



Coast Guard Flag Voice 30

RECRUIT ADVERTISING

Our decision to advertise on World Wrestling Federation (WWF) programs has generated substantial "interest." This Flag Voice will address our decision -- sorry for the length, but it's a complex issue. I don't expect all to agree, but I trust most will understand. The bottom line is that our sole intention is to get to the target youth market of today.

I shouldn't need to restate the reasons we must do a much better job at getting today's youth to recognize the Coast Guard as a good career option. Besides a significant personnel shortfall that lends considerable urgency to "filling the workforce," I've previously explained the propensity for today's youth to consider the military service, much less the Coast Guard, as a career is at an all-time low. According to the Youth Attitude Tracking Survey (YATS), the Coast Guard has substantially the lowest name recognition of all the Services.

While recruiting is more of an art than a science, it does take two essential capabilities: a means to generate awareness and "leads," or interested individuals whom recruiters can turn into recruits, and recruiters, who meet with potential recruits to "close the deal." The Services' recruiting efforts show it takes about 100 leads to generate just one recruit. Hence, each Service needs substantial lead-generating capability. Advertising plays a major role in that effort.

In dollars, the Coast Guard cannot compete with DoD's resources. We simply cannot afford to advertise on prime-time TV as do the other Services, so historically we have relied on print ads and Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on cable TV and radio. We have no control over when PSAs are aired, as they are gratis. Unless you are up at 2AM watching the 100th rerun of "Invaders from Mars," you're unlikely ever to see one of our commercials.

Although not the most productive advertising medium, at least we had PSAs. However, between a massive Federally funded anti-drug campaign and the recent state settlements with the tobacco companies, both requiring extensive cable and radio advertising, the PSAs available to the Coast Guard will be severely curtailed. Our recent CG Reserve radio PSA has received half the amount of play its predecessor did at the same point after its release.

We therefore asked our advertising agency, Emmerling Post, to come up with some alternatives. They checked out paid TV and found both network and local schedules are too expensive for our budget. However, syndicated sponsorships presented plausible options. Emmerling Post discovered certain cable programming, namely WWF, is the leader over all other programs in attracting viewers in the 18-24 year age group. Described as a current cultural phenomenon, WWF outdraws even prime-time programs such

as "Friends," where advertising is considerably more expensive. The WWF reaches nearly 5 times more viewers than "Baywatch" while being 80% more efficient in our target audience. WWF is ranked highest in every demographic measure of interest among men 18-24, women 18-24, and second in African-American households 18-24. A February 14th article in the Washington Post noted Nielson Media Research found the 14th most-watched basic cable show the week before was the impeachment vote, with about 2.3M viewers. What were the 13 more popular shows? Eight of top 13 were either WWF or its competitor WCW, the other were broadcasts of dog shows and "Rugrats."

Marketing is a matter of tonnage and frequency. This is especially so with the age group that we are targeting. They are bombarded with advertising messages during every waking hour, even during school. The messages which stand out and are seen with sufficient frequency are the ones that go to the top of the mind.

Emmerling Post approached WWF and worked out an affordable deal. The WWF was interested in getting into the military Services market and found the Coast Guard especially intriguing. The TV spots will air 2-3 times per week. If you've seen the ads, you know the Coast Guard sponsors the "Save of the Week," an interesting tie-in to our mission as lifesavers. Some have serious objection to what is shown during these ads. It is typical "wrestling" action. Because this type of ad is imbedded into the show itself, it holds the viewing audience's attention better than the more traditional commercials when the audience drifts off for a break. Reaction from the "target" audience was the Coast Guard is "with it, smart and knows their business." As of this past weekend results are very encouraging, especially when compared to previous advertising efforts. We have already had 588 calls with 174 transfers directly to recruiters and 236 talking to live operators who took down information for further follow up by recruiters. The contract is for 26 weeks at which time we will thoroughly review the results. The Commandant has tasked us with measuring carefully the leads generated as well as the demographics of those recruited. If this works we will know!

Now, what about the "message" we are sending? Clearly, WWF programming does not exemplify our core values and its use of vulgar language, sexist attitudes, and sexual innuendoes is not what we are supporting. The fact is, today's youth watches these shows. Just stop by the mess deck at your own unit. Why? Well, you just might ask them, especially your son or daughter if they are in that age group. The answer you'll probably get is that it's just entertainment. Like it or not, the Coast Guard must draw from society at large. A focus group at Cape May last week revealed many young recruits avidly follow the WWF. What entertains our youth changes over time, and never has a generation of parents either completely understood or approved of what their children viewed as entertainment. I can speak to this first-hand with a 17-year-old daughter! She doesn't watch wrestling herself, but some of her friends do, and I consider them a fairly "wholesome" crowd - competitive swimmers, HS band members, etc. While the professional wrestling scene has mushroomed (helped, no doubt, by the election of a state governor), I don't see today's youth emulating those "values." But it's still those youth we must reach. To do so we must go where they are. While we might like to advertise on "Little House on the Prairie," you won't find too many of the target recruiting audience there. Every generation looks for their own way of escaping, and the broadcast programs/publications/videos which tend to be popular with today's youth are those that depart from the "norm" as defined by many of us "older" folks. WWF plays to that

emotion and provides unusual entertainment, which the fans find dramatic, humorous, and probably even identify as their "own," as opposed to their parents' generation.

In a recent article in the Washington Post, Lisa Provence wrote of the WWF, "It's apparent that joie de rasslin transcends age, race and socioeconomic status. Or even gender, as there were plenty of little girls there wearing their Stone Cold Steve Austin T-shirts."

In "Bring in da Noise," an article by Eugene Robinson in The Washington Post Magazine of 14 February, described his difficulty, as an African-American father of two sons, with the "message" of rap songs. He was aghast at the words about mindless violence, endless repetition of the rudest words, and explicit descriptions of anatomy. But he states, "I realized that, like it or hate it, this was the music of my sons' generation." He goes on to say: "And the words themselves? Well, they were still a barrier. But not an insurmountable one. To listen to the music of my era, my parents had been forced to jump an equally high hurdle, into a space where it was acceptable to sing about sex and drugs and rebellion in ways that first struck them as not merely crude, but immoral." He further states: "And I see less impact on my kids and their peers that the music of my youth had on me and my generation. Kids today are more conventional than we were, less rebellious, even less violent. Rap simply has not bred an entire cohort of foul-mouthed gangstas."

I do not think the youth of today, just because they are interested in the WWF, are any less likely to turn into the very best Coast Guard people with a deep sense of our core values and full commitment to the equal treatment of our men and women.

I'll quote an E-mail written by James F. (Jay) Crissey, now a Coast Guard civilian worker and an Auxiliarist who is a qualified recruiter, and a former active duty member in the late 60's and early 70's. He writes:

"The subject of the ads and now your communications has caused much thought here, and leads me to the following. I have four children ages 22, 18, 13 and 9, and am very involved with them in youth organizations. As a little league football coach and BSA troop Scoutmaster, I see many of today's young people, and at age 52 I'm aghast at their styles, music and culture. Yet when I look back at my youth in the 60's and remember bell-bottoms and beads, the Beatles and Jimmy Hendrix and our "counter-culture", I now understand my parents and their contemporaries' amazement and disgust/distrust. I can picture in my mind's as if yesterday, Liberty call aboard the Cutter KLAMATH in Seattle and the sight of the Chiefs and Senior Officers as the JOs and young enlisted went ashore dressed like hippies in tied-die tee shirts, bell-bottomed pants, knee-high fringed suede boots and fringed suede jackets. What a sight we must have been to them. Yet this is the crew who sailed the South China Sea on Operation Market Time, saved lives while on Ocean Station November, and prided themselves on NEVER NOT MAKING A COMMITMENT TO WHICH THEY HAD BEEN ASSIGNED."

We must not judge a book by its cover, or allow ourselves to judge someone by their looks. We must expend every effort to choose the BEST person for our Coast Guard. We must look everywhere for that

right person, in the schools of the suburbs and the inner cities, in the shopping malls and YES, IN THE AUDIENCE OF THE WFW AND WCW. To not look everywhere means we have not done a complete job, not fulfilled our mission. And to this Old Coastie, that's not our way of doing things. Finally, we must trust our time-tested system of making a Coast Guard person. The young folks of the KLAMATH I mentioned earlier were not for the most part born to be Coasties, they were made Coasties. They were good material to start, but it was the 1st Class, Chiefs and senior Officers who made them good, if not great, Coasties. Likewise, we must trust the same time-tested system of the Cape May Company Commanders and the duty station mentoring of senior people to produce the good, if not great, Coast Guard personnel for today and into the future.

I couldn't have said it better. No, WWF wouldn't be my first choice, either, and the Coast Guard certainly does not support all its values. We're not selling WWF's message, but using their medium as a venue to get our important message to today's young people - high school graduates, college students and college graduates -- that we have jobs and careers that really matter. There is no correlation that watching these events, much less attending rap and other contemporary concerts that are "short on core values," is a measure of the "quality" of these people. It's our job, and a tough one at that, to sign up those who will treat others with dignity, and be able to take aboard and exemplify our core values. And even a tougher job to instill those values during a Coast Guard career. I trust we all are up to the challenge!

Regards, FL Ames

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