

# Army Marketing Strategies and the Future of Word-Of-Mouth Marketing

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U.S. Army Sgt. Nayib A. Covar, an infantryman with the 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, takes a photo after sharing his reasons for serving in the U.S. Army during an interview Nov. 22, 2016, at Fort Stewart, Ga. Soldiers with the 3rd Infantry Division are highlighted on Facebook and Twitter every Wednesday for the Why We Serve Wednesday social media campaign. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Nikki Felton)

The U.S. Army predates the nation it serves. Since its inception, policymakers have worked to define the relationship between America's Army and the civilian populace that supports its mission.

The Army has had to sell itself since the 18th century. First, it had to convince Congress that it was a match for the battle-hardened British Army. It then had to convince the American people that it could win the Revolution with enough time, resources and support. Since the end of the Vietnam War, the Army has been composed entirely of volunteers. It has had to market itself directly to military-aged men and women while at the same time appealing to applicants' friends, family, and influencers — teachers, civic leaders and role models.

The Army has previously adopted successful marketing campaigns. In decades past, the slogan "Be All That You Can Be" resonated with the public. As the Army transitioned to an all-volunteer force, this theme was appropriate. It was as much a call to individual achievement as it was a higher calling to service. In recent years, the Army's marketing efforts have struggled. The intent of the "Army of One" campaign was confusing and never caught on with its target audience. Instead of serving as an invitation to serve as a part of a team, the message seemed to focus solely on individual achievement, which runs counter to Army values and ethics. The "Army Strong" message was better, but the campaign did not resonate, either. It was replaced after it was found that civilians didn't embrace the idea. The Army's current marketing theme, focusing on "the Army Team," is in keeping with the values, ethics and culture that are integral parts of the Army brand.

The first Army marketing campaign that comes to mind is from the World War I and II era — the "I want you!" poster. This iconic image was a direct appeal to the individual observing the poster. It featured Uncle Sam, the physical embodiment of the spirit of the United States, pointing at the observer. His eyes were intently fixed on the potential applicant, conveying the seriousness of the country's need for Soldiers. The image of Uncle Sam, stern and unwavering despite threats to the American way of life from overseas, demanding that a service-age male stand up and do his part, was a successful marketing strategy. It was not just for those who would become Soldiers, but for those who would invest in the war effort in other ways — by purchasing war bonds or by working to manufacture wares used by Soldiers in the field.

Immediately after the Vietnam War, the Army had to address benefits the service offered to potential applicants, including job training and civilian

education, in order to become competitive with potential civilian employers. It also had to present the esprit de corps, the camaraderie and the feeling of job satisfaction that could potentially result from military service. Finally, the Army needed an idea that could convey a connection to great leaders of the past, and to their achievements in founding and preserving the nation they served. The resultant slogan, "Be All That You Can Be," and the advertising campaign that surrounded it for almost two decades, introduced many potential applicants to the idea that the Army could be a stepping stone to higher education (using the Montgomery GI Bill and the Army College Fund), to marketable job skills (electronics repair, aviation, logistics), or to a military career. Many of the applicants during this period also had a relative who had served in World War I or II, in Korea or in Vietnam, so the Army was also able to market to an individual's sense of family. While appealing to the applicant from all of these positions, "Be All That You Can Be" also appealed to an applicant's sense of pride and personal achievement.

Another successful campaign involved the Army National Guard. The marketing surrounding the simple slogan "You Can" inspired interest in the Guard's dual mission for decades. The elegance and simplicity of the slogan conveyed a slew of possibilities: Would you like to have career training applicable to the civilian sector? You can. Would you like to complete your civilian education while serving your country? You can. Would you like to serve your local community in times of emergency? You can. Many individual states supplement the benefits offered by the GI Bill and Federal Tuition Assistance, making it even easier to attract applicants with an interest in continuing education. When the National Guard presents itself as an organization that can empower an applicant, it becomes attractive not only to the applicant but to influencers as well. Guidance counselors, principals, faith leaders and legislators can support students who seek to improve themselves by learning a trade or developing themselves through continuing education — at a minimum burden to the public coffers — while at the same time returning the investment by serving the community.

Recruitment issues were recently addressed in an Army Press online journal article, "Improving Army Recruitment by Word-of-Mouth Marketing." The article addressed some handicaps the Army has as an organization. The author, Cpt. Kevin Sandell, a public affairs officer, suggests that direct communication with Soldiers may be more productive than typical recruiting efforts. Word-of-mouth recruiting may be very effective, especially considering the recent focus on the Army ethic and professionalization. In addition to the opportunities for education, the Army has renewed its efforts to certify Soldiers in their military occupational specialties. This certification extends as far as civilian credentialing in some of the more technical fields.

Former Secretary of the Army Eric Fanning emphasized the importance of these word-of-mouth connections and of the ability of Army National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers to make those connections. This word-of-mouth strategy is being incorporated into wider campaigns. As the overseas contingency operations of the past decade have reduced in size and scope, the Army's media coverage has reduced as well. To increase media exposure, the Army instituted the "Meet Your Army" campaign as a means of fostering communication between the civilian community and the military. It is important to maintain this level of visibility, not just for the recruiting effort, but to keep the public invested in the Army's mission. The American people need to be reminded that they enable the Army: through their trust and confidence, through encouraging young people to serve and through their tax dollars.

The Army offers untested youths the opportunity to sharpen the skills they learn in their primary and secondary education and apply them as part of a team. The NCO is in a position to convey this message to the American people. Noncommissioned officers play a special role in the marketing of the Army as recruiters. The recruiter is often the applicant's first interaction with a Soldier, regardless of the Soldier's component. Recruiters must be a tangible representation of all those things the Army mission and vision represent. The recruiter must subscribe to the Army ethic and live by the Army values. A recruiter must stand by the Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer and the Soldier's Creed. A recruiter must keep the oath made upon enlistment. Recruiting and retention NCOs must not be primarily concerned with the number of recruits they bring into the Army's formations, but rather with bringing in quality applicants that have the potential to abide by the values and ethics the recruiters represent. Trained, educated and ethical recruiters will attract trainable, educable and ethical applicants.

The job description of the recruiting and retention NCO specifically states that the recruiter will be a first-line marketer, distributing and displaying recruiting material and cultivating community centers of influence. However, word-of-mouth marketing strategies dictate that all NCOs are recruiters, regardless of billet. They are tangible symbols of the Army brand and therefore must be prepared to relay their positive Army experience, verbally or in writing. An NCO has professional experience, training and education that can easily be related to by Americans. NCOs have attained their status by adherence to the Army values, the Army ethic, the Warrior Ethos and the Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer. Conveying why it is important to adhere to these abstract principles is as important as abiding by them. The NCOs of the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve are in prime positions to market the Army, because they are parts of their communities. They can and should take the time to relay the Army's mission and vision to Americans, not only to attempt to recruit youths into the ranks, but also to inform others of what the Army does.

The Army has had successful marketing campaigns — first marketing itself to military-age men, but now to all service-age Americans — while simultaneously presenting an attractive employment and educational opportunity to applicants' influencers. The Army's marketing is most successful when it emphasizes the one-team concept, appealing not only to self-interest but to applicants' desires to incorporate the Army values and ethics into their lives.

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