Army of one? Marketing battle for recruits

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ABSTRACT

This case study reviews the United States Army's efforts to recruit through various advertising campaigns, and the challenges faced in meeting recruiting goals during wartime versus peacetime. The case is suitable for marketing strategy, branding, nonprofit, or promotions courses at either the graduate or undergraduate level.

Keywords: advertising, campaign, Army, promotions, branding, strategy, recruiting

INTRODUCTION

The history of the United States Army shows that times with military action demand higher number of recruits than peacetimes. In order to garner higher interest and recruit the soldiers needed, the Army used a simple marketing approach: they advertised heavily and appealed to the candidates' bravery, patriotism, or their interest to learn new skills. However, in spring 2005, the Army was faced with a new reality, recruits did not follow the call for joining as expected (Kaplan, 2008). Amidst current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the ever-looming threat of terrorism, a major challenge was presented: how to attract new recruits in order to secure the military commitments overseas?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This case is suitable for undergraduate or graduate marketing strategy, promotions, nonprofit, or branding classes. After analyzing this case, one should be able to:
- Define target markets and marketing objectives for a nonprofit organization (applying metrics that do not measure organizational success by profit)
- Understand the advantages of brand management and repositioning when perception of a brand has been weakened or the environment changes
- Explain promotional activities to support the U.S. Army goals

THE UNITED STATES ARMY

The United States Army was founded in 1775, led by George Washington, at the onset of the Revolutionary War. During the next 200 years the Army saw many reorganizations, wars, presidents, and of course the constitution's creation and ratification. In 1973, after the removal of troops from Vietnam, the Army converted to volunteer enlistment and has since not returned to draft enlistment (Griffith, Griffith, & Mountcastle, 1997). This change of enlistment decision caused the Army, and all branches of military, to focus more on how to appeal to able-bodied citizens and convince them to serve. Different economic and political factors play a large role in the opinion of Americans looking at the military, and greatly influence their desire to enlist (Warner & Asch, 2001). During an economic downturn, many see service as providing stable income, healthcare, and opportunity for career advancement. However, during times of war, citizens' views on enlistment vary dependent on their sentiment associated with the war (Kleykamp, 2006). Patriotism and pride may not always prevail over rising death tolls and inherent danger.

On September 11, 2001, a series of four terrorist attacks were carried out on the United States in New York City, and Washington, DC. Through the tragedy, multiple wars began, causing the need for military recruitment to increase. The terrorist attacks in 2001 were followed by an economic downturn and recession in 2001 and 2002. Wars were ongoing and showing no signs of slowing during 2004 and 2005 (Feith, 2008); however, the economic situation of both the United States and virtually every other major economy had improved drastically.

MARKETING IN THE U.S. ARMY

The United States Army is overseen by the Department of Defense, housed in the Pentagon building in Washington, DC. The Navy and Air Force are also run by the Department of Defense from the same location. Budgets assessed to these three different branches of defense are shown below ("US Department of Defense," 2004).

DoD Budget by Service
(Discretionary budget authority, $ in Billions)

	FY 04	**FY 05**	**Change**
Army	95.4	97.2	+1.8
Navy/Marine Corps	115.1	119.3	+4.2
Air Force	110.9	120.5	+9.6
Defense Wide	53.9*	64.7	+10.8
Total	**375.3****	**401.7**	**+26.4**

* Includes $3.5B rescission to the FY03 Iraq Freedom Fund and $1.8B rescission to DoD appropriations in the FY04 Omnibus Appropriations Act

** Also Includes $0.8B in prior-year program rescissions

Totals may not add due to rounding

Figure 1: DoD Budget by Service ("US Department of Defense," 2004)

The Army, similar to any major corporation, spends a great deal of money and time on its brand messaging. It must choose its marketing strategy carefully. Throughout the many years since the Army's inception, one way to resonate with potential recruits has been through the use of a memorable slogan (Chambers & Verdum, 2006). One of the most popular marketing campaigns ever used was the infamous cartoon of Uncle Sam, with a pointed finger, stating "I Want You for the U.S. Army." It was so successful that it was used for both World Wars.

Source: Library of Congress, James Montgomery Lithograph, 1917

In the following years, the Army changed its slogans frequently to be more reflective of current times. After the Korean and Vietnam wars, when the draft was coming to an end, the promotional strategy focused on pragmatic motivations, such as enlistment bonuses and the chance to gain new technical skills (Garfield, 1999). After some years of low recruitment, the U.S. Army decided that a new catchphrase was needed. "Be All That You Can Be" was introduced in 1980 and used until 2001 (Bailey, 2007). This campaign initially served to be a successful move, as

the accompanying jingle was so recognizable, it was considered in the top twenty advertising campaigns as defined by *Advertising Age* magazine (Garfield, 1999).

AN ARMY OF ONE

As the economy boomed at the turn of the millennium and fewer young enlistees joined the Army, the decision was made to change the Army slogan again (Van der Graaf & Nieborg, 2003). This decision was due to the strategy intended to win over the new era of a younger audience that was much more influenced by technology and advanced forms of media attention. The external support for this advertising mission came from ad agency Leo Burnett, a Chicago-based company whose clients consisted of McDonald's, Nintendo and Coca-Cola; the agency was signed with a contract worth over $100 million dollars for the creation of a new advertising campaign and it began working with the Army in 2001 (Bulik, 2004). One key element of Leo Burnett's assignment was compiling information about the potential recruits. The agency team literally hit the streets and the World Wide Web to ask 18- to 24-year-old men about their thoughts on joining the Army and what they think when they hear the word "Army" (Bulik, 2004).

With this essential information in mind, the agency created a slogan intended to resonate a strong message of leadership and independence. And so, the new slogan "An Army of One" was born (Dao, 2001). Initially, the Army of One slogan was not seen as positive by veterans in and out of the Army, as the Army had always been about teamwork (Chambers & Verdum, 2006). However, Tim Bergen, the Senior Vice President of Army business at Burnett, felt that the message conveyed to youths that "Instead of thinking they were just a number in the Army, we wanted them to think about what the Army could do for their goals and career" (Bulik, 2004, p. 2). Beyond the slogan, a new brand logo and a new framework of how to excite and attract potential recruits were created. This approach of reaching out to potential recruits and inundating them with several forms of multi-media proved to be successful for the first years of application.

Source: http://pixshark.com/army.htm

For 2005 the Army planned to spend $290 million on marketing, the Marines about $67 million, the Navy about $100 million, and the Air Force $56.8 million (see Table 1). All of the Army's competitors stated they would be consistent with their messages. The war in Iraq and satisfying recruiting numbers had not caused them to significantly adjust their marketing strategy (O'Brien, 2005).
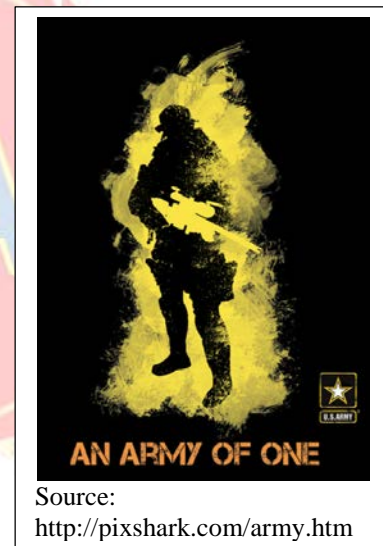
Annual Marketing Budget in mil. USD	2000	2005	CAGR
U.S. Army	$150.0	$290.0	11.61%
U.S. Marine Corps	$46.0	$67.0	6.47%
U.S. Navy	$74.0	$100.0	5.15%
U.S. Air Force	$61.6	$56.8	-1.34%

Table 1: Annual Marketing Budget by Service in mil. USD (O'Brien, 2005)

DIFFICULTIES IN FINDING RECRUITS

For 2004, the Office of Army Demographics (OAD) reported 494,291 men and women in duty (see Figure 2) (O'Brien, 2005). What seems to be a high number at first sight can be considered dangerously low after closer examination. The Army did not grow, while more candidates were needed for its overseas commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan.
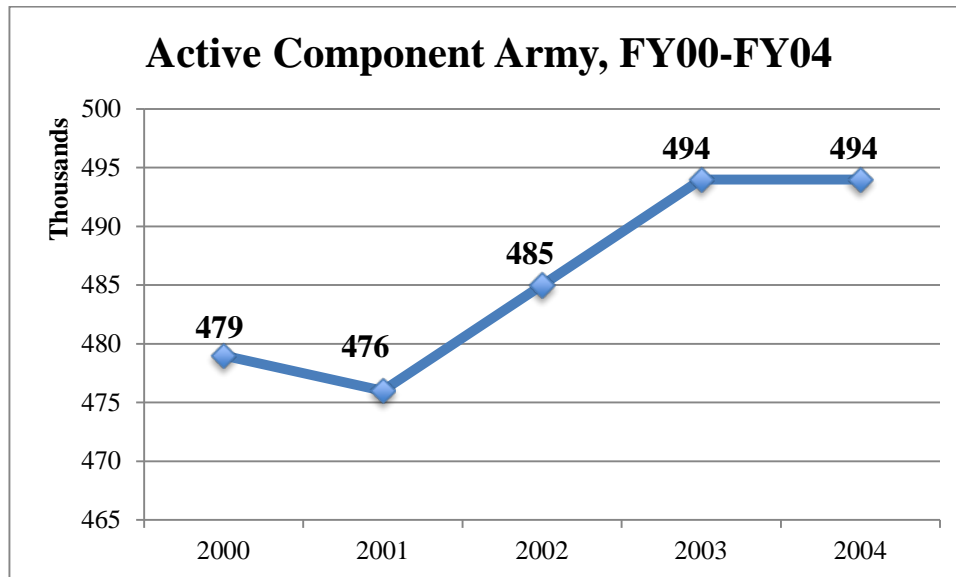

Figure 2: Active Component Army, Fy00-Fy04 (Maxfield, 2004)

        The military disclosed that it would miss its February 2005 recruiting goal by more than 27%. 7,050 recruits were targeted, and just 5,114 signed up. For the total fiscal year (October 2004 to September 2005) the active-duty Army needed to recruit 80,000 new soldiers in order to replenish its positions. That was 3,000 more than in 2004. Army Guard and the Army Reserve were also dramatically behind its recruiting goals. By this time, both part-time forces made up about 40% of the full-time U.S. troops in Iraq (Polusny et al., 2011). Yet these troops were crucial for success in this warzone. Normally the Army uses "delayed entry" recruits (committed to join on the condition that the Army ships to boot camp some months after signing up) to compensate weak periods of recruitment. But not this time, since the list of recruits was smaller than usual. Many of them were already activated in 2004 to help achieve last year's recruitment goals (Moniz, 2005).

        Despite the problems in recruiting new soldiers, Bill Carr, acting deputy undersecretary for military personnel policy, emphasized the relevance of the retention of currently active soldiers: "Retention has overachieved, and that has helped the underachievement in some parts of the recruiting effort" (Miles, 2005, p. 1).

        In comparison to the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force did not report any recruiting problems at this time (Miles, 2005). This circumstance might point to a distinctive Army recruiting problem, as their mission often put them in more danger than the Air Force or the Navy.

IMPAIRED PERCEPTION OF THE ARMY BRAND

Within almost two years approximately 1,500 U.S. soldiers had died in Iraq since the campaign started in March 2003 (Moniz, 2005). This high number of war casualties significantly influences how potential recruits and their immediate family perceive the brand. When it comes to joining the Army they primarily feel uneasy, as service is dangerous and may mean death. So the issue of recruitment may not be a lack of trust or patriotism. The risks of serving just outweigh the rewards. Col. Thomas Nickerson, the Army's advertising director, concludes that the current "Army of One" tagline does not transport the risks of war. It focuses on individual success (O'Brien, 2005).

A study for the Navy found that enlistees build their recruitment decision on influencer's opinions (Robertson, 1993). It is important to recruits to know what their parents think, and so it is to the Army. In 2003, about 49 percent of mothers exposed to the Navy's message tended to encourage military service to their children. When the study was conducted again in December 2004, only 29 percent of mothers would do so (O'Brien, 2005). Military representatives and marketing analysts confirmed that Hispanic parents are among the most powerful influencers. Targeting them might be a key to unlock hidden recruitment potential, since the portion of minorities among accessions is declining (see Figure 3) (O'Brien, 2005).
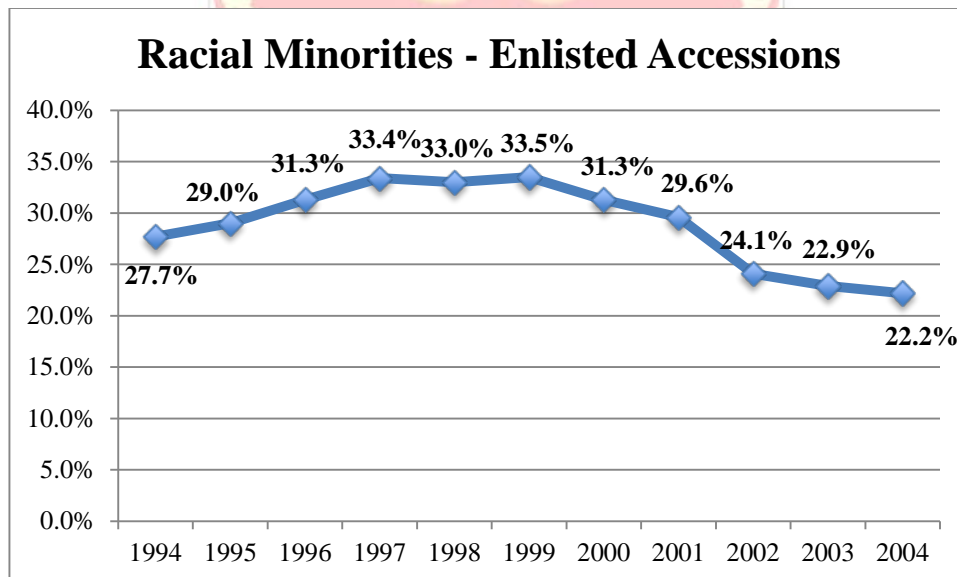

Figure 3: Racial Minorities (Black and Hispanics) Enlisted Accessions (Maxfield, 2004)

While the Army deploys its troops in dangerous ground fighting, enlistees of other military branches may not be as likely to face lethal combat missions. Consequently, the Air Force and the Navy are perceived differently, which might help them recruit candidates. The Marine Corps also positions its servicemen on the ground, but enlists fewer recruits than the Army and focuses on its status as an expeditionary force-in-readiness. Thus the brand is less positioned as a branch with an emphasis on service as a career (O'Brien, 2005).

DECISION QUESTIONS

The Army's leadership had critical decisions to make to overcome the unfavorable recruiting situation and to secure meeting its military commitments. Higher recruitment goals were being set, while negative news from overseas weakened the enthusiasm for joining the Army and produced a lack of support by many parents and other influencers. A strong national economy offers potential candidates other choices (Press, 2005).

In early 2005, several alternatives need to be evaluated and discussed with the Pentagon. It was important to Col. Thomas Nickerson and Gen. Peter Schoomaker, the Army chief of staff, to prepare quick wins that were needed to achieve the 2005 recruiting goals, but also to consider strategic options that might help to manage the Army brand in the long run. Both decision makers were eager to discuss any alternative that might help improving the recruitment situation. That included debating about critical questions such as the following:

- What are the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats on which the Army can base its strategic decisions?
- Who should the U.S. Army target to?
- What changes in the "product" could attract more recruits or what benefits might potential recruits want to see?
- What brand management practices should the U.S. Army adopt?
- What strategic changes need to be done to manage the Army brand more effectively as a competitor of the other military brands?
- What is the best promotional approach to respond to the needs of potential recruits?
- Is there a better approach for managing the United States military branches recruiting and reducing potential cannibalization effects?

EPILOGUE

In November of 2006, the "Army of One" campaign was retired and replaced with "Army Strong." The effort, with a budget estimated at $1.35 billion over five years, appeared in traditional media like television as well as nontraditional outlets like blogs, social networking websites and chat rooms. The campaign was produced by nine agencies, eight of them part of the McCann Worldgroup (Elliott, 2009).

In 2015, the "Army Strong" tagline was retired. Soldiers continue to see the phrase in internal Army communications, but the campaign ended a nine-year run as the familiar face of Army branding after research showed civilians did not buy in. Soldiers and veterans loved the slogan and intuitively understood it, but the phrase did not resonate with those the Army was trying to recruit (Lilley, 2015).
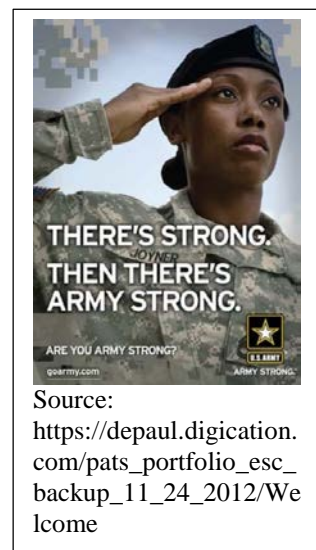
Source: https://depaul.digication.com/pats_portfolio_esc_backup_11_24_2012/Welcome

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