

U.S. ARMY RECRUITING: IMPROVING ADVERTISING, COMMUNITY OUTREACH, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

U.S. ARMY RECRUITING: IMPROVING ADVERTISING, COMMUNITY OUTREACH, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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Recruiting an all-volunteer force sufficient to meet the demands of combat operations and our nation's other commitments is a significant challenge. Essentially, the recruiting challenge for USAREC has evolved to a matter of how to organize its major recruiting campaigns to achieve a synchronized effort across the United States and on military installations around the world. Particularly critical in overall success is how USAREC envisions, develops, and operationalizes improvements in its efforts to connect with the changing youth population that is the key recruiting pool in the future. This paper will explore how the command must develop and implement an improved Information Line of Operation (LOO) within its overall recruiting strategy. Increased effectiveness in this LOO (Advertising, community outreach , and social media operations) will directly impact future recruiting operations effectiveness and offer the best opportunity to reach the targeted generational audiences. Overall, this change will be essential to Recruiting Command providing the all-volunteer Army with qualified enlistees, by empowering its recruiting force to rapidly adjust to changing information environments in order to persuade the next generation of prospects to enlist.

U.S. ARMY RECRUITING: IMPROVING ADVERTISING, COMMUNITY OUTREACH, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Recruiting an all-volunteer force sufficient to meet the demands of combat operations and our nation's other commitments continues to be a significant challenge. In 2007 President George Bush announced a plan to expand the Army's end strength by 65,000 active-duty Soldiers, 1,000 Reservists, and 8,200 Army National Guardsmen by fiscal year 2013.¹ However, in 2008, the ongoing operational stress on the force based upon long deployments and an increasing demand for Army forces led to a decision to accelerate and complete this increase by FY 2010.² During this period of rapid growth from 2005 through 2008, Recruiting Command did not consistently meet the Department of Defense's (DOD's) quality recruitment requirement for 90% of new recruits to possess a high school diploma. Additionally, meeting DOD recruiting quality goals has been difficult since only 3 out of 10 youths in ages 17 to 24 qualified for Army service without a waiver. Young Americans who are overweight, who have educational shortfalls (no high school diploma), who score poorly on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), and who have legal or moral issues dramatically reduce the eligible pool of potential enlistees to 2 out of every 10 youths.³ The February 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report describes this rising recruiting challenge in very stark terms:

...In coming years, we will face additional challenges to our ability to attract qualified young men and women into the Armed forces. Among them are a large and growing proportion of youth who are ineligible to serve in the military for medical, criminal, ethical, or physical reasons. We will also be challenged to recruit personnel with specialized skills in such areas as foreign languages, medicine, and computer operations.⁴

U.S. Army Recruiting Command's (USAREC) analysis of these challenges has led to several new programs initiated in the last two years to expand the population

eligible for enlistment. The Assessment of Recruiting Motivation and Strength (ARMS) program addresses obesity because the Army has been rejecting individuals who do not meet body fat requirements. An ARMS authorizes enlistments of overweight volunteers who are otherwise physically fit and eager to join the Army. Two additional programs have been initiated to address recruiting otherwise qualified youth with educational shortfalls. First, the Two-Tier Attrition Screen authorizes acceptance of volunteers who have no high school diplomas, but who are otherwise physically fit and who have attributes that indicate they will succeed in basic training. Second, The Army Preparatory School for future enlisted Soldiers (not to be confused with the West Point Preparatory School) opened in August 2008 in order to help promising individuals without high school diplomas earn a General Educational Development certificate in 4 weeks and to prepare these volunteers for basic training. Selected “Prep School” individuals must score in the upper percentile on the AFQT, pass the two-tier screen and require no waivers for Army service. Finally, the Army has extended the maximum recruiting age from 40 to 42⁵.

In all, developing these holistic approaches to recruiting have increased the number of qualified recruits, but these programs’ long-term viability will be determined only by the yet proven performance of Soldiers accepted through these means. These programs supplement traditional recruiting operations and are a departure from the Army’s reliance on its very traditional and accepted tactics, techniques and procedures to identify qualified recruits. In effect, the Army has reframed the recruiting “problem set” by using imaginative approaches to recruit sufficient numbers of qualified individuals to meet current goals.

Essentially, the recruiting challenge for USAREC has evolved to a matter of how to organize its major recruiting campaigns to achieve a synchronized effort across the United States and on military installations around the world. ⁶ Developing a “strategic approach” should include several lines of operations for diverse, important efforts in order to address changing youth norms. Further, these lines of operations should specify actions to transform the current operational environment in order to meet Recruiting Command’s goals.

Particularly critical in overall success is how USAREC envisions, develops, and operationalizes improvements in its efforts to connect with the changing youth population that is the key recruiting pool in the future. This paper will explore how the command must develop and implement an improved Information Line of Operation (LOO) within its overall recruiting strategy. To enable success, the Informational LOO focus is addressing generation Y and I norms with the specific ways and means to include: Effective advertising that expands awareness of opportunities for Army service; Community Outreach to build trust in the Army; Cyber Recruiting -- increasing the most prevalent form of communications used by this generation – “Social Media”.

Recruiting an all-volunteer force sufficient to meet the demands of combat operations and our nation’s other commitments is a significant challenge. An effective Information LOO must include an effective integration of advertising, community outreach, and social media. Increased effectiveness in this LOO will directly impact future recruiting operations effectiveness and offer the best opportunity to reach the targeted generational audiences. Overall, this change will be essential to Recruiting Command providing the all-volunteer Army with qualified enlistees, by empowering its

recruiting force to rapidly adjust to changing information environments in order to persuade the next generation of prospects to enlist.

Generation Y and I

Younger generations are connected to the “information environment” in dramatically different ways than past generations and in response the Army’s recruiting efforts must recognize and adapt to these changes in order to be successful in the future. Generation Y and I composed of 15-24 year olds use of social media for ‘information-mining” and decision-making in ways that are a vast departure from previous generational norms and further complicates the current USAREC recruiting efforts. The key watch word for this generation is “Trust,” or desire to verify and assess the credibility and validity of the vast amount of information that is put before them on a daily basis. Equally key is that they must trust the physical and personal sources of this information, so evaluating the influencers that they come in contact with is an important part of their decision making. Close friends, family members, key developmental influencers, and social network friends and groups make up the baseline of trusted influencers for generation Y and I. Therefore, any effective methods for making and impact on the beliefs and perceptions of this generation cannot just start from the outside – methods must include a significant “inside-out” approach among these key groups.

Describing generation Y and I as “the most supervised generations” in recent history is not farfetched. They have always worn safety helmets and straps, played on soft playground surfaces and entertained themselves with digital media. They grew up with “helicopter parents” (term coined because of their constant hovering over their

child) watching their every move and for the most part have never experienced long periods of unsupervised outside play.⁷

Generation Y and I are the first generations that were born and raised after the invention of the internet. As a result, they are a very “Tech Savvy” group, and they take for granted the ability to pull information any time or anywhere. The norms for generation Y and I include a reliance on individualized communications gear, portable computer devices, and even TV programs that are programmable to their individual wants and desires.⁸ The leading social networking method for these generations are FaceBook, with more than 40% of users spending an average of 83 minutes a week on the site, and MySpace as a close second in popularity.⁹ Essentially, the internet has played a major role in how this generation views and perceives the World, and will continue to play a significant role in how they receive and pass personal communications and pick potential career options.

Further compounding the challenging recruiting environment is that fewer Americans are now considering joining the Army, parental support for military service is declining, benefits of military service are misunderstood, schools are limiting recruiters’ access to potential recruits, generation Y and I use of social media discourage military service, and youths considering military service rank the Army as their last option. Further, RAND Corporation and Government Accounting Office trend reports depict an environment in which influencers of targeted audience age groups are increasingly disinclined to encourage military service. Ironically, the trend continues to indicate these influencers overwhelming support for the military. Even so, 65% of surveyed

influencers would not encourage or recommend military service to a relative or to someone they know.¹⁰

In response to this dramatically new environment, the recruiting command leadership must overhaul its strategic messaging and recruiter training methods. U.S. Army recruiters may only have one good opportunity to gain the trust of generation Y and I potential applicants, and the current sales approach will not resonate with these generations. Key details of the recruiting messaging must include understanding generation Y and I values, understanding the role of influencers, understanding their need for career tailoring, and understanding their need for high-tech operations.¹¹

Advertising

Advertising is the awareness foundation needed to achieve success inside USAREC's Informational LOO initiatives. In the past, Recruiting Command relied on broad-based media advertising to address new problems in the informational environment. The advertising approach used was designed to increase brand awareness and to highlight for those making choices for their future that the Army is the best choice of military service. This brand-awareness approach focused attention on the desirability, personal benefits, and potential rewards of service in the Army. However, unless expanded awareness leads to action (that is, it brings volunteers to recruiters), it is useless.¹² A recent Gallop poll on honesty and ethics ranked advertising practitioners near the bottom of the list of "trustable individuals", falling somewhere between car and insurance representatives – a virtual death-zone for anyone attempting to be successful among a generation of youth who see trust as the absolute cornerstone for building and maintaining effective relationships. Perhaps the Army's continued reliance on advertisements to enhance recruiting is mostly an exercise in

futility, because in the public's eye, it may be viewed as an Army "contract with the devil".¹³ However advertising with a quality repetitious message is the essential stepping stone to build Army awareness and plant the seeds of Army service as a viable career choice.

In *The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR*, authors Al and Laura Ries claim that advertisers strongly defend their work on the basis of enhancing awareness of the brand, building brand value, and creating an emotional bond with consumers.¹⁴ They also note that advertising is not worth its cost unless the ad campaign is designed to reinforce an ongoing public relations effort or to strengthen third-party endorsements. Past experience in Recruiting Command advertising campaigns support Ries' assertions. The *Army of One* campaign failed to build any emotional bond with the targeted audience and essentially confused most Americans. More importantly, the *Army of One* campaign failed to link to establish groups of American youth and as a result failed to move the targeted audience in the direction desired – to enlist in the Army. In the end, the Army's most recent major failure to meet its recruiting goal came in 2005 during the *Army of One* recruiting campaign when the Army failed to properly assess and plan for the interrelationship of many essential factors already outlined.

In response to this ineffective effort, the Army and Recruiting Command's Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 strategic marketing plan established three goals designed to overcome the one-sided and confusing approach utilized during the *Army of One* campaign: First, new efforts focused on "Trend reversal" by portraying the Army as a valued organization that Americans support, recommend, and want to join. Second, a focus on better efficiency aimed to achieve all missions within constraints of the FY 10 budget and force

manning reductions, including a 41% reduction (FY09 - \$278,013,365; FY 10 - \$163,000,000) of the commands FY10 marketing budget.¹⁵ Third, efforts focused on improving perceptions of the Army by emphasizing the value of Army service.¹⁶

On the surface, the advertising challenge for recruiting is simplified by drafting affordable ads that portray the Army favorably and must encourage young people to join the Army. However, as Al and Laura Ries point out, it is not just advertising, but effective messaging that matters. Therefore, the overall Army advertising effort must be linked to and nested within an overall public relations campaign that seeks to improve the public's perception of the Army as a valued institution, and one worthy of service and sacrifice by the American people.¹⁷ In addition, a key strategic advertising challenge is to develop a 'stickiness factor' that causes prospects to stop, to read or listen, to remember, and then to act on the Army message.¹⁸ However developing a sticky Army message is complicated by the fact that the average American is exposed to 254 different commercial messages daily, along with numerous of web sites that are available on the internet as they access a variety of information sources.¹⁹ This "informational bombardment" can lead to a type of unknowing perceptual immunity to advertising, as well as to telemarketing (cold calling is a standard operating procedure for recruiting efforts), direct mail advertising, and spam e-mail. Making sure the Army message does not go into "one ear and out the other" and that it sticks is a critical task.²⁰

The Recruiting Command's FY 10 approach to creating a retainable message involves creating a three stage process for prospect appeal that includes awareness, engagement, and activation. In stage one, Awareness messaging is path-neutral and is

designed to appeal to the widest audience. Awareness ads (promulgated on National TV, mailings, regional radio, and combined with sponsorship programs with – NASCAR, NHRA, and the High School All American Bowl) attempt to build broad interest and relevance through the three path-neutral strategic platforms of leadership, education, and opportunities. These Army- sponsored events are unique experiences but are showing only marginal success; post-event surveys of such major awareness and engagement events report an average of only 3% recall of Army sponsorship.²¹

In stage two, virtual and physical engagement programs must build on earlier general awareness programs. In this stage, prospects should be able to ask questions and engage in face-to-face and web dialogues with Soldiers and Army veterans. The “goarmy.com” website provides prospects with opportunities to explore, including interactive videos and opportunities to e-mail with a contract or cyber recruiter. However, a static website and a contractor (often a retired Soldier or middle-aged civilian) serving as the Army representative for the on-line chat sessions have demonstrated little impact on the Command’s recruiting environment or prospect’s informational mining desires; a DOD survey on website usage reported only 7% of targeted youths visited the [Army’s official](http://Army's official website) website.²²

In an effort to increase effectiveness in virtual web efforts they are supplemented by physical face-to-face opportunities with national touring teams. For example, the Virtual Army Experience (VAE) Alpha includes 6 Convoy Skill Engagement Trainers HMMWVs with 3 screen interactive gaming systems and 2 over watch positions featuring TOW ITAS (long-range anti-tank) Missile systems with 3 screen interactive gaming systems, 12 *America’s Army* laptop gaming systems, and a Packbot robot. The

VAE is strategically deployed to high attendance events (air shows, State Fairs, National Conventions etc) that attract at least 20,000 visitors. But the Army has only one VAE Alpha available for use, and consequently has only limited opportunities for face-to-face contact with the targeted population. In all, despite all of its efforts to convey the Army message using the above efforts, only 3% of the targeted population recalls the message using these methods.²³

In stage three of the advertising effort, “Activation” is heavily dependent on relationship management. This stage is designed to educate prospects by creating “touch points” and tagging (through mailings, Television, and text messaging) events to enhance future prospect’s data-mining efforts that are then reinforced by face-to-face interactions with recruiters that are necessary to establish the trust sought by generations Y and I prospects. Research further reveals generation Y and I’s desire to control the recruiter relationship by using a social medium of their choice to manage the method and frequency of their interactions. The current recruiting approach (cold calls, spam e-mail, unsolicited contact) to establish touch points falls dramatically short of meeting generation Y and I expectations. Additionally, Recruiting Command’s heavy dependence on direct mail, TV/radio ads, career builder job postings, and special mission job postings do not effectively communicate with an audience that uses social media as the bedrock of its communication and information research.²⁴ Continuing to cling to comfortable but outdated approaches are a recipe for perpetuation “comfortable failure” and must change if USAREC is truly optimize the advantages at hand in the current and rapidly changing information environment.

By enhancing on-line recruiting by creating opportunities for prospects to experience the Army for themselves through interaction with Soldiers on social networking sites and high tech on-line experience appealing to their network norms are logical transitions to appeal to unique generation Y and I information gathering norms.

In contrast to previous efforts, The “*Army Strong*” campaign attempts to incorporate advertising across all elements of the three stages of the Command’s strategic approach to mission success. In this case, using a simple and direct approach has shown their worth, as the “*Army Strong*” continues to increase brand recognition because its message is clear and understandable to the audience. DOD surveys on the *Army Strong* and *Strength Like No Other* advertising campaigns indicate that approximately 70% of the targeted audience finds the ads interesting and 25% wanting more information.²⁵ Analysis and research supports the axiom that people will watch when they can easily understand the message, that they will quickly dismiss advertising when the message is confusing.²⁶ As noted before, Ries’ warning remains accurate:

Advertising cannot change minds. Advertising cannot move brands from one position to another inside a mind. Advertising cannot replace an existing brand in the mind with a new brand. All of these jobs are outside the scope of an advertising solution.

As echoed by Admiral Michael G. Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, our military frequently suffers from failure to communicate effectively: “No, our problem isn’t caves; it’s credibility. Our messages lack credibility because we haven’t invested enough in building trust and relationships, and we haven’t always delivered on promises.” It is ironic that while the Chairman was focused in his statement on how our message is not resonating among overseas populations in developing more trust of U.S. intentions and actions abroad, his words also apply to the challenges that the

recruiting community faces among our “Youngest Generation”. The Chairman was not commenting specifically on recruiting, but he properly expressed our critical need to build trust and relationships with the larger public.

The improved “*Army Strong*” advertising campaign has expanded awareness of the Army and laid the groundwork for recruiting mission success. But advertising alone cannot accomplish the critical task of building the necessary bond with the Command’s targeted audience. Nesting the advertising and “goarmy.com” campaigns with the Army’s community outreach efforts and effective use of social media must be effectively linked at the lowest level to capitalize on the *Army Strong* campaign by building a trusting relationship with future targeted recruiting populations.

Community Outreach

Developing the right group of supporters and enablers (beyond the recruiter network) that will spread the recruiting message is essential to increasing credibility and appeal. To enhance trust and credibility among Generation Y and I youth that are based upon recognized and reliable members of the community, establishing local civilian Army advisory boards to assist recruiting and at times leading local Army public relations efforts is the second key to success inside the Information LOO. Grassroots movements are not new to politicians, but are a radical departure from traditional recruiting methods. Outreach programs build local advisory boards of key community leaders that create an Army recruiting movement by disseminating the Army message and engaging their local communities. Gaining support of community leaders further eliminates potential barriers to receiving and understanding the Army message. Additionally, those community leaders are the same group of influencers’ generation Y and I look to for guidance on future career choices.

The *U.S. Army Grassroots Community Relations Playbook* establishes a foundation for building and sustaining community relations. Through use of local “grassroots” programs recruiting efforts seeks to build trust among community’s leaders and centers of influences’ (education, ethnic enclaves, business and social leaders) by addressing their lack of knowledge of Army programs and their misconceptions about Army service. These programs enable and actively encourage community leaders to serve as advocates for the Army among local populations, thus increasing the legitimacy and credibility of recruiting efforts. Community leaders that trust the Army can positively impact the local recruiting environment and those leaders who serve on Army advisory boards become the grassroots trust-builders. In fact, recruitment of an advisory board member in itself is a significant recruiting effort. Currently, the worldwide public relations firm of Weber Shandwick Worldwide is contracted to support the development of advisory boards for Recruiting Command and their initial criteria for board membership recruitment include:

- Two years terms without compensation
- Willingness to be educated on Army mission, structure, culture, and recruiting activities
- Willingness to use their influence and connections to support the Army recruiting efforts.

The first of many community advisory boards was established in Dallas, Texas, as Weber’s efforts focused on local politicians, business leaders, and a few educators. Recruiting and forming the Dallas Board members went smoothly, but the board’s overall effect on the Dallas market was negligible. In contrast, Weber’s 2008 -2009

effort in Los Angeles was strongly supported by and integrated with the local Recruiting Battalion and 6th Recruiting Brigade's efforts to form an effective board for the Southern California operating area. The Army recruiting team wanted board members with specific social abilities, regardless their job titles or positions. The Brigade's leadership insisted that potential board members possess social skills to appeal across a variety of cultural and economic boundaries. While positions in the local community were a factor in recruiting board members, leaders of the local recruiting effort; valued board members who were respected among the local families and youth population and, more importantly who could encourage qualified young people to join the Army. The Los Angeles board met for the first time in February 2009 and immediately began to improve the recruiting environment. In 2009, the LA Recruiting Battalion went from ranking in the bottom 10 in mission accomplishment to achieving 100% mission accomplishment for the first time in the Battalion's 34-year history. Once the board understood the message they quickly established multiple opportunities for physical engagement by local recruiters. Ethnic enclaves, numerous community colleges, reluctant school boards and numerous high schools opened their doors for engagement with the local recruiting team and actively supported the recruiting efforts. In the past those relationships would take years to build, but through the boards efforts they were achieved in a few short weeks. This success in large part resulted from the Advisory's Board's ability to positively influence and change the environment and create an environment that favorable viewed and advocated Army service.

In analyzing the Los Angeles board as an example, the structure and selection of the board emerge as the key elements needed in developing such an effective

“grassroots’ appeal that resonates with the local populace. In Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* the authors describe the kinds of people who served on the LA Army Advisory Board and provide a useful model for identifying and selecting the right kinds of people to serve on advisory boards nationwide. Gladwell classifies these influential people into three categories of “Connectors”, “Mavens”, and “Salesmen”. In all, no single personality type or contributor is key to communicating the Army’s message effectively; rather it is essential to build a trio of personality types serving as primary board members that offers the greatest opportunity to spread the Army recruiting message and make it stick. Ideally, an effective civilian advisory board includes Mavens who know the expert Army message, Connectors who provide the social glue and connectivity to embed the Army message in the community, and Salesmen whose persuasion makes the message stick with our intended audience.²⁷

“Connectors” seem to know everyone in a community and have the knack of making friends and acquaintances. They are a key asset because they sustain viable social connections and most importantly, they belong to numerous subcultures. In their interaction with others, Connectors are curious, self confident, sociable, and energetic, and they have the ability to bring a wide variety of individuals together.²⁸ Connectors are ideal advisory board leaders because they enable the next two types of members – the Mavens and Salesmen to accomplish their key functions of spreading the Army message effectively.

The second category of contributors on effective boards is the “Mavens”. The word Maven comes from Yiddish and it means “one who accumulates knowledge.”²⁹

“Mavens” are not just passive collectors of information and use their vast knowledge base to solve other people’s problems. They accumulate knowledge about many issues and gain satisfaction from sharing practical wisdom and advice.³⁰ When brought in to serve on an Army advisory team, the Mavens thirst for knowledge causes them to study, inquire, and quickly become the “local” experts on Army programs and opportunities. Then the Mavens greatest contribution then becomes their desire and ability to share this new knowledge with educators, parents, and students.

Army advisory boards should also include the third category of “Salesmen”, because these key contributors who have the skills to leverage the connections and credible knowledge provided by the other board members in order to persuade those who are unconvinced by generic, mass messages.³¹ Salesmen are always upbeat, outgoing and persuasive in their interactions with potential recruits; their energy, personal appeal and optimism are contagious, and they add the personal and emotional appeal component to local efforts that build upon the facts presented about the value and contributions of Army service.

The best example of an effective Connector, Maven and Salesman trio in action is the Army’s “Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest” (MAVNI) pilot recruiting program that began in February 2009. The MAVNI program provides opportunities for non-US citizens to volunteer for Army service; these potential recruits do not have permanent resident status but are in the U.S. legally. MAVNI’s two critical need areas are health care professionals and foreign language and culture experts. In the first category, health professionals are individuals that must meet all professional criteria and certification for their fields and pass an English proficiency test. Currently 297

positions are available for active and reserve duty. In the second category, of foreign language and cultural skills there are needs for over 35 languages with 593 positions open for active and reserve duty.³² Finally, MAVNI applicants must meet all basic service requirements and score in the upper percentile on the Military Aptitude Test. New York City was selected to test the MAVNI program due to its cultural diversity, and for similar reasons LA was added in April 2009 as the West Coast test site.³³ The program was not advertised by traditional means (of TV, Radio, and Direct Mailings); instead it depended on local recruiters to identify candidates with appropriate language skills or medical expertise which seemed like a monumental task for local recruiters. However, MAVNI triggered a recruiting movement a few weeks after launch; it attracted nationwide awareness before LA was able to process its first applicants.

The movement started when a few Connectors discovered the opportunity to potentially accelerate or “fast-track” U.S. citizenship. They then passed the information to Mavens, who built MAVNI information websites. Salesmen brought it all together by sharing their Army experiences on personal blogs and encouraging those qualified to apply. The blogs and websites spread the program’s requirements and benefits nationwide. When local recruiters began processing applicants in April 2009, hundreds of qualified prospects lined up to fill the spaces available. The Salesmen and Maven blogs assisted prospects by identifying recruiting stations and individual recruiters who understood the program requirements and could quickly process applications. Program-focused blogs also developed trust and credibility among potential recruits by identifying recruiting stations and recruiters that should be avoided.

The most impressive success of the MAVNI pilot was its demonstrated ability to recruit qualified applicants to serve in a military occupational specialty with difficult qualification requirements and precise training opportunity windows without the need for advertising or recruiter's cold calling; this accomplishment cannot be overstated. The MAVNI program needed only a few exceptional individuals to spread the message and fill the Army's requirements.

The informal MAVNI advocates' exploitation of social networking websites (blogs, Facebook fan and group sites) dramatically increased MAVNI recruitment success, and provided insights that might also be useful in understanding how best to use new communications approaches through the use of on-line, social networking sites. As noted earlier, generation Y and generation I live in the cyber social networking space. After using advertising to build awareness and capitalizing on advisory board environmental support to build community trust, the last informational critical task must be communicate with the targeted audience through the medium they are most familiar and comfortable with -- in cyber space.

Cyber Recruiting - Social Media

The transition from mass communications to an emphasis on social media as a recruiting tool is a major paradigm shift from traditionally accepted, "tried and true" recruiting operations. The Recruiting Commands' established worldwide methods of cold calling e-mail spam, personal referrals, and limited face-to-face opportunities do not address the near-term generational challenges and opportunities previously discussed. Optimizing the advantages of social media for connecting with our youngest generation gets at the core of generation Y and I information-mining desires. Social networks in play among Generation Y and I are individual-centric and allow users to

share ideas, activities, events and interest within user-chosen networks or groups. For future success, efforts must gain access to two essential networks: internal networks and an external network. Internal social networks are “by invitation only” and require permission from the user and network administrator to participate. The internal network creates an elite status for members and creates an open forum for discussions and sharing of ideas. An external network is an open public network available to all web users and designed to communicate groups’ ideas and attract new members. Both internal and external networks create a feeling of community among the users as well as a sense of belonging desired by Generation Y and I.

As the Army considers using social media for recruiting, it must work within current DOD policy requirements, many of which are currently under review as they attempt to balance strategic risk (for security and protection of information systems) with the flexibility needed to support operational (and recruiting) requirements needed for effectiveness. Two guiding documents apply to all DOD public communications: Operational Security guidelines and requirements, and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Both of these emphasize that all Soldiers and units must conduct themselves professionally in the virtual world on the same level as they would in the real world using face-to-face communications. As new guidelines emerge all social media efforts (Blog, Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr) should also include a comments policy which determines acceptable dialogue, and such, the policy should ban profanity, malicious comments, and off-topic comments. In addition to policy, three guiding principles for use of social media set strategic guidance on cyber recruiting: 1) Presence – to clearly communicate the Army message; 2) Relevance, to provide value- added content to the overall

strategy; and finally 3) Prominence – tailor the DOD profile consistent with the content.³⁴ Observing these established strategic guidance's will assist in mitigating potential risks of using the social media to attract qualified recruits. Additionally, although there are risks, the needs to reach the targeted audience in a media they desire far outreach the potential missteps and the command will have to tolerate honest mistakes to continue to grow the right leaders who are able to adapt quickly to the changing recruiting environment in cyber space.

Strategic decisions and operational guidelines are established at the highest level, but decentralized control of the cyber effort is necessary for successful recruiting. The local recruiting station is the best start point in a decentralized effort. Incorporating the social network expansion will require an off-network stand-alone computer system tied to a local internet service. The baseline efforts for recruiting command should focus on Myspace, Facebook, Twitter and Flickr for socialization and connecting with the targeted audience.

Facebook is the social media first line of cyber engagement for Army recruiters to reach generation Y and I. The recruiting station's effort should include constructing sites with photos that everyone will recognize, contact information, and other information that informs Facebook users about what the organization does. The recruiting station's efforts should include both a "Fan" and "Group" site options. The "Fan" site consists of stand-alone pages on which the recruiting station commander can post photos of recruiting events, updates on new enlistment bonus programs, specific military occupational specialty requirements, and ways to access more in-depth information. Through "Fans" sites, those interested can join the site and post comments

on programs, services, etc and connect with others, all without approval of the recruiting station web administrator.

The “stand-alone” group page within Facebook enhances recruiting by creating a sense of belonging. The recruiting station can maintain group pages for their assigned high schools and universities. A high school group page may include profiles of current future Soldiers in the delayed entry program, current Soldiers, Army alumni, parents of Soldiers, teachers, school administrators, and other students interested in Army service. Students then use the group page to reach out electronically to communicate with current Soldiers who have similar backgrounds. Such contacts enable prospects to acquire ground truth on Army service in a method they are most comfortable with – directly with other Facebook members. The station commander would serve as the group’s administrator and tailor the stations recruiting efforts in accord with the environmental changes reflected in the current level of interest and questions asked. Likewise, negative comments offer opportunities for dialogues to overcome misinformation on the Army. If the primary group page concern is basic training, the station commander could then tailor the next face-to-face presentation and engage in on-line dialogue to address those concerns.

Blogs are a conversational web site designed to share news and opinions. More importantly, blogs invite interaction.³⁵ The conversational tone and give-and-take format of blogs enables individual recruiters to connect with prospects in a medium that is familiar and welcomed. This enables recruiters to engage the targeted population as the command’s best spokespersons, rather than a contractor operating on the goarmy.com site.

A third option is to use Twitter, a micro-blogging site. Messaging on a twitter site sends the “tweet” to all of the individuals who follow the recruiting station through micro-blogging. A station commander’s twittering should focus on the important facts, briefly but informatively. Twitter also has numerous uses for command and control of a widely dispersed recruiting force. A commander’s tweets could share environmental changes, identify the hot question on Facebook or blog, offer heads-up policy changes, or praise Soldier performance - to cite only a few tweeting functions. Twittering also provides links to multimedia sites to encourage further information-mining by potential prospects. Future Soldiers within a high school environment might also be interested in the station commander’s tweets and are more likely to share the tweets information with friends if these brief messages (links to multimedia – the hottest new video) stick. Then the future Soldiers may share them with other prospects, thereby increasing the recruiting pool.

A fourth potential valuable approach might be Flickr, which is simply an on-line scrapbook of quality photos. Using a Flickr site to exhibit significant high school and university events as well as photos of past, current, and future successful Soldiers also appeals to current and near-future generations. Flickr essentially becomes the photo gallery of the recruiting stations alumni. Tracking the success of career Soldiers and Army alums becomes a visible and viable proof of the value of becoming a Soldier and starting any career with the Army.

Incorporating all elements of social media into emerging recruiting effort is a somewhat risky strategic decision. Recruiting command is a tightly controlled command with specific regulations and policies governing all aspects of the accessions process. Transitioning to social media as a baseline recruiting tool empowers leaders at the

lowest levels and assumes that they will understand the broader implications of their actions when using social media. Recruiters' uses of social media can be risky, but with the appropriate leadership, policy guidance and supervision by commanders and website administrators, recruiters can use social media to reach targeted audiences with minimal risks of inappropriate comments and misperception among youth population groups from the Army recruiting force.

Summary

Recruiting an all-volunteer Army sufficient to meet the demands of combat operations and our nation's other commitments is a significant challenge. The February 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report paints a stark future for the Army recruiting effort and forecasts difficulty in attracting qualified young men and women into the Armed forces. This future forecasting highlights the need for U.S. Army Recruiting Command to review the current recruiting environment and begin necessary changes to tactics, techniques, and procedures to create the flexibility needed to solve future complex recruiting challenges.

Shaping the near- term environment is the emergence of Generation Y and I as the major focus of recruiting efforts that will produce the next generation of Soldiers. Generation Y and I lack of certain key personal qualifications and inner desires to serve in the military will further compound the recruiting challenges in the next 5-10 years. Those generational young Americans who have educational shortfalls, are overweight, cannot pass the AFQT, and who have moral and prior behavior challenges reduces the potential qualified recruiting pool to 2 out of 10 youths. Additionally, because the younger generations are connected to the "information environment" in dramatically

different ways than past generations, the Army's recruiting efforts must recognize and adapt to these changes in order to be successful in the future.

Recruiting success is dependent on developing an effective Informational LOO and must include an effective integration of advertising, community outreach, and social networking. Increased effectiveness in this LOO will directly impact future recruiting effectiveness and offer the best opportunity to reach the targeted generational audience. There are a variety of major challenges in developing a recruiting effort powered by an effective, persuasive message that is offered in methods that are not only the most acceptable but, more importantly, the most effective. First, approaches must be compelling and reach as many people as possible using the methods that they are comfortable with on a daily basis. Second, the recruiting message must possess a credible promise for future personal improvement and that it can have a significant impact that actually moves the receiving audience to action. Third, developing the right group of supporters and enablers that will spread the recruiting message and enhance trust among the receiving groups is essential to increasing credibility and appeal.

Laying a foundation for success is the "*Army Strong*" campaign that incorporates all elements of the three stages of the recruiting command's strategic approach and is the first key to success inside an Information LOO. Those successful, essential elements in the "*Army Strong*" campaign have been dependent on three elements. In Stage One, recruiters have built awareness in order to appeal to the largest audience and build the broadest possible interest and relevance through path neutral platforms of leadership, education, and opportunities. In Stage Two, advancing engagement programs that build on earlier awareness programs and are anchored by goarmy.com

opportunities to explore interactive videos and engage in face-to-face and web dialogues with recruiters. Finally, in Stage Three, enabling “Activation” to build relationships by creating “touch points” events to enhance future prospects data-mining efforts reinforced with additional face-to-face interactions with recruiters is essential to establish the trust sought by Generation Y and I prospects. Throughout all three stages the strategic advertising challenge is to develop a message “stickiness” factor that causes prospects to stop, to read or listen, to remember, and then to act on the Army message.³⁶ So a quality message that appeals to the targeted audience with sufficient repetition nested with community outreach and innovative use of social networking to achieve the stickiness factor is the objective.

Establishing local civilian Army advisory boards to assist recruiting and at times leading local Army public relations efforts will be the second key to success inside the Information LOO. Grassroots movements are not new to politicians, but are a radical departure from traditional recruiting methods. Outreach programs must expand and create local advisory boards of key community leaders that create an Army recruiting movement by disseminating the Army message and engaging their local communities. Gaining support of community leaders further eliminates potential barriers to receiving and understanding the Army message. Additionally, those community leaders are the same group of influencers’ generation Y and I look to for guidance on future career choices. As noted above, bringing together a trio of personality types who work together as primary board members offers the greatest opportunity to spread the Army recruiting message while concurrently building and perpetuating trust among the youth population where future success will lie. A civilian advisory board includes community

individuals who know the Army message, individuals who provide the social glue and connectivity to embed the Army message in the community, and individuals whose persuasion makes the message stick with our intended audience and causes them to take action – join the Army.³⁷

The third and final key to success inside the Information LOO must include the use of social networking at the lowest, most personal levels to connect with the youth targeted audience. The “cyber cornerstone” for recruiting command efforts remains the website “goarmy.com,” that continues to change and improve with each passing year to provide an improved interactive experience to attract new generations who are considering joining the Army. Using social media to supplement the web site gets at the core of generation Y and I information-mining desires. Research reveals generation Y and I desire to control the recruiter relationship by using a social medium of their choice. By enhancing on-line recruiting by creating opportunities for prospects to experience the Army for themselves through interaction with Soldiers on social networking sites and high tech on-line experience appealing to their network norms are logical transitions to appeal to unique generation Y and I information gathering norms.

Incorporating all three informational LOO initiatives with advertising establishing the awareness necessary to reach our targeted audience, capitalizing on advisory board environmental support to build community trust, and integrating local recruiting station into cyber social networks to reach the targeted audience in the right medium will empower the Army recruiting force to successfully man the all-volunteer Army for the near-future. Past practices no longer suffice. Current temporary fixes are not adequate. It's a new ball game. We can win it, if we play smart – smart in terms of our audience

that needs new and more effective methods centered on their needs, and not on our own comfortable preferences and practices.

Endnotes

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