

FACEBOOK EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE RISK EDUCATION PILOT

Testing innovative approaches to delivering risk
education: Facebook ads





A MAG community liaison team visited Ismael and his family after hearing reports of landmines and UXO.

BACKGROUND

The violent campaign by Islamic State (IS) to seize territory across Iraq caused the widespread displacement of Ninewa residents. IS held areas of Ninewa Governorate for around three years and by the end of June 2017 almost 1.9 million people were displaced from the governorate – the highest rate in Iraq. People fled their homes in an attempt to escape the horrific atrocities being carried out by IS, with mass killings, abductions and the complete destruction of cities and villages.

By February 2019, more than 1 million people from Ninewa remained internally displaced. Many of these people are still living in internally displaced person (IDP) camps and host communities, unable to return due to the destruction that remains and the explosive ordnance contamination that continues to deny them access to their homes, land and livelihoods.

Areas contaminated by mines of an improvised nature have not been subjected to systematic survey but are claimed, by national authorities, to cover hundreds of square kilometers. Contamination includes a wide variety of improvised devices left by IS, but the vast majority are victim-activated and meet the Ottawa Treaty definition of an anti-personnel mine.

Explosive ordnance (mines, cluster munitions, unexploded ordnance, abandoned ordnance, booby traps, improvised explosive devices, other devices as defined by CCW APII) in Ninewa presents a significant risk to returnees resettling in their communities of

origin, IDPs transiting through contaminated areas, and humanitarian actors providing assistance to affected populations. Against this background, explosive ordnance risk education, training community focal points, disseminating safety messages and hazard reporting are essential to supporting the safe return of IDPs.

ABOUT MAG

MAG is a global leader in humanitarian mine action, employing more than 5,000 people in 25 countries where it delivers landmine and UXO clearance, mine risk education and arms management and destruction. The organisation also plays a leading policy and advocacy role, including in the campaign to make the world landmine free by 2025. In 2019, MAG cleared 66 million m² of land and benefitted more than 1.1 million people across the world.

In late 2018 MAG formed a partnership with Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA), Facebook and the Iraqi Directorate of Mine Action to launch a pilot project to test Facebook advertisements as a delivery method for explosive ordnance risk education. PM/WRA secured \$25,000 of Facebook ad credits with the aim to reach hard to reach communities and ethnic minorities in Ninewa.



MAG community liaison staff provide MRE to family members as part of emergency response in Til Azir village.

PILOT INITIATIVE

MAG launched an innovative project with Facebook and the US government to deliver mine risk education so people in northern Iraq are informed on how to stay safe from the explosive ordnance left behind after years of war.

The initiative utilized Facebook's advertising tools to deliver simple graphics to an at-risk population describing how to recognize dangers, how to stay safe if an explosive device is discovered, and how to alert the authorities to the problem.

The pilot project, which was delivered from August 23 until November 11 2019, targeted users living in Ninewa, a governorate in northern Iraq that is home to 2.5 million people.

The initiative aimed to reach at least 80 per cent of the 1.1million Facebook users in Ninewa and is supported by MAG teams working on the ground. The ads are linked to a dedicated website (www.staysafefrommines.com) containing essential information on how to stay safe from mines in three languages.

Since 2016, MAG has removed more than 17,000 explosive items from Ninewa—many found in and around homes, schools, and health facilities. MAG teams have given risk education sessions to more than 175,000 people, teaching them how to recognize, avoid, and report explosive ordnance. These sessions are typically

delivered in person by MAG staff. However, with families continuing to return home, there has been a need to develop a way to provide life-saving education to larger audiences, more quickly.

Portia Stratton, Country Director for MAG in Iraq, said: "Almost half of all landmine victims are children, so it's important as many people as possible learn how to keep their families safe until we can clear the dangerous items. Our staff usually deliver risk education in-person, which has its limits. Using Facebook to get to hundreds of thousands of at-risk people via their phones complements the in-person delivery approach and has the potential to reduce the casualties from these deadly devices."

Sol Black, a PM/WRA Program Manager at the US Department of State, said: "As part of our constant search for new and innovative ways to keep people safe from explosive hazards left by IS in Iraq, the United States Department of State is proud to partner with MAG and Facebook to deliver targeted risk education to Iraqis living in areas most heavily impacted by improvised explosive devices, landmines, and other explosive hazards left by IS."

"By leveraging an existing communications platform already used by the majority of Iraqis, this Department of State-facilitated initiative uses an innovative approach to deliver life-saving information to those Iraqis most



MATERIAL DESIGN

The materials used in the campaign were designed by MAG risk education experts in Iraq and Jordan. They were adapted from existing materials that had been field tested and successfully deployed in the country in physical formats and optimized for delivery through Facebook ads.

A series of four color themed graphics were developed using illustrations of culturally appropriate characters.

Red graphic: Aimed at children featuring young characters representative of the region, Omar and Nour. Poster reads: "Don't touch, inform others, inform an adult if you see a suspicious item."

Yellow graphic: Aimed at parents. Poster reads: "Don't risk your life, inform immediately, Mines and explosive

remnants are no game, playing with it, tampering it, or trying to move it might end your life."

Green graphic: Aimed at families. Poster reads: "Inform immediately, explosive remnants are dangerous to your family and to your society."

Purple graphic: Aimed at adults in urban settings. Poster reads: "Danger! These items are deadly and can cause serious injuries! Don't approach! Don't touch! Inform immediately."

Each post was accompanied by supporting text to provide further context and included phone numbers to contact the Iraqi Directorate of Mine Action and the Civil Defense Authority.

Each post included tags for the Iraqi Directorate of Mine Action Facebook page to provide visibility and a link to further information. An example of the supporting text follows:

“If you find an item of unexploded ordnance or another dangerous item, do not get close! Do not touch! Report what you have found to the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) on the following number: (182), or the Iraqi general Civil Defense Directorate on the following number (115).

Learn more and find out how to report a risk – www.staysafefrommines.com”

TARGETING

Targeting for the pilot campaign was developed in collaboration with Facebook Client Partner, Rich Jones, to maximize the impact. The selected marketing objective for the ads was "Reach" which maximizes the number of people that the ads are shown to. The frequency objective for the ad was set as "Higher Frequency" to ensure that the ads were delivered to users multiple times to reinforce messages and support behavior change. Ads were targeted at all 1.2million Facebook users in Ninewa Governorate aged from 13 upwards.



WEBSITE

A simple website was developed to provide an additional resource and direct people to authorities to contact if they discover an item of explosive ordnance.

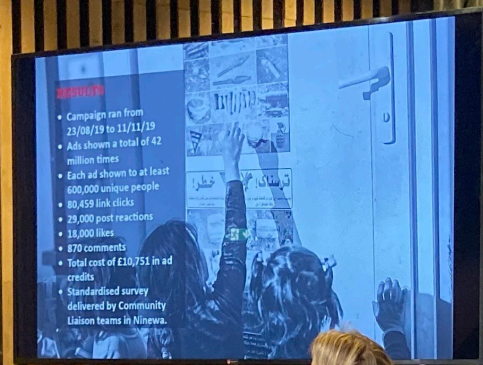
The website was developed with the support of Extra Digital, UK-based specialists in Arabic website design. The website address is: www.staysafefrommines.com.

The site supports the three main languages of Ninewa Governorate, Arabic and Kurdish dialects Badini and Sorani. It consolidates ads in each of the three different languages together in one place and provides further background information on MAG. A contact form in each

language is included at the foot of each page to facilitate reports of discoveries of explosive ordnance.

The site includes details and links to contact the Iraqi Directorate of Mine Action and the Civil Defense Authority, and is branded with the logos of each of the project partners.

During the pilot campaign period the website was visited 17,300 times but the contact form was not yet used.



Explosive Ordnance Risk Education Advisory Group (EORE AG) 4th Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, 26 November 2019.

RESULTS

The pilot campaign focused on achieving maximum reach and delivering ads multiple times to all Facebook users in Ninewa Governorate. Results from the pilot were as expected with Facebook’s advertising tools able to effectively predict reach when designing the targeting for the campaign.

Over the campaign period of August 23 to November 11 the ads were shown a total of 29million times to 983,447 unique people, representing 39% of residents in Ninewa. The ads generated 80,459 link clicks, 29,000 post reactions, 12,000 likes and 586 comments in total reaching 82% of Facebook users in Ninewa Governorate.

The total amount spent during the campaign was \$13,288. The average cost per reached individual was \$0.004, and the average cost per single ad shown was \$0.0003.

Delivering explosive ordnance risk education through

Facebook ads provided useful insights into how targeted users engage with different materials on the platform. The results demonstrate the potential value of Facebook ads as a delivery mechanism for risk education that warrants further exploration.

- **Ads shown a total of 29 million times**
- **Ads reached 983,447 unique individuals**
- **Ads delivered to 82% of Ninewa Gov Facebook users**
- **80,000 link clicks**
- **29,000 post reactions**
- **12,000 likes**
- **500 comments**

Ad	Likes	Comments	Shares	Link Clicks	Reach (unique individuals)	Impressions (total # times ad shown)	Cost to reach unique individual	Cost to deliver ad once	Cost per engagement	Amount spent
Yellow	3,038	147	45	18,593	818,934	6,211,087	\$0.004	\$0.0004	\$0.18	\$3670
Purple	3,551	215	50	26,850	640,091	8,056,554	\$0.005	\$0.0003	\$0.21	\$3385
Green	2,121	138	49	12,605	707,020	7,827,333	\$0.003	\$0.0002	\$0.15	\$2672
Red	3,784	86	86	22,411	794,859	7,135,366	\$0.004	\$0.0003	\$0.14	\$3561
TOTALS	12,494	586	230	80,459	983,447 (unique individuals across all ads)	29,230,340	\$0.004	\$0.0003	\$0.17	\$13,288



COMMENTS

Each of the Facebook ads had its own comments section, providing an opportunity for users to feedback their views on the content. During the pilot project, the ads received 586 comments across all posts.

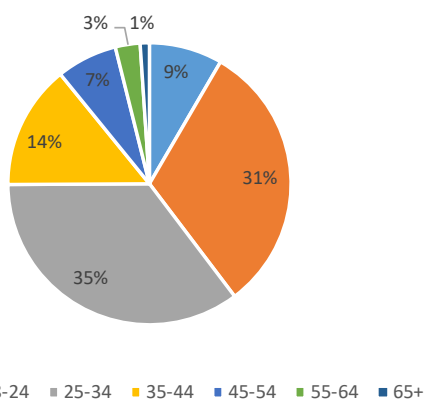
Around 30% of the comments were positive and welcoming of the information shared. Examples include: “Most welcome, dear. May God protect you” - Bassam “May God bless you, and reward you for the good deeds you have done” - Jassem “Thanks for the awareness-raising instructions” - Jotyar

A proportion of the comments expressed frustration with progress being made to remove explosive ordnance.

The project delivery coincided with increased security challenges and public protests, which often became the focus of the comments, rather than the risk education messages. Facebook ads can attract these types of comments and in the future more consideration should be given to respond to such posts and potentially hide divisive comments to streamline and support interaction.

The comment section also provides an opportunity for MAG to engage with users to answer questions, provide further information, and help the ads to reach more people through commenter’s friends and family. Due to limited resources this opportunity wasn’t pursued as part of the pilot project but if effectively resourced would add value to the initiative by supporting greater interaction, capturing additional feedback and exposing the ad contents to a greater number of people.

Ad reach by age



66% of the ads were delivered to 18-34 year olds demonstrating that the platform could be a particularly useful in reaching young adults.

INNOVATION
 Facebook is the world’s most popular social networking service with 2.45 billion monthly users. More than six million organizations use Facebook ads providing a cost effective way of reaching large numbers of people at a low cost. Facebook ads have the potential to deliver explosive ordnance risk education in areas that are difficult to reach due to cultural, financial, geographical or security reasons. The pilot project is the first time that explosive ordnance risk education messaging has been delivered on a large scale using Facebook ads.



MAG community liaison officer Hayam provides mine risk education lessons to Yazidi families in Domiz IDP camp

COMMUNITY LIAISON SURVEY

- **55% of people surveyed recalled seeing an ad in the last month.**
- **94% of people said the ads helped them to understand the risks of explosive ordnance**
- **83% of people said the ads provided them with information on how to stay safe**
- **22% of respondents could recall the full message**
- **66% of respondents could recall part of the message**

To better understand the effectiveness and reach of the pilot campaign on the population of Ninewa Governorate, MAG conducted a standardized community survey with 215 participants that was carried out by community liaison teams in the region.

The survey was conducted in Hamdaniya, Tel Keif, Shekhan, Tel Afar, Sinjar and Mosul districts from October 20 to November 7, 2019. Due to the security situation and movement restrictions, it was not possible to collect surveys in Tel Afar and Sinjar between October

27 and November 7, and November 5 and November 7 respectively. The Iraqi government also restricted access to the internet and social media, amidst anti-government protests, during the campaign period.

The survey used convenience sampling, a typical approach for pilot studies, to identify respondents.

The campaign ads were delivered to 75% men and 25% women which was reflected in the survey demographic - 77% men to 23% women. This reflects the reduced use of Facebook by women compared to men in the region.

More than half (55%) of people surveyed recalled seeing an ad in the last month. Nearly a quarter of people (22%) could recall the full message and 66% of people could recall part of the message. In terms of understanding the messages 94% of people said the ads helped them to understand the risks of explosive ordnance and 83% of people said the ads provided them with information on how to stay safe.

The in-country survey demonstrates that Facebook ads are an effective method of delivering explosive ordnance risk education. The pilot study reached the majority of Facebook users in the governorate and could act as an effective tool to complement existing risk education activities and to deliver messages to hard to reach communities.



MAG community liaison staff distribute literature and provide risk education to a family in Tulaband village, Hamdaniya, who have just returned after being displaced from their home for two and a half years.

CHALLENGES

The pilot campaign represented the first time that explosive ordnance risk education has been delivered on a large scale using Facebook ads and the initiative experienced a number of challenges.

The development of materials took longer than initially anticipated requiring around six months to complete. A series of changes were made in terms of graphic design, ad compatibility, field testing and translation to refine the materials. Due to challenges in-country and securing appropriate national mine action authority sign-off, with the approval of the materials also took longer than planned. The delay limited the length of the campaign as the ads expired on November 11.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The pilot initiative was successful and demonstrated the potential for explosive ordnance risk education through Facebook ads and the wider Facebook platform but left significant scope for improvement.

Image-based materials could be improved by providing materials better suited to adult audiences including showing photographs of actual explosive ordnance. A broader range of content would add value with opportunities to deliver content such as case studies and reports on recent incidents or discoveries of explosive ordnance. More interactive tools such as games and quizzes could be used to help enhance information recall as well as providing feedback on the impact of messaging.

Video is an increasingly popular method of consuming content on social media and provides an opportunity to deliver more effective risk education messaging.

For this pilot project it was decided to use basic single-image ads, thereby not utilizing the full potential of Facebook's various multimedia and interactive opportunities. For future campaigns it can be considered to use more complex ads and other forms of media, including interactive games and video.

A lack of dedicated capacity for the project limited opportunities to further develop the project in terms of range of materials and supporting interaction.

The format of the pilot makes it difficult to measure the change in understanding and behavior. Pre and post campaign surveys could address this shortfall.

All materials would benefit from encouraging greater interaction from users such as requesting feedback in the comments, encouraging users to share posts with friends and replying to comments.

A more sophisticated targeting approach could be used to deliver more refined messages directed at different target audiences whether by sex, age or location.

The survey delivered by community liaison teams in Ninewa Governorate captured qualitative feedback including delivering the ads in relevant Kurdish language dialects, developing materials more suited for adult audiences, using video and using organic marketing methods to share posts on relevant Facebook pages.

Ultimately, the pilot initiative demonstrated the potential for using Facebook to deliver explosive ordnance risk education to affected populations but to improve the efficiency of campaigns, further testing is required.



A MAG community liaison team delivers risk education to children in Tulaband village. In order to increase the likelihood of life-saving messages to be retained, the lessons include drawing, coloring, drama and games.

CONCLUSION

The pilot initiative represented a success in modernizing elements of explosive ordnance risk education delivery and demonstrated that Facebook is a viable vehicle with significant potential to help people stay safe from landmines and explosive ordnance.

A modest investment of \$13,000 enabled MAG to deliver explosive ordnance risk education messages to 983,447 people in Ninewa, representing 82% of Facebook users in the governorate and 39% of its residents. By delivering ads multiple times the pilot project delivered the materials 29 million times in total, serving to reinforce behavioral change.

The approach and materials delivered were modest and leave significant scope for further testing, particularly in terms of interaction, age specific materials, different targeting approaches, multimedia and complimentary organic marketing approaches in order to maximise the impact of the initiative.

Facebook ads present a massive and low-cost opportunity to complement existing in-country risk education practices in Iraq and beyond by providing a cost-effective method direct to people's computers and mobile devices. Facebook boasts around 177m users in countries where MAG works but further investigation is required to identify how many are located in contaminated areas.

The Facebook platform provides a particular opportunity to deliver risk education in areas that are inaccessible

or hard to reach and to reinforce messages to those reached through other methods of delivery. Facebook ads also provide an opportunity to deliver risk education during or immediately following conflict.

“Facebook is honoured to play a part in helping reduce landmine casualties in Iraq. With so many now using Facebook around the world, ads are another way to share urgent information with communities who might be at risk. We hope that these messages in Iraq could one day save a life.” - Facebook spokesperson

Continuing to work in partnership with Facebook and the PM/WRA is crucial to further evaluating the platform and how best to scale up the initiative in Iraq and beyond. MAG should take the opportunity to establish itself as the leader in digital risk education and continue to explore Facebook and other digital tools to deliver life-saving messages, particularly for younger audiences.

With greater investment the pilot results could be significantly improved and create the prospect of establishing Facebook ads as a critical component of the explosive ordnance risk education toolbox, directly contributing to keeping people safe in the aftermath of conflict.

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