



A Digital Communications Approach

External
communications
strategies using
online mediums

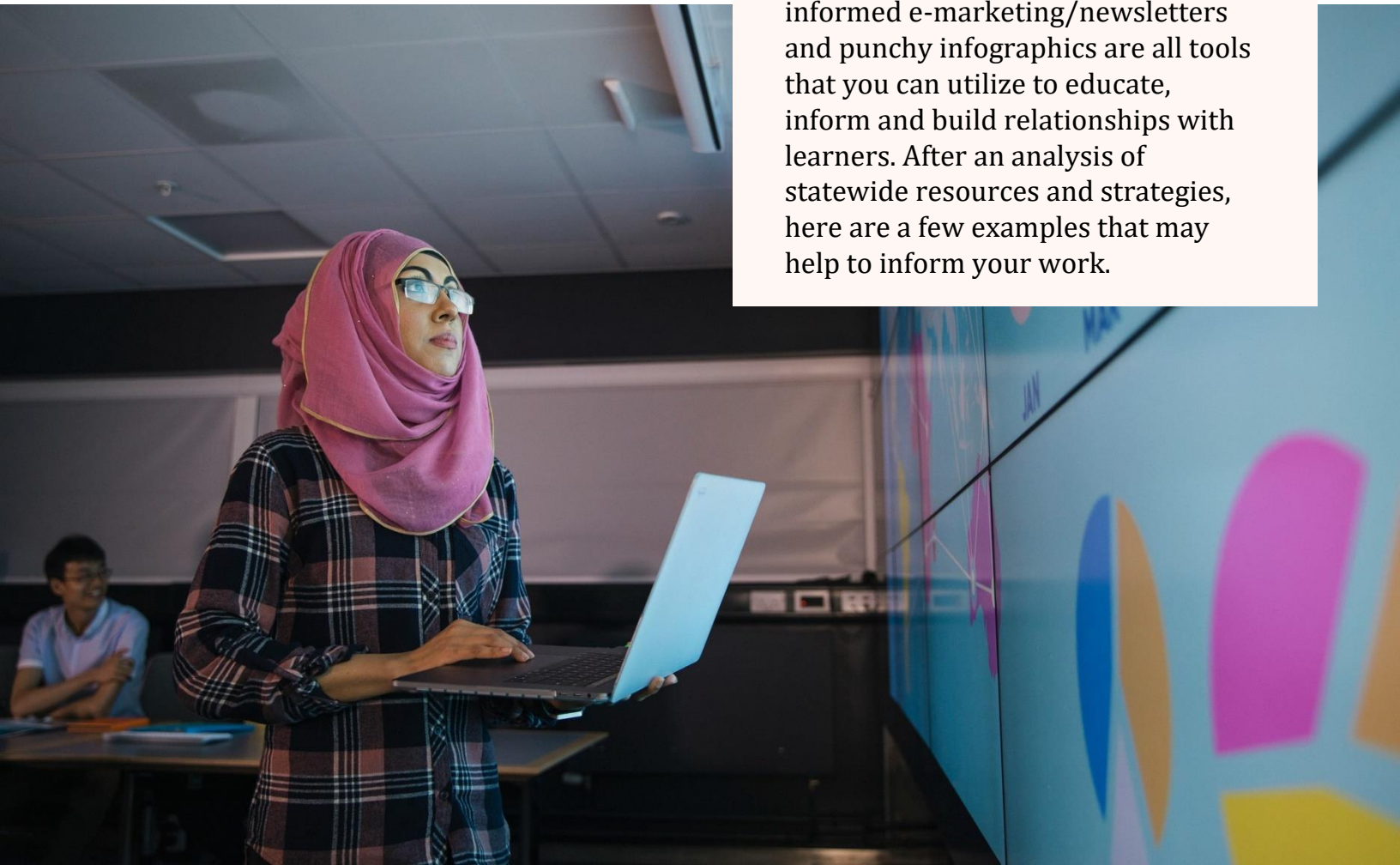
In a rapidly changing world, it is more important than ever for learners of all ages to develop the skills and experiences necessary to succeed in the high-wage, high-skilled and high-demand careers of their choosing.

Career Technical Education (CTE) is working in every state to help learners succeed, while also providing employers with skilled and talented employees across a range of industries, from advanced manufacturing to media production. In total, around 12.5 million students are enrolled in CTE across the nation — but industry skill gaps and unfulfilled employee potential remains. To connect more students to CTE programs, Advance CTE compiled model programs to address the challenge of better communicating with families and students about CTE options.

Advance CTE has worked with states to pilot innovative and effective models to communicate the many benefits of CTE to key stakeholders, students and their families, to guarantee career success for each learner. This case study is one of three that highlights the exciting work being done across the country to reach local stakeholders, create communications strategies that emphasize digital mediums and develop messaging that resonates with specific audiences.

Introduction

In an increasingly connected world, it is critical to use a digital-first approach when communicating with target audiences. Social media strategies, short videos, analytics-informed e-marketing/newsletters and punchy infographics are all tools that you can utilize to educate, inform and build relationships with learners. After an analysis of statewide resources and strategies, here are a few examples that may help to inform your work.



Using Video as a Powerful Tool for Student Voices

How Washington's Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board tapped student creativity to tell the CTE story

When developing effective communications strategies for CTE, it is important to consider the primary audience you're trying to reach, the message you're hoping to convey and what the audience will find engaging and informative about that message. For audiences who may not be aware of the benefits and opportunities of CTE, a credible messenger can be a key part of a communications strategy. For many, such as employers, prospective students and educators, hearing CTE success stories directly from students can be the most effective approach.

Additionally, for many offices on a tight budget, it is even more important to get the biggest "bang for your buck" when developing wide-reaching and exciting communications strategies.

The Washington Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board's [CTE Get Real: Student Filmmaking Toolkit](#) exemplifies

a targeted, informative and motivating campaign. The toolkit takes a direct and hands-on approach to messaging by putting student voices front and center through short CTE student-produced educational and narrative [videos](#). Students produce videos highlighting the benefits of CTE while further developing the very skills that makes CTE such an important method of learning.

The Washington Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board contracted with the Seattle Film Institute to create a comprehensive toolkit that simultaneously provides information and messaging about the benefits of CTE, while laying out a step-by-step guide to the filmmaking process. From basic tips of filmmaking to diagrams of camera angles and tutorials for editing, this guide includes a lot of information about CTE without getting bogged down in a standard one-pager format that may not be engaging for students. The project culminated in an awards ceremony that helped to incentivize interested students in participating. By producing exciting student content, state CTE programs can create an archive of evergreen digital content that can be shared across platforms repeatedly.

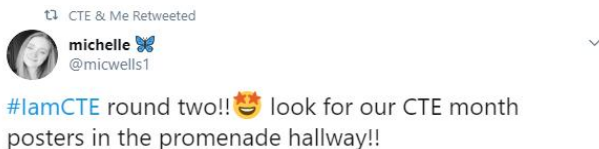


The Social Media Showdown

How the Arkansas Division of Career and Technical Education created a student competition for effective social media campaigns

To generate engaging and memorable social communications that would help increase recruitment of students to CTE programs of study, the Arkansas Division of Career and Technical Education developed an annual social media competition that invites high school students to raise awareness of CTE in the state.

By partnering with local schools, the department was able to maximize their outreach to students and other stakeholders who wanted to participate.

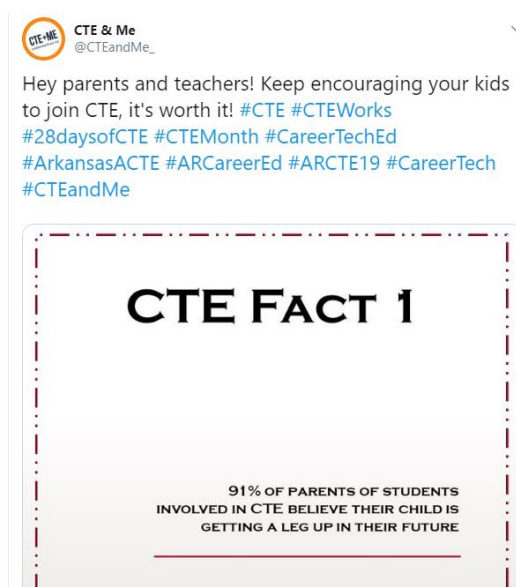


Building on the success of the pilot in 2018, the second year of the social media campaign saw an increase in student participation by over 25 percent and expanded the previous 14-day campaign to 38 days.

In 2019, the contest expanded beyond the Business Management & Administration Career Cluster® to also include Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM), as well as a continued partnership

with Arkansas' THV11 TV station. To add more structure and research-based messaging, the students were provided with Advance CTE's [Social Media Guide](#).

After creating the campaigns, the student teams presented their social media marketing strategies in front of a panel of broadcasting and advertising professionals at THV11 in Little Rock.



Competing on criteria ranging from design and development to effectiveness and presentation, students earned points that rated their skills and understanding of the project's objectives. The winning team was *CTE & Me* from the Alma School District who created a social media campaign focused on interesting facts, student ambassadors and eye-catching infographics to educate students and families about CTE.

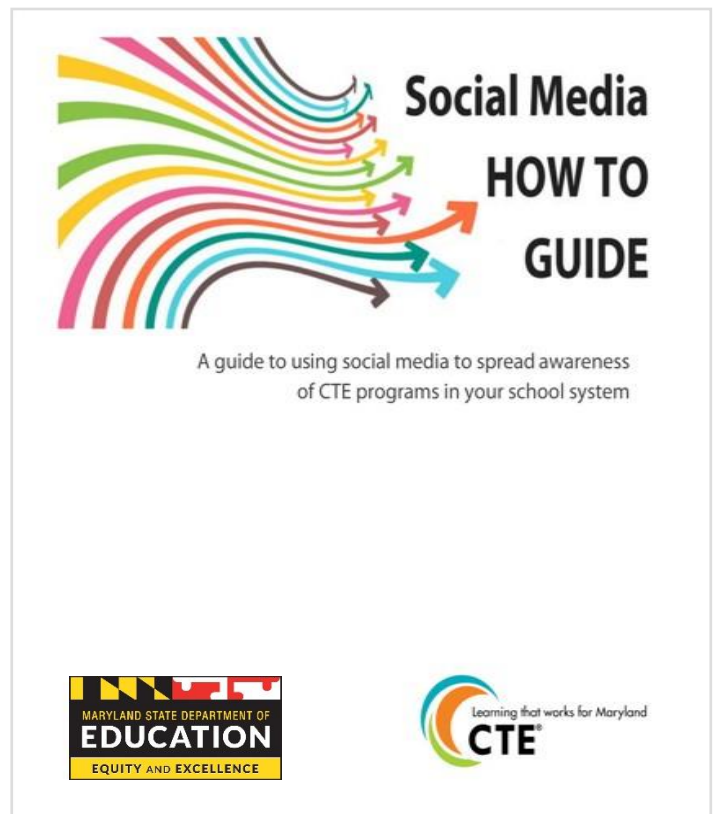
Afterwards, using [Advance CTE's Focus Group Discussion Guide](#), a student focus group was surveyed to determine what terms resonated most strongly with students including 'education pathway,' 'real-world knowledge,' and 'personalized,' which will be incorporated into future Arkansas Division of Career Education materials.

A Guide to Using Social Media Effectively

How the Maryland Career and College Readiness Division, Maryland State Department of Education demystifies social media platforms

The Maryland State Department of Education conducted a statewide and local social media campaign on Facebook and Twitter to help families understand the benefits of CTE. This two-phase project began by holding focus groups in two districts of students, families and school counselors to explore if the [research](#) on messaging to students and families conducted by Advance CTE would also entice Maryland students and families, and encourage them to consider CTE as part of their education. Once the state confirmed the key messages, they provided sub-grants and support to districts to carry out social media campaigns using the key messages, while launching a statewide social media campaign.

This work resulted in a [Social Media How To Guide](#) for Maryland stakeholders that walks users through everything from how frequently to post on Facebook vs. Instagram to the benefits and drawbacks of shooting live video to pulling analytics data. Advance CTE developed a [Social Media Guide](#) based on this work for use by all states. As communications becomes increasingly digital and social media-focused, it is more important than ever to understand the ins and outs of effective social media engagement and how to better use it to reach learners and key stakeholders.



Conclusion

In order to create a steady drumbeat of content geared toward your key audiences, adopting a digital-first approach can help states think creatively about reaching local stakeholders. It is essential to meet them where they are while providing a diverse array of opportunities for them to engage with relevant content. By using tools like analytics-informed social media strategies and interactive toolkits, states can draw people in, in ways that are both informative and entertaining. In addition, getting creative with video through strategic partnerships with organizations that have tools ready to use can help states keep costs low and build new relationships with potential employers.

States should survey local landscapes and see what's resonating already online by reviewing student surveys, analyzing effective platforms that reach target audiences, researching what key partners are messaging, building partnerships with stakeholders like schools, districts and employers that can help lift up your messages and finding student voices that can be amplified in your communications. This information will provide a good benchmark of what audiences are looking for and may lead to digital-friendly tactics that will keep them connected to CTE.

