

CASE STUDY:

Money Advice Service

The Money Advice Service aimed to help people increase their financial capability. Winning Moves investigated how their online Budget Planner tool is helping people to make the most of their money.

The challenge

The Money advice Service (MAS – and now delivered by the Money and Pensions Service) was set up by the UK government to give free, unbiased money advice to help people across the UK make the most of their money. The service provided a range of tools and information via its' website including the Budget Planner which allowed consumers to enter their income and expenditure. The Budget Planner provided a snapshot of consumers finances and tips on money management or dealing with budget deficits. MAS commissioned Winning Moves to conduct an evaluation to understand how and why financial capability outcomes are improved using the Budget Planner the potential for outcomes to be further improved. The evaluation was also to be used as a test case for MAS to understand how to effectively evaluate its wider digital content.

**The approach**

To summarise understanding of how the Budget Planner works and the assumptions behind it, a theory of change was developed for the Budget Planner based on a rapid review of available literature and a workshop with the team at MAS. Two further stages of research were then conducted. Firstly, qualitative interviews with a sample of 'squeezed parents' (as defined by MAS' market segmentation) were recruited from a consumer panel. These respondents were asked to use the Budget Planner prior to interview which explored how they had used it and their reaction to the tool. In the second stage, insights from consumer data and web analytics, captured from users of the planner, were used to evaluate whether this information could be a useful indicator of the success of the tool. Alongside this, a 'pop-up' survey was built into the planner in order to gather further feedback from users in general. Qualitative interview respondents from the first stage of research were also interviewed for a second time, to understand the outcomes they had achieved using the Budget Planner.



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The result

The evaluation found that using the Budget Planner can help people, in certain circumstances, to make some significant changes to rebalance their income and expenditure. Whether users made changes following their use of the Budget Planner seemed to depend on three underlying factors:

- The need to budget in the first place
- Whether the tool was completed accurately
- Whether users were shocked by their level of expenditure and recognised opportunities to make cutbacks.

There was some indication that participants who had made changes to their spending, having used the Budget Planner, were starting to feel the benefit of those changes (i.e. feeling they had more money in their pocket) three months after use. Some participants who had noticed having more money available to them were beginning to save and a couple had achieved very short-term savings goals across the research period. Participants who started to notice having more money available to them said they felt more motivated and empowered to trial other behaviours or set more ambitious savings targets. Experiencing associated emotional rewards (e.g. planning to visit family overseas, when this had previously been considered unaffordable) also increased their motivation to maintain behaviours that allowed them to stick to their budget.

The full report can be accessed from the [FINCAP website](#).

Recommendations to MAS emerging from the evaluation included:

- Increase engagement with the Budget Planner by linking budgeting to financial goals
- Ensure users understand the benefits of accurately completing the tool
- Links to further advice and support should be tailored to the user and more visible
- Consider collecting some basic personal data that can be used to ensure the results are more bespoke.

MAS developed and published a [response to the findings](#) which was published alongside the report.

