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SILVER WINNER

The Navy Landed Me Here

Summary

This campaign for the US Navy has been the most successful in history: in lead generation, in the acquisition of new African American Officer applicants (54% over target), as well as in actual awarded Officer contracts (a 700% increase from the previous year). The campaign was able to overcome the obstacles of a “last resort” perception, the lack of concrete program awareness, and the fear of combat and the perils of war, going on to connect deeply and meaningfully with the target audience. The creative use of research provided rich consumer insights, guided both the strategy and campaign development, as well as into highly effective creative work.

Background

The United States is undergoing the most profound social, cultural, demographic, and technological changes in its entire history. By 2042, 54% of American population is slated to be multicultural. Today, almost 50% of the Millennial Generation — the sole recruitment demographic for the US Navy — is already multicultural. Highly aware of the need to respond to these changes, the Navy has the long-term goal of insuring that its Officer Core truly reflects the US population by 2037.

Although the Navy meets its goals for the overall number of General Enlisted recruits selected for active duty each year, meeting the diversity Officer recruiting goals has proven to be more difficult. Given the difficulty of recruiting the African American Officer target, GlobalHue was asked to focus all of its efforts on reaching the African American Officer recruitment goal, which had never been met in the past.

We knew three things going into the project.

First, we knew that for young, African American students a military career is often viewed as a last resort — a kind of fallback option if everything else fails.

Second, we knew that the actual awareness of Navy programs and careers was extremely low. While students thought that they knew a lot about what the military has to offer, their true awareness of the program benefits was very low. Further, they don’t know that the Navy is “hiring” in the careers that are most important to them: engineering, medicine, aviation, law, and business.

Third, the ongoing war had severely dampened the attraction of the military. The nightly news has give so much visibility to the battlefield and the perils of war that most respondents thought of those dangers as the inevitability of going into the military, making it a major obstacle to recruitment.

Objectives

- Business objective: Increase the number of new African American Officer applicants.
- Marketing objective: Generate 2,000 African American leads for US Navy Officer programs.

A different approach to research

Traditionally, Navy recruitment advertising in the general market has focused on service, patriotism, military action, and international relief efforts. We had a hunch that there was a much more effective way to reach the African American Officer recruitment target, so we set out to find the deep, human insights that would help us connect to the young students we needed to reach.

To do so, we conducted qualitative research in NY, LA, and Atlanta with students between the ages of 17 and 24, who indicated that they would consider the military as an option. Based on strategic hypotheses about the target audience, however, we overturned three important research and procedure conventions.

First, we changed the recruitment strategy. Typically, the Navy only approaches university sophomores in the second semester. Unfortunately by this time, a student paying their own way through college is already heavily in debt, as tuition costs can easily run \$20,000 a year. By the time they're a sophomore, they're already "immune" to the sticker shock of tuition fees.

As a result, we decided that we needed to start early and seed the market, so we did a mix of focus groups with both high school and university students. This eventually led to lowering the lead generation qualifier for the Navy from sophomores to freshman.

Second, we took a much more emotional focus than usual. We did a deep dive on the student's hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the future, for what they wanted out of life. We also helped them articulate the barriers that they thought might get in their way.

Lastly, instead of focusing on advertising messaging, as was the case in the past research, we went in with the Navy's actual Baccalaureate Degree Completion Program (BDCP), the nuts and bolts of what the Navy had to offer. This had never been done before, and, as it turns out, the BDCP was the secret weapon in attracting young, African American students.

What we learned: The cultural context

Whether in high school or college, young African American students had set their sights on an education as the means to help them achieve their goals and dreams in life. Many of the high school students felt that they needed to escape from their existing environments and/or nonproductive situations that could potentially hold them back. Those already at college were seeking supportive environments that would help to move them forward: counseling, guidance, and networking opportunities. For both groups, the ideal environment was one that would provide discipline and structure as they made their way through school and progressed in their careers.

Since most of the students were faced with funding an education themselves, they had a very focused, down-to-earth attitude toward the outcome. Getting an education was about a powerfully charged end state: “I want to be a doctor, an engineer, a business person, etc.” *Anything that didn’t lead to that end state simply didn’t resonate with them.*

The barriers to their dreams revolved around three points:

- A lack of money and a corresponding fear that they wouldn’t be able to finish their education.
- Their lack of experience as students and the difficulty of finding internships and jobs that would provide it.
- The need for a nurturing environment that would help them to develop and move forward.

The Navy BDCP runs counter what people know about military programs. It provides students with a stipend of up to \$4500 a month, there are no drills and no uniforms during their university life, and the Navy enlistment commitment afterwards is typically 4-5 years. They loved the money and the freedom while at the university, but expressed concern that they would end up swabbing the proverbial decks, rather than being able to work in their chosen field.

Once students understood that after graduation they would be employed by the Navy in their chosen field, as well as have the opportunity to gain relevant experience and lead teams of their own, they realized that the BDCP was a catalyst to their dreams. As one respondent put it, “You mean the Navy is the answer to all of the barriers up there on the wall?”

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{Insight/End State:} \\ \text{“Where I want} \\ \text{to go in life”} \end{array} \right] + \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{Navy} \\ \text{support as} \\ \text{catalyst} \end{array} \right] = \text{The Opportunity}$$

We knew that we would need to find a creative way of going directly to the end state **and** demonstrating how the Navy was the answer to many of the barriers that could get in the way of their dreams.

The campaign idea: Anchor your dream with the Navy

After the research, it was quite clear that that we needed to approach the African American segment in a different way than the general market. The message of service, patriotism, and military action strayed far afield from the single-minded career focus of these students.

Keeping in mind the importance of an emotionally charged end state, we wanted to show graduates in successful situations, people who were living their post-Navy dream, rather than wearing uniforms, which would remit back to service. Being primarily a print and interactive campaign, we needed work that would have both strong visual and emotional impact, work that portrayed the Navy as the catalyst for success.

We began thinking about powerful symbols for the Navy and realized that the anchor, which had never been used before in recruitment advertising, was ideal. After all, the anchor has long been a part of the traditional Navy insignia (including tattoos), and when you think of anchors, you can’t help but think of the Navy. The anchor is also a symbol for stability and strong foundations, for security and steadiness that helps weather a storm, and, in this case, we wanted it to serve as an anchor to the students’ hopes and dreams for their future.

As a device which came crashing through each of the ads, the Navy anchor also provided dramatic impact and a bit of comic relief to what could have been a very literal execution of line, “The Navy landed me here.” Four of the six print ads portray successful African American professionals, all gazing directly at the camera with confidence and pride, having been landed in their jobs by the Navy. The other two show students who have been “landed” at the university.

Media

The 360° campaign included print, interactive, event marketing, and PR. The website, <MyNavyMyFuture.com>, was designed to overcome the lack of knowledge about what the BDCP had to offer. It guided students through the benefits of the Navy program, gave them an opportunity to explore careers, get orientation on Navy life, create their own career path toward their future, as well as learning about important African Americans in the history of the Navy.

Results

Upon experiencing the campaign, the understanding of the both the end state, as well as the Navy support role were immediate. “It makes it seem like anyone can do it.” “The anchor is stability, something to lean on.” “You don’t have to be all on your own.”

This translated into concrete results that over delivered on client expectations. Last year the Navy exceeded its application goal by 54%. As a result, the Navy was only one application short of meeting its African American Officer applications — for the first time in history.

The launch of <MyNavyMyFuture.com> generated more than 300 online discussions, touching more than 300,000 people across 80 unique sites, including Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. In addition, the total campaign garnered 22 Officer contracts, versus only 3 the year before — a 700% increase over the previous year.

In short, the campaign created momentum for the Navy brand, giving it new meaning and relevance for an important target.