



U.S. Army Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment await to reunite with their family members as part of “Family Day” at Fort Jackson, S.C., June 26, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Fort Jackson Public Affairs Office)

How to Reach Z

Sgt. Maj. Darrin Colwell

U.S. Army Northern California Recruiting Battalion

The United States Army has been in existence for over 240 years with Gen. George Washington serving as the first commander in chief of the Continental Army. His heroics could be considered the first major military recruiting campaign as stories of his daring victories not only increased recruitment, but also inspired the French to increase their involvement in the war to help the U.S. win its independence (Karabell, 2016; Ten Facts, 2020). The difficulties Washington faced in recruiting back then are not much different from today’s challenges: inspiring young people to defend their nation. This article looks at modern recruiting obstacles and examines how the U.S. Army is adjusting to effectively reach Generation Z (Gen Z).

The Obstacle

The United States Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) missed its recruiting goal of 76,500 recruits for fiscal year 2018, missing the mark by 6,500 recruits (Britsky, 2019). This led to a major overhaul of the U.S.

Army’s recruiting strategy and, according to Maj. Gen. Joseph Calloway, the commanding general of the U.S. Army Human Resources Command, included a “new focus on reaching potential recruits through social media, interactive gaming, and in locations where recruiting has typically been weak such as major metropolitan areas” (Dickstein, 2019, para. 11).

The Target

The previously successful call to defend one’s country is no longer up front and center in pulling in new recruits. According to *The New York Times’* reporters Dave Phillipps and Tim Arango, “To be sure, the idea of joining the military has lost much of its luster in nearly two decades of grinding war. The patriotic rush to enlist after the terrorist attacks of 2001 has faded” (Phillips & Arango, 2020, para. 9). The end of blind patriotism and a strong economy has dampened traditional recruiting surges and is one of several reasons that the Army missed its recruiting mark in 2018 (Rempfer, 2020). The



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael A. Grinston speaks to the United States Army Recruiting Command battalion and brigade leadership during the USAREC annual leader's training conference at Fort Knox, Ky., Oct. 23, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Lara Poirrier)

days of promoting kick-in-the-door adrenaline-laced commercials are ending. While direct action is part of the Army mission, there are over 150 Army career fields needing to be filled (Brading, 2019).

Current data reflects young adults in Gen Z currently enlisting were positively influenced by a prior service member in their community. "A driving decision to enlist is whether a young person knows anyone who served in the military. In communities where veterans are plentiful, teachers, coaches, mothers, uncles and other mentors often steer youths toward military service" (Phillipps & Arango, 2020, para. 11). The ability to communicate to others, especially to Gen Z, about a positive military experience is a great recruiting tool (Duncan, 2020).

The New Strategy

The current marketing strategy in place to appeal to Gen Z is the *What's Your Warrior?* campaign. "What's Your Warrior pivots toward the wide-array of military occupational specialties that don't necessarily engage on the frontlines – like bio-chemists or cyber-operators" (Brading, 2019, para. 6). This campaign focuses on filling a

multitude of Army career-fields, and features real-life Soldier stories as a way to relay the Army mission in an authentic manner that is relatable to young adults. Gen Z values authenticity more than production value (Patel, 2017).

The Future

The Army has an end strength goal of 485,000 Soldiers by the end of fiscal year 2020. To achieve this goal the Army is getting away from older marketing strategies such as print, email, and TV ads, instead focusing on the digital realm in order to reach Gen Z. Brig. Gen. Alex Fink, chief of Army Enterprise Marketing, said the Army is venturing into the new age by using virtual recruiting stations and increasing their presence on newer social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube (Sisk, 2020).

There is also an immersive virtual experience campaign out called *In Our Boots* that allows prospective recruits to lead virtual teams through high intensity missions such as a Special Operations Sniper, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician, Tank Commander, or Unmanned Aircraft Systems Operator. This new system gives potential recruits an opportunity to experience an authentic view of what a mission is like for a Soldier (Army Marketing and Research Group, 2019).



What's Your Warrior is the Army's latest marketing strategy, aimed at 17-24-year-olds, known as Generation Z, by looking beyond traditional combat roles and sharing the wide-array of diverse opportunities available through Army service. (U.S. Army graphic)

Conclusion

Today's new generation of youth are smart, capable, and tech-savvy. According to Secretary of the Army Ryan D. McCarthy, "We know today's young men and women want more than just a job. They desire a powerful

sense of identity, and to be part of something larger than themselves" (Brading, 2020, para. 17). The potential pool of recruits is available. The Army needs to keep finding the right platforms and messages in order to recruit the best and brightest. ■

References

- Army Marketing and Research Group. (2019). U.S. Army's marketing campaign: "In Our Boots." *Army.mil*. https://www.army.mil/standto/archive_2019-05-17/
- Brading, T. 'What's Your Warrior?' – Army's new recruiting effort targets Gen Z. *Army.mil*. https://www.army.mil/article/229645/whats_your_warrior_armys_new_recruiting_effort_targets_gen_z
- Dickstein, C. (2018). Army misses 2018 recruiting goal, which hasn't happened since 2005. *Stars and Stripes*. <https://www.stripes.com/news/army/army-misses-2018-recruiting-goal-which-hasn-t-happened-since-2005-1.548580>
- Duncan, T. (2020). The importance of writing. *NCO Journal*. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2020/February/The-Importance-of-Writing/>
- Karabell, S. (2016). The French aristocrat who helped George Washington defeat the British. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shelliekarabell/2016/07/10/the-french-aristocrat-who-helped-george-washington-defeat-the-british/#32eb7dfe15af>
- Patel, D. (2017, November 27). 5 differences between marketing to millennials Vs. Gen Z. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/deepatel/2017/11/27/5-differences-between-marketing-to-millennials-vs-gen-z/>
- Phillipps, D. & Arango, T. (2020). Who signs up to fight? Makeup of U.S. recruits shows glaring disparity. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/10/us/military-enlistment.html>
- Rempfer, K. Army to shift resources from bonuses to recruiting ads in future. *Army Times*. <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/02/20/army-to-shift-resources-from-bonuses-to-recruiting-ads-in-future/>
- Sisk, R. (2020). The Army's unconventional big-city recruiting strategy is paying off, officials say. *Military.com*. <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/02/20/armys-unconventional-big-city-recruiting-strategy-paying-officials-say.html>
- Ten Facts About George Washington and the Revolutionary War. (2020). <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/ten-facts-about-the-revolutionary-war/>

Sgt. Maj. Darrin Colwell is the operations sergeant major for the U.S. Army Northern California Recruiting Battalion in Sacramento, Calif. He is a graduate of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Class 69. He holds a master's degree in leadership from Trident University International and bachelors degrees in marketing and business administration from Post University. Colwell has been inducted into The Honorable Order of Saint Barbara and is a Member of the Glen E. Morrell Order of Recruiting Excellence.

The logo for NCO JOURNAL features the words "NCO JOURNAL" in a bold, serif font. The "N" and "O" are significantly larger and more prominent than the other letters. A stylized arrow or spearhead graphic is positioned below the "L" and points to the right.

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>
<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>
<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>
<https://www.instagram.com/ncojournalofficial/>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

