



HM Revenue
& Customs

Research report

Tax Credits Communications Campaign Tracking 2017

Tracking advertising for Tax Credits Renewals

Corporate Communications - Marketing

Behaviour, Insight and Research Team

Tax Credits Communications Campaign Tracking 2017***About Marketing***

Marketing plan and deliver integrated campaigns and products to enhance awareness of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) products and services, to influence our customers' behaviours and help deliver HMRC strategic objectives.

We support our colleagues in delivering our Vision. We influence product design, distribution channels, our working environment and all other areas of our customers' experience through our work on printed material, signage, environments, intranet and internet and tone of voice.

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Tax Credits Communications Campaign Tracking 2017***Research requirement (background to the project)***

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) administers tax credits (child tax credit and working tax credit) to provide financial incentives to work and help low income families with children. Claimants must finalise/renew their application each year to ensure that all details of household income and circumstances are kept up-to-date. The yearly finalisation and renewal deadline is 31 July. HMRC wants to encourage claimants to notify them of any changes in household income or other circumstances as soon as possible, in order to avoid the claimant finishing the year with an overpayment.

Each year, HMRC runs a national advertising campaign to encourage claimants to renew their application on time, and more recently to highlight the benefits of renewing online. The latest burst of advertising began on June 27 with below the line channels (search and digital programmatic), with TV (including video on demand) and radio starting from 1 July. The campaign ended on 31 July 2017.

The Tax Credits Renewals campaign creative, which focussed heavily on the deadline, was changed in 2015, after running for over 10 years. The new campaign adopted a new creative style, tone and messaging, with a primary focus to encourage renewals online; “Your life isn’t nine to five, so neither’s ours”.

The 2017 campaign was the third year of running the new creative. The channels remained the same as 2016, though the overall spend was around ten percent lower. TV budget was more invested in video on demand than traditional TV in 2017.

The campaign’s key objectives were to:

- Encourage claimants to renew early and before the 31 July deadline
- Encourage claimants to renew online

The purpose of this research was to measure the effectiveness of the 2017 Tax Credits Renewals advertising campaign amongst current Tax Credits claimants. The research aimed to evaluate the following:

- Awareness of the campaign
- Understanding of the key campaign messages
- Whether claimants understood they could renew online
- Whether the campaign had a positive impact on claimants’ understanding and actions

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When the research took place

Research was conducted using a pre and post campaign design:

- The pre-wave was conducted between 12 – 30 June 2017, before the campaign aired (and avoiding the Purdah period for the June general election)
- The post-wave research was conducted between 1 – 21 August 2017, shortly after the campaign came off air and the 31 July deadline for renewing had passed

Where relevant in this document, results are compared with waves from previous years.

Who did the work (research agency)

The research was carried by the GfK UK Ltd, in accordance with the requirements of ISO 9001 and ISO 20252.

Method, Data and Tools used, Sample

The interviews were conducted in-home and face-to-face using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). There were 350 interviews lasting approximately 15 minutes at the pre-wave, and 323 interviews lasting approximately 20 minutes at the post-wave. Respondents were shown the following examples of campaign materials on the CAPI machine to accurately test levels of advertising:

- Two out of the five TV ads
- Two out of the seven radio ads (each respondent was played one 30 second and one 20 second radio ad)
- A montage of the digital ads
- A montage of the mobile app ads

The sample covered the UK and was drawn using random location sampling, as in previous waves of research. It included men and women aged 16 and over who were claiming tax credits. Quotas were set on key subgroups (gender, age, income and parental status) to ensure that the sample was representative of the tax credits claimant population. The data was weighted by age, gender, parental status and income to ensure that waves could be compared fairly.

Differences in response between groups, or from wave to wave, have been significance tested using two-tailed tests at the 95% level of significance. Significant differences are noted in the commentary.

Tax Credits Communications Campaign Tracking 2017***Main Findings*****Campaign performance**

Total advertising awareness (the proportion of claimants who said they had seen or heard any advertising or media coverage about tax credits in the last few months *either spontaneously or after prompting*) was significantly lower this year than in previous post-waves. Just over half (55%) of claimants recalled some advertising about tax credits, compared to 64% in 2016. The decline in advertising awareness was accounted for by a smaller proportion recalling having seen either a TV or radio advertisement compared with last year – continuing a downward trend since the new campaign began in 2015 (at 73% awareness). Nonetheless, TV and radio remain the most commonly mentioned sources of advertising awareness (with TV at 32% and radio at 10% total awareness).

Campaign recognition (the proportion recalling at least one of the ads after they were shown materials from the campaign at the post-wave) was at 67% in 2017 – in line with 70% in the previous year but continuing a gradual decline over time. The dip this year was largely accounted for by declines in levels of campaign recognition for both TV (from 58% in 2016 to 51% in 2017) and radio (33% in 2016 to 26% in 2017).

Although campaign recognition of TV and radio ads has declined there have been significant increases amongst the online channels overall - from 28% in 2016 to 31% in 2017. This reflects the increase for online ad recognition – from 20% in 2016 to 26% in 2017, with mobile app ad recognition remaining more stable since last year.

- Females and White British claimants had higher levels of advertising awareness and recognition compared with Males and other ethnicities respectively, as was the case in 2016. However, awareness levels for women have dropped significantly since 2016, from 72% to 60%.

This drop has worked to reduce the gap between women and their male counterparts compared to 2016. However, advertising awareness and recognition is still notably higher for women and white British claimants.

The digital aspects of the campaign have been particularly successful in reaching specifically men and non-White British claimants this year, with both groups reporting higher recognition levels for these channels than previously:

- 24% of non-White British claimants in 2017 recognised the online banners compared with 15% in 2016
- 20% of men in 2017 recognised mobile app advertising compared with 13% in 2016.

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Campaign messaging and impressions

Message take out has remained stable, with messaging about the “deadline for renewals” continuing to come through the most strongly (with 87% of those who recognised at least one element of the campaign agreeing that the ads told them to “renew by July 31st to ensure that payments don’t stop”). This was followed by messaging about renewing online (with 83% of ad recognisers agreeing that the ads told them to “renew online at gov.uk/managetaxcredits”). Though overall there were no significant changes to levels of agreement for messages this year, there was a drop in those *strongly* agreeing that “HMRC has made it easier for me to renew my tax credits”, from 60% in 2016 to 48% this year.

Generally, feelings after seeing/hearing the ads were fairly similar to those in 2016. The ads were again most commonly seen as encouraging online renewal (which is the desired outcome). Just over four in ten (43%) claimants who recognised at least one element of the campaign felt that “they encouraged me / my partner to renew online”, though this has dipped slightly from 48% in 2016. Following an increase last year, the proportion who felt that “they made me / my partner concerned about tax credits” has fallen back to similar levels seen in 2015 (8% 2015, 11% 2016, 6% 2017). The reverse has happened for “they encouraged me / my partner to call the telephone helpline” (16% 2015, 11% 2016, 17% 2017).

Impact of the campaign on claimants’ understanding & actions

Total awareness of the tax credits renewal deadline remained consistent with results in 2016 and 2015, with 55% of claimants able to name the correct deadline date with or without prompting, compared to 58% in the previous two years. As was the case in 2016, women were more likely than men to be aware of the date (with 50% total awareness among women compared to 32% among males). However, total awareness amongst women has fallen from 63% in 2016 to 50% in 2017.

All were asked how they renewed their most recent claim. Just under a third of claimants said that they renewed their claim online this year (29%) – similar to the previous year (27%) but slowly continuing the gradual increase in this over the last few waves. White British claimants were more likely to have renewed online, with 34% choosing this method compared to 20% of non-White British claimants. In comparison, the proportions saying they renewed their claim via paper and telephone both stayed more stable over the same period.

Prompted reasons for renewing claims this year have remained stable. As seen in previous waves, the renewal packs/postal reminders were the main prompt to renewing tax credits at 47%. This was followed by advertising (22%), and finally conversations with friends or family (6%).

Tax Credits Communications Campaign Tracking 2017**Perceptions of online renewal**

The majority (88%) of claimants said that they found the renewal process easy this year, which is consistent with both 2016 and 2015 (87%). Agreement that the renewal process is easy was highest amongst those who were aware of the deadline for renewal (96% of those who were spontaneously aware of the deadline, and 94% of those who were aware after prompting).

When asked about the reasons for using their 2017 renewal method, online renewal scored consistently higher than other methods for reasons around convenience. This year 51% of respondents claimed “I thought it was the easiest way to do it”, 56% that “I could do it at a time that suited me”, and 39% that “I thought it was the quickest way to do it”. Generally the use of both paper and telephone renewal continued to be prompted by habit or lack of knowledge, with paper renewal scoring highest for “the renewals form told me to do it” (17%) and telephone for “I always renew that way” (25%).

Claimants were shown a list of things that people have said about tax credits and asked how much they agreed with each statement. There has been a significant increase since 2016 in the proportion of claimants agreeing that they “find it easier to renew my tax credits claim online” (from 41% to 50%). The proportion agreeing, “it is good that I can renew my claim online at a time that suits me” has stayed stable however, at 68%.