chief".

At the top of the email content, there is a row of three images: a man loading bags into a truck, a woman smiling, and a woman holding a bag of supplies.

SMS Example 1 from DoSomething.org:



Website Example 1 from DoSomething.org:

