OVERVIEW

The First-Year Mentoring Office at Brigham Young University (BYU) uses Signal Vine to connect newly admitted first-year students with their peer mentors. Using a text messaging platform adds privacy, security, and oversight to BYU’s mentor communications. First-year students in the texting program are more engaged and report stronger relationships with their mentors than students who are not part of the program.

Peer mentors began to text first-year students using their personal cell phones. Staff quickly realized that personal texting wasn’t an effective long-term strategy because of challenges with:

- **Time Management.** Texting from their personal cell phones meant that peer mentors were on call around the clock.
- **Oversight.** Staff had no way of knowing if and when peer mentors were sending text messages to students.
- **Privacy & Security.** Communications were spread across hundreds of personal devices instead of one central system.

IMPLEMENTATION

Peer mentors and staff realized that text messaging worked well with first-year students. They simply needed a better way to do it.

In 2015, BYU first implemented Signal Vine. Program staff worked closely with a team of peer mentors to create a calendar of text messages. The purpose of these text messages was to remind students of upcoming deadlines and prompt them to take timely action on required tasks.

Every peer mentor had an account on Signal Vine with access to his or her caseload of students. When a scheduled text message was sent out to students, peer mentors logged in to the platform.

CHALLENGES

Before BYU started using Signal Vine, newly admitted first-year students missed important information about transitioning to college. Peer mentors struggled to get in touch with the students they were assigned to mentor. Something needed to change.

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- BYU Peer Mentor

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during their assigned office hours to provide one-on-one support to students. The peer mentoring program now had the oversight it needed without sacrificing its personal touch.

BYU originally implemented Signal Vine as a pilot program. The program team ran a test to measure the effect of Signal Vine on program outcomes before expanding text messaging to all first-year peer mentor groups.

**RESULTS**

BYU tested Signal Vine by dividing first-year students into three groups: one that received text messages from mentors’ personal cell phones, one that received text messages through Signal Vine, and one that didn’t receive any text messages. Students in the two texting groups received the same message content and timing.

Program staff measured significant differences between the two texting groups. First-year students in the Signal Vine group communicated more frequently with their peer mentors. They reported stronger relationships with peer mentors and saw more value in having a peer mentor.

Students asked more questions in text messages than they did in emails or phone calls, which helped peer mentors provide deeper and more meaningful guidance.

The BYU First-Year Mentoring Office continues to use Signal Vine today and now texts with all incoming freshmen.

“I love Signal Vine because most of my students are a lot more comfortable texting me than actually talking to me. It allows me to respond to them more quickly and easily than I otherwise could.”

- BYU Peer Mentor

**OUTCOMES**

**Increased Engagement.** First-year students communicate more frequently with peer mentors using Signal Vine.

**Stronger Relationships.** Students in the Signal Vine group report stronger relationships with their peer mentors.

**Better First-Year Experience.** First-year students see more value in the mentoring relationship when using Signal Vine.