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The Air Force is ready to respond. Anytime. Anywhere.

Abstract

This purpose of this case is to facilitate the exploration of branding and marketing communications strategy for a non-profit, governmental institution. The Australian Air Force needs to increase recruitment. Skill shortages in the labour market and competition from other industry sectors are some of the barriers faced by the Australian Air Force. More importantly, misconceptions about the fighter pilot role can discourage people from considering a career in the Air Force - many young people think this role is unattainable. The communications task for the Air Force is to convince the target market that they have the skills to do the job. The communications task is made more complex by the fact that the target market has grown up with technology and are considered 'digital natives'. A particular challenge lay in communicating the air force's message to the target market using social media. It is also important to communicate the fact that members of the Air Force are different from civilians, and appeal to would-be soldiers who respond well to the more militaristic realities of war and the concept of mateship. The Australian Air Force and its marketing communications team needs to do some creating thinking in order to develop a successful integrated marketing communications campaign. Two advertising campaigns are profiled in this case study.

Learning outcomes

This case serves to highlight the importance of branding and marketing communications strategy in a non-traditional setting and prompt discussion and learning.

Introduction

How hard can it be to recruit great candidates for the Australian Air Force? Top Gun was a film made in 1986 that achieved huge box office success. The story centred around macho students of an elite US Flying school for advanced fighter pilots who compete to be best in the class. It glamorised the profession and raised the profile of the people who fly jet fighters. There are many films like Top Gun (1986) that elevate fighter pilots and depict them as heroes doing exciting and death-defying feats in the air. However, common misconceptions about the fighter pilot role can discourage people from considering a career in the Air Force; young people often think this role is unattainable and they don't have the skills to do the job, even if they are interested in aviation. However, the Australian Air Force does a lot more than train pilots. The highly successful campaign, the "Air Force trains more than just pilots" was run for five years to dispel this misconception. According to the Chief of Air Force:

"In reality, the Air Force is not just a school for 'Top Gun' pilots; it involves a diverse range of skills and covers a diverse range of jobs. A career in the Air Force provides a unique skill-set that prepares you for life." (Defence Force Recruiting, 2012).

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) consists of the three armed Services: the Royal Australian Air Force (the RAAF) which provides air and space power for Australia's security, the Navy and the Army. The Air Force offers a wide range of career options, such as engineering, information technology, communications and trades such as mechanics and electronics. However, the Air Force struggles to recruit people for many of the roles. Although most jobs in the Air Force are highly specialised and critically important, they are not as glamorous as the fighter pilot roles. The

communications task for Air Force is challenging given that a wide range of people must be targeted, the career options are varied and each career role requires its own unique and highly targeted communication activity.

Exciting new IMC campaign

According to Australian Defence Force (ADF),

“Recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of people with the right qualities and levels of experience will be one of most significant challenges in building the ADF of the twenty-first century.” (Defence White Paper, 2000, p. 62).

Amongst the challenges are the damaging misconceptions about the Air Force; skill shortages in labour market; and competition from other industry sectors, notably mining. In order to deliver air power capability to government is vital to inspire quality people to serve in the Air Force. In keeping with the intent of the White Paper, which has a renewed focus on air power, a multi-million dollar Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) campaign was launched in 2012. This campaign marked the creation of an exciting new brand position, “The Air Force is ready to respond. Anytime. Anywhere.” In the campaign the Air Force is positioned as a combat organisation ready to defend the nation anytime and anywhere. Core Air Force values like courage and teamwork are embedded in the campaign, since it is clear that members of the Air Force are “not civilians in uniform...they are different; they are required to place themselves at risk” (Defence White Paper, 2000). The key messages used in the development of creative material were:

- The Air Force makes a vital contribution to the defence of Australia
- The Air Force is a leader in technology and innovation

- The Air Force is an accomplished organisation that offers a diverse and exciting range of career and lifestyle options
- The Air Force is ready to respond anytime and anywhere
- The Air Force relies on team work to deliver air power for government

Primary target market

The primary target market consists of 16-24 year olds. The type of person most likely to complete training in the Air Force is a young adult who is intelligent enough to go to university but wishes to start working now, in a meaningful role. They are mature and focused individuals, but feel their options are limited when further education is removed from the scenario. Most have not considered the Air Force as a career option (Defence Force Recruiting, 2012)

Having grown up with technology, Gen Y are 'digital natives'. They are the 'what's in it for me' generation, who grew up in an era of economic growth and affluence and in a world saturated by mass media marketing. They need to be connected to their world 24/7 and through many channels of communication. They now spend more time online than ever before.

They display a cynical view of advertising and they look for truth, irony and humour. The communication style has to be 'real, raw, relevant and relational'. Communication must be real - in other words, credible. It must be raw; young people have access to special effects in movies, video games and advanced technology so they don't want a slick presentation, they want something interactive, spontaneous and open, not a rehearsed talk or manufactured spiel. It must be relevant, falling

within their area of interest. It must be relational; it is important for communicators to care, to show genuine interest in those they are trying to reach.

Deciding to enlist in the Air Force is a complex personal life decision and influenced by family and friends, in particular, the School's Career Advisor so a specialist program was developed to target schools so that students would consider an Air Force career.

Marketing objectives

Their marketing objectives for the campaign were:

- Generate a sufficient number of qualified leads to meet recruitment targets, specifically deliver in excess of 11,000 enquiries for the financial year 2012/13.
- Maintain current positive brand associations and introduce new brand associations.
- Continue to broaden the consideration set, increase propensity to consider, and motivate qualified candidates to apply.

The communications objectives were to increase awareness, understanding, interest and applications for hard-to-fill jobs. Specifically

- Educate the target market about job options in the Air Force;
- Dispel negative misconceptions about the Air Force;
- Communicate to the target audience what the Air Force actually does;
- Broaden the perception of Air Force to include the notion of combat and teamwork; and

- Engender an emotional connection with Air Force amongst the target audience (Defence Force Recruiting, 2012).

Media and channel strategy

A wide range of media were used to deliver the brand's message: television; online television; cinema; magazines; radio; regional press advertising with classified jobs ads; the internet; digital advertising such as digital banners; search engine marketing and search engine optimisation to drive traffic to website; social media such as Facebook and live chats; mobile marketing such as text messaging to remind enquirers to submit applications; website; multiplayer gaming as well as brochures, DVDs and job sheets. Facebook is used to give users updates, videos and photos. Mobile marketing is used to encourage candidates to progress their application.

The creative strategy

Two of the Air Force's recruiting marketing campaigns are profiled below.

Campaign 1: The 'Runway' Brand

The campaign, the 'Runway' is designed to cement the new brand position of 'Air Force is Ready to Respond Anytime and Anywhere'. This ad follows two pilots as they walk from a hangar to an F/A-18 Hornet. On their walk across the tarmac, they travel seamlessly through different times and locations, passing a wide range of Air Force personnel who are all busy doing their particular role. There is a renewed focus on the fighter-capable pilots. However, the commercial showcases all the roles in the Air Force and how they work together as a team to deliver a air power capability to government. It conveys the type of lifestyle that airmen and women can expect if

they join the Air Force. The various locations shown in the commercial represent live or potential sites of operational activity and the Air Force's ability to operate anytime, anywhere.

The brand campaign is supported by a micro-site allowing the user to meet all of the characters in the ad, thereby giving people detailed job descriptions. This information can be downloaded onto tablets and smart phones. It's not just the roles that get the extra depth. For instance, users can click on the vehicles, aircraft, night vision goggles and Steyr rifle and the zoom will bring up 3D renders and details about their capabilities (Defence Force Recruiting, 2012).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Campaign 2: Fighter Pilot

This campaign, called 'Take your skills up a notch' was developed based on research and was designed to address common misconceptions about the fighter pilot role, specifically the belief that you must be super human to be a fighter pilot.

A 30 second and 15 second TV commercial was developed to show people that they might be closer to being a fighter pilot than they thought; in the commercial, they introduce the notion that the things people do day-to-day are the type of skills needed to begin pilot training. For example the skill, dexterity and quick thinking needed to ride a dirt bike, the team work, strategy and planning needed to play soccer, are all skills found in a great pilot. The commercial is shot in the point of view (POV) style, allowing us to see the world through the eyes of a young person who may have what

it takes to be a fighter pilot. There is a strong ‘call to action’ – simply “search Fighter Pilot”.

The target audience expects the Air Force to be a leader in the area of technology and the Air Force seeks to use latest technology to engage and impress the targeted demographic. The TV commercial and its ‘search’ call to action is designed to drive traffic to a micro-site. In this destination site, users are given the opportunity to take part in a virtual game (or training program), called ‘Behind the Visor’. The game is a multi-player one, and it enables users to view different missions in real world locations, whilst learning about the ability of different aircraft, the required aptitude, training and simulated pressures of life in the Air Force. The concept is delivered using a plethora of technology, including live Google feeds, real time data visualisation, object/face/photo recognition, augmented reality maps. It is expected to be a powerful tool in attracting recruits (Defence Force Recruiting, 2012).

The internet and innovation

The website (www.defencejobs.gov.au) is the hub of all marketing activity and provides great detail on what it might feel like to be in the Air Force. The website identifies individuals narrating their experience so it gets the stories of an Air Force member into the hands of the target market. Testimonial content is very important for the target market as it enables them to see first-hand the experiences of currently serving personnel. The internet is also used to deliver a ‘typical day’ platform for key priority roles, including Pilot, Motor Mechanic, Joint Battlefield Airspace Controller, Air Intelligence Analyst and Air Combat Officer. This enables the user to take a journey through a week in the life of real Air Force member. It gives the user insight into the role, training, lifestyle and camaraderie of the Air Force. Traffic is driven to

the website using paid digital banner ads, search engine marketing, search engine optimisation and radio ads.

Summary

Many young people have preconceived notions about the Air Force and these campaigns are designed to deliver attitudinal change in the target market. As the target market demographic are members of Gen Y and Gen Z, social and interactive media is very important in engaging and maintaining their attention. These campaigns work together to tackle people's lack of knowledge of Air Force and its operational role, to highlight the Air Force's innovative use of cutting edge technology and to dispel damaging misconceptions about the lifestyle of a person in the Air Force.

List of further readings

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Links to web resources

<http://www.defence.gov.au>

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Defence White Paper (2000). Canberra: Australian Defence Force. Retrieved July 1, 2013 from: <http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/wpaper2000.pdf>

Discussion questions

1. How effective is interactive marketing in attracting recruits to the ADF?
2. As the client, ADF, you have to approve the creative work of their advertising agency. What do you think of the two advertising campaigns?
3. How would you test the effectiveness of these advertising campaigns? Compare the advantages of rough tests over tests of finished commercials.
4. Explain why marketers measure the effectiveness of advertising.