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BE CONNECTED. BE DISCOVERED. BE ON FACEBOOK AND OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS: RECRUITING, SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

SqnLdr S. Wheal

JCSP 43

Exercise Solo Flight

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SqnLdr S. Wheal

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INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Lay's Potato Chips used social media networks to create a new flavour of chip. The campaign called 'Do Us a Flavor' was one of the most successful marketing campaigns in the history of the Internet. Lay's were able to connect to millions of Americans, exposing their brand to a bigger audience than ever before.¹ This campaign is a prime example of how a brand can reach an extraordinarily large audience with relatively little effort. The Canadian Armed Forces can learn a lot from the Lay's campaign and other examples of successful social media marketing to lead to increased use of social networks to recruit future soldiers, sailors and airmen.

This paper will explore and illustrate the reasons why the Canadian Armed Forces should increase its use of social media to improve its recruiting base. Firstly the paper will examine the issues faced by the Canadian Forces in regards to the difficulties it currently faces in recruiting the required numbers to meet the approved number of a force of 68,000.² The proposed approach to recruiting will be primarily focussed on the requirement to meet required recruiting targets with a smaller base of recruiting staff and geographical locations.

¹ Anne Whiting, and Anant Deshpande. Social Media Marketing: A Myth or Necessity. "Journal of Applied Business and Economics." Vol 16, 5, 2014.

² Office of the Auditor General of Canada. "2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence," last accessed 25 April 2017. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

It will then focus on defining what social media is and the way in which the Canadian public use it. The use of social media will also be examined across different generations with specific focus on the Millennial demographic. The paper will then explore the concept of social media marketing and how commercial organisations have successfully implemented strategies to improve their business, drawing common linkages to how the military can do the same.

Discussions will then be concluded by exploring how the use of social media as a recruiting platform has been a successful tool in the private sector and what the Canadian Forces can learn from this to implement in order to turn around the issues it is facing with regards to its own recruiting dilemma.

WHY SOMETHING DIFFERENT IS NEEDED

The Canadian Armed Forces need to address the continuing shortfall in regards to recruiting that has affected the entire institution over many years. The 2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada contained an entire part focussing on whether the “Canadian Armed Forces implemented appropriate systems and practices to recruit,... the Regular Force members needed to achieve its objectives.”³ As detailed throughout the report the “Regular Force did not meet its target of 68,000 members.”⁴ The fact that the Canadian Armed Forces are not meeting their recruiting targets is just one reason why it needs to review the method in which it attracts potential recruits. The inability to meet targets with the current approach to recruitment is worsened when coupled with a

³ Office of the Auditor General of Canada. “2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence,” last accessed 25 April 2017. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

⁴ Ibid.

growing trend in North America of organised ‘counter recruitment.’ Counter recruitment was the key activity which caused the United States Army suffer from a recruiting crisis in 2005.⁵ Both the aforementioned issues present an environment where new and inventive methods of attracting new candidates are more important than ever.

Today the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group is part of the Military Personnel Generation Formation and has been given three guiding principles to support recruiting activities. Firstly, a Canadian Armed Forces wide recruiting culture is to be promoted. This refers to empowering and encouraging all members of the Canadian military to act as recruiters, using acts such as just adhering to the military ethos. Secondly an agile, effective and efficient recruiting system is to be utilised to maximise potential opportunities. Finally the group is to give access to recruiting services to the maximum number of Canadians as possible, regardless of location, economic background, or ethnicity.⁶

Considering the above mentioned principles the Canadian Armed Forces has still been hampered in all efforts to recruit suitable personnel by a reduction in recruiting staff of about 180 and the closing of 13 recruiting centers since 2008. The reduction in staff and locations has led to approximately 620 personnel responsible for recruiting across all of Canada from 23 locations in 2015.⁷ This hampering and reduction makes it necessary to explore new and innovative avenues of recruiting and publicity, especially looking toward a cost effective approach that has the potential to reach the maximum number of

⁵ Aimee Allison and David Solnit. *Army of None*. Toronto: Seven Stories Press, 2007, p 56.

⁶ Canadian Department of National Defence. Canadian Forces Recruiting Group. Pamphlet 2016

⁷ Office of the Auditor General of Canada. “2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence,” last accessed 25 April 2017. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

potential candidates in the vast pool that the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group has been tasked to focus on. If not achieved the growing gap between the number of personnel required and the actual number of personnel will continue to widen. This gap has increased from a deficiency of 2,279 regular personnel in 2011-12 to 4,194 in 2015-16.⁸

The United States acknowledges that people are a vital ingredient to America's edge. But as with Canada, people are proving difficult to attract. As the Canadian Armed Forces is (like the United States) a volunteer force, enlistees must be recruited, with recruiting aimed primarily towards young adults. Today's target audience of young adults are known as Millennials. "Millennial is the name given to the generation born between 1982 and 2004, also known as Generation Y (Gen Y)."⁹

Although the target audience of young adults is still relevant, the recruiting methods to attract them have remained unchanged in many years and anecdotally have continued to use a one-size-fits-all approach. Today, and into the future, not only will young adults be needed for the military but so will highly skilled experienced individuals in the realm of cyber-security, foreign languages, and engineering.¹⁰ To complicate the attraction of young people to the Canadian Forces the pool of people in the target audience is shrinking in comparison to the wider population. The average age of a

⁸ Ibid...

⁹ Investopedia, "Millennials: Finances, Investing, and Retirement," last accessed 25 April 2017, <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/millennial.asp>

¹⁰ Leon Panetta and Jim Talent, "The Military Needs Modern Ways to Attract and Manage Talent," *The Wall Street Journal*, 03 May 2017.

Canadian was 28 years old in 1976. Twenty Five years later, in 2001 it was 38. If trends in population growth continue the median age of a Canadian will be almost 50 in 2041.¹¹

Considering the changes in age, job availability and attitudes towards employment, new methods of attracting suitable people to the Canadian Forces are required to alleviate this shortfall. Avenues that were not present twenty years ago need to be explored and embraced. One such method that has not been explored to its full extent is the use of social media as an effective recruiting tool.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS POPULARITY IN CANADA

Social media is a platform based application used on computers, smart phones, and other compatible devices that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, and specific to this topic, career interests. It is primarily focused on virtual communities and networks.¹² Social media and social networks are not new. In fact the earliest recorded instance of a social network was a computerised bulletin board system designed to post messages, and advise employees of companies of meetings.¹³ Today social media is viewed as an avenue to which anyone with access to a computer or personal device of some description can do what traditionally has been reserved for commercial organisations and “spread ideas through TV and stuff like TV. They can make a product

¹¹ Barry Edmonston and Eric Fong. *The Changing Canadian Population*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011.

¹² Jonathan Obar, and Steve Wildman, “Social Media definition and the governance challenge: An introduction to the special issue.” *Telecommunications Policy*, Vol 39, Issue 9, October 2015. 745-750

¹³ Anne Whiting, and Anant Deshpande. *Social Media Marketing: A Myth or Necessity*. “*Journal of Applied Business and Economics*.” Vol 16, 5, 2014.

remarkable; that being, is it worth making a remark about. They can aim their remarks at people who will listen and maybe they'll tell their friends.”¹⁴

A social network is an application that is created and maintained through human interaction. The interaction is often formed around groups with similar ideas, backgrounds, and interests. Traditionally they focus on aspects of the member's personal and professional lives that appeal to specific age groups rather than being multigenerational.¹⁵

Canadians have embraced the use of social media with open arms. The most popular social networks in 2016 were, Facebook (having 71% of Canadians accessing the platform at least twice a week), YouTube is a comfortable second with regular use by 49% of the population. Twitter (27%), Pinterest (23%), Google+ (21%) and Instagram with 20% of the Canadian population accessing the platform at least twice a week in 2016 completes the top six.¹⁶ Of particular note, Millennials use social media platforms quite differently to the greater population; this demographic showed preference towards YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat in 2016.¹⁷

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Recruiting for the military in essence is a marketing campaign to make the military a preferred choice, like making Advil your preferred choice of pain killer, or

¹⁴ “Seth Godin: How to get your Ideas to Spread.” TED Talk Video, 17:01, Posted by “TED.com.” Feb 2003. https://www.ted.com/playlists/489/how_do_ideas_travel

¹⁵, O. Platon and Orzan, G, “Consumer opinions towards online marketing communication and advertising on social media.” *Lex ET Scientia International Journal*, 19(2), 236-244.

¹⁶ Melody McKinnon, “2016 Canadian Social Media Use and Online Brand Interaction (Statistics),” last modified 24 May 2016, <http://canadiansinternet.com/2016-canadian-social-media-use-online-brand-interaction-statistics/>

¹⁷ Ibid...

Ford a preferred choice of car. Social media marketing and its effectiveness is an often debated topic by marketing professionals. Some claim that a social media campaign cannot bring new interest to a product, yet supporters violently oppose this idea.¹⁸ One thing that most can agree on is the requirement to maintain an honest approach to employment branding online. Job seekers look for content that helps them make decisions not just inflate the company's internal ego. This honest approach ventures deeper when focussing on an organisations social media presence. Employee-driven branding helps describe the culture and values of an organisation; moreover, it sends a key message that employees are engaged with their employer.¹⁹

Second and third order effects of any organisation having an online presence allows consumers (and in the case of the Canadian Forces, potential members) to easily obtain information from a vast, geographically dispersed group of people on a variety of social networks. Social media marketing allows organisations the ability to push their product onto potential clients via a vast variety of platforms.²⁰ This creates a unique opportunity for companies and organisations to promote their 'goods' to a larger audience than ever before, but the consumer is able to react (in a positive or negative manner) on the same platforms as the company; making social media marketing a double edged sword.

Therefore social media marketing needs to also be examined from the consumers view. In 2016 Canadians interacted with companies online using a variety of methods.

¹⁸ Anne Whiting and Anant Deshpande. Social Media Marketing: A Myth or Necessity. "Journal of Applied Business and Economics." Vol 16, 5, 2014.

¹⁹ Pamela Babcock, "Keeping it Real: Getting Employer Branding Right." HRNews (Oct 13, 2015).

²⁰ Ashley Carlson and C. Christopher Lee. "Followership and Social Media Marketing." *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*. Vol 19 No 1 2015.

Besides visiting organisations web sites (30% of Canadians reported doing this), following and commenting about companies on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram is a common occurrence. This interaction in both directions displays a perfect reason for the Canadian Forces to have a diverse online marketing and engagement plan. Online marketing is crucial for success in business and recruitment alike, “social media marketing cannot be ignored. Consumers will always look for companies and brands on social media and they fully expect to find you there when they do.”²¹

THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT

“Traditionally, organisations depended on low-tech, time-consuming recruiting methods, such as newspaper ads, employee referrals, and employment agencies to locate and attract qualified candidates.”²² This approach did serve companies well; however technological changes in the late 20th and early 21st centuries saw both job seekers and businesses look to the internet for employment options. Internet based recruiting is not, however, the one and only solution. There are many issues caused by looking for potential employees on the internet, including loss of potential suitable employees by application overload, and a loss of a personal touch, not to mention technical glitches. Furthermore, technology is changing at such a swift rate that new platforms and applications appear on average every six months.²³

²¹ Melody McKinnon, “2016 Canadian Social Media Use and Online Brand Interaction (Statistics),” last modified 24 May 2016, <http://canadiansinternet.com/2016-canadian-social-media-use-online-brand-interaction-statistics/>

²² Patricia Borstorff, Michael Marker and Doris Bennett. “Online Recruitment: Attitudes and Behaviours of Jobseekers.” *Journal of Strategic E-Commerce*. Vol 5, 1 2005.

²³ Ibid.

2015 and 2016 proved that hiring competent and suitable talent was difficult in North America. This is attributed primarily due to a supply and demand issue. There were shortfalls in recruiting in areas where the Canadian Armed Forces are focussed, further complicating Canada's task of recruiting the right people. The technology, health and engineering sectors all had more jobs available than trained personnel to fill them. In 2015, there were 17 vacancies for electrical engineers for every qualified candidate.²⁴

“When social media is discussed in the context of recruitment, whether it be social recruiting or digital recruiting, it always causes debate as to whether it can really work.”²⁵ The use of social networking for recruitment by private industries has traditionally been presented in two forms. An organisation can choose to invest and create its own social network that then encourages user generated content and discussion. Alternatively, organisations can associate themselves with already established social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Regardless of the approach the ongoing conversation which maintains relevance of the company, employment opportunities and the ability to create a relationship between the employer and prospective employees is key.²⁶

The private sector has found that potential candidates expect an intuitive social technology based recruiting system that is simple to use. If recruiting possibilities are not

²⁴ “2016 Recruiting Trends and Strategies” YouTube Video, 58:17, Posted by “Talematry,” 06 Jan 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tw3LifLsJvg>

²⁵ Andy Headworth, “Social Media Recruitment.” Kogan Page, London, 2015.

²⁶ Adele Ladkin, and Dimitrios Buhalis. “Online and Social Media Recruitment.” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 28, no. 2 (2016): 327-345.

presented in this fashion job seekers are not likely to remain on the web site and explore potential employment options.²⁷

APPLICABILITY TO THE CANADIAN FORCES

In 2004 an American survey found that over half of “youth aged 16 – 21 say “definitely not” with respect to the possibility of military service, and that this percentage continues to grow indicates a need to develop an appropriate information campaign.”²⁸ Although the mentioned survey is American this trend of young people have a lowering interest in joining the military could be extended to Canadian society. Given this detail new avenues of introducing potential careers in the Canadian Forces needs to be explored.

The hospitality industry has discovered that use of technology and social media has had a profound impact on recruitment. It has provided avenues to enhance company exposure and ease of access of vacant position information. The hospitality sector has found that advertising on websites and social media is a cost effective and rapid method of reaching a wide audience of possible employees.²⁹ Although the military and the hospitality industry are vastly different, there are commonalities which can be drawn between the two. Primarily both rely heavily on mass recruitment of varied skill levels, especially in the ‘young adult’ or millennial demographic. It is this similarity in which the military can leverage off studies completed for the hospitality industry.

²⁷ “2016 Recruiting Trends and Strategies” YouTube Video, 58:17, Posted by “Talematry,” 06 Jan 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tw3LifLsJvg>

²⁸ National Research Council. *Evaluating Military Advertising and Recruiting*. Washington: The National Academies Press, 2004. P76

²⁹ Ladkin, Adele and Dimitrios Buhalis. "Online and Social Media Recruitment." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 28, no. 2 (2016): 327-345. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1759326472?accountid=9867>.

The use of private sector studies is more relevant than ever as today people are joining the military for reasons other than for service to ‘Queen and Country.’ The motivations to join have been changing over many years, and, to many, military service is now seen as just another form of employment. This view by potential soldiers, sailors and airmen has brought about more of an interest in employment conditions such as, pay in comparison to the private sector and training provided. This changing view has seen concerns raised over declining ‘group solidarity’ which affects the effectiveness of the military.³⁰ Furthermore, branding is more important than ever. 90% of millennials research employment online. This research is not just aimed at looking at specific employers web pages. The positive branding message needs to be everywhere online.³¹

A cost effective solution to the difficulties presented to the Canadian Armed Forces recruiting issues is needed, as the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group is faced with an uphill battle of giving access to recruiting services to the maximum number of Canadians possible, regardless of location³² while dealing with reductions in recruiting staff and physical recruiting centres.³³ The answer is found simply by accessing the many social media platforms used by the targeted audiences. When used correctly Social Media can result in a positive Word of Mouth experience. This is a critical importance in today’s society which is flooded with conflicting messages online. Nearly 85% of millennials have reported that a word of mouth referral is a primary influencer in their decisions.

³⁰ Matthew Rech, “Recruitment, counter recruitment and Critical Military Studies.” Global Discourse, Vol 4 2-3, 2014.

³¹ “2016 Recruiting Trends and Strategies” YouTube Video, 58:17, Posted by “Talematry,” 06 Jan 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tw3LifLsJvg>

³² Canadian Department of National Defence. Canadian Forces Recruiting Group. Pamphlet 2016

³³ Office of the Auditor General of Canada. “2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence,” last accessed 25 April 2017. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

Moreover, social media has proved to be an effective tool in making the public advocates of organisations and companies advancing the standing and national knowledge of an organisation just through word of mouth.³⁴ The Canadian Armed forces can use this knowledge to its best extent to reach its audience wherever that may be across Canada.

CONCLUSION

The Canadian Armed Forces needs to address the difficulties it faces to negate the growing gap in required manpower and what it actually recruits. It needs new and inventive methods of promoting itself as an employer of choice, especially to the millennial demographic. As detailed in 2015 “Regular Force did not meet its target of 68,000 members.”³⁵ This paper has explored the opportunities social media presents that the Canadian Forces can leverage off as an avenue to reduce this recruiting shortfall.

In order to explore the opportunities social media present to the Canadian Armed Forces in the recruiting realm a definition of what a social network is had to be derived. Throughout this paper it was understood that a social network is an application that is created and maintained through human interaction, traditionally focussing on people’s personal or professional lives and appealing to specific age groups. With this knowledge the most popular social networks used by Canadians were explored, finding Facebook is the most popular across the population. Yet Millennials prefer YouTube and Instagram.

³⁴ Patricia Borstorff,, Michael Marker and Doris Bennett. “Online Recruitment: Attitudes and Behaviours of Jobseekers.” *Journal of Strategic E-Commerce*. Vol 5, 1 2005.

³⁵ Office of the Auditor General of Canada. “2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence,” last accessed 25 April 2017. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html

Recruiting for the military firstly required appropriate branding to assist in making the Canadian Forces an employer of choice. Effective social media marketing is therefore required to alert potential recruits to the opportunities available to them.

The private sector has explored and used social media as a positive recruiting tool and the Canadian Forces can learn a lot, especially from the hospitality industry. Although the key to recruiting using social media is ensuring it is intuitive and simple to use.³⁶

Furthermore the use of social media will provide an avenue to enhance the Canadian Military's exposure and alert job seekers in the required demographic of employment possibilities. This exposure can reach all Canadians no matter their geographic location, making a professional social media campaign the answer to recruiting difficulties in the current environment of fewer recruiting centres and a shrinking recruiting staff base.

³⁶ "2016 Recruiting Trends and Strategies" YouTube Video, 58:17, Posted by "Talematry," 06 Jan 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tw3LifLsJvg>

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