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National Skilled Trades Advertising Campaign – Creative Testing and Evaluation Executive Summary

Prepared for Employment and Social Development Canada

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Canada 

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March 2022

This public opinion research report presents the results of the focus groups and two online surveys conducted by Earnscliffe Strategy Group on behalf of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). The focus groups were conducted in August 2021, the first survey was conducted in December 2021 and the second survey was conducted in March 2022.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Campagne nationale de publicité pour les métiers spécialisés – test de concepts créatifs et évaluation

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Executive Summary

Earnscliffe Strategy Group is pleased to present this report to Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) summarizing the results of the qualitative research conducted to pre-test materials for the National Skilled Trades Advertising Campaign, as well as the methodology report of two online surveys conducted pre- and post- campaign.

In Budget 2019, the government committed to providing Skills Canada with an investment of \$10 million per year, starting in 2020-2021, to encourage more young people to consider training and work in the skilled trades.

As part of this commitment, the Public Affairs and Stakeholder Relations Branch of ESDC is planning a national marketing and advertising campaign to promote the Skilled Trades as a first-choice career for young people. The Campaign will aim to change the perception around careers in the skilled trades, promoting their merits, including high demand, high wages, and ongoing professional development. In addition, the Campaign will encourage Canadians to consider training and working in the skilled trades, addressing a potential labour shortage in the Red Seal Trades, and getting Canadians back to work after COVID-19 job losses.

The results of the qualitative research presented in this report form the first of a three-phase research project aimed at testing and evaluating the National Skilled Trades Advertising Campaign. The main objectives of the qualitative research were to collect feedback on creative concepts to inform final creative development and measure recall, message retention and effectiveness. The main objective of the qualitative phase was to ensure the advertising campaign resonates with its intended target audience and meets its objectives. The research will inform final creative development by determining the potential for effectiveness and the resonance of messages and concepts with target audiences.

The methodology of the quantitative research, which made use of an Advertising Campaign Evaluation Tool (ACET), is also presented in this report. This research was conducted prior to and after the campaign to measure aided and unaided recall, message retention and effectiveness.

The total contract value of the three-phased project was \$125,976.39 including HST.

To meet the qualitative research objectives, Earnscliffe conducted a series of six (6) online focus groups. The target audiences included youth (16-19) and young adults (20-34). The groups were conducted with residents of Eastern Canada (Atlantic Canada, Quebec, and Ontario) and Western Canada (the Prairies and British Columbia). Two of the groups (one with each target audience) with residents of Eastern Canada were conducted in English and two were conducted in French. The groups with residents of Eastern Canada included official language minority Canadians (OLMCs) – both those who speak French outside Quebec and those who speak English in Quebec. The focus groups were approximately 90 minutes in length and participants received an honourarium of \$100.

It is important to note that qualitative research is a form of scientific, social, policy, and public opinion research. Focus group research is not designed to help a group reach a consensus or to make decisions, but rather to elicit the full range of ideas, attitudes, experiences, and opinions of a selected sample of participants on a defined topic. Because of the small numbers involved, the participants cannot be expected

to be thoroughly representative in a statistical sense of the larger population from which they are drawn and findings cannot reliably be generalized beyond their number. As such, results are directional only.

To meet the objectives for the quantitative phase of the research, Earnscliffe conducted two online surveys. The target audiences for both surveys were:

- youth (16-19), both in and out of school and not-employed-or-in-education-or-training (NEET); and,
- young adults (20-34) in out and out of school and NEET, looking to change careers or go back to school.

The first survey included 2,154 Canadians ages 16 to 34, including 1,147 youth (16-19) and 1,007 young adults (20-34), and averaged 5 minutes in length. Fieldwork was conducted from November 30, 2021, to December 17, 2021.

The second survey included 2,069 Canadians ages 16 to 34, including 1,026 youth (16-19) and 1,043 young adults (20-34), and averaged 6 minutes in length. Fieldwork was conducted from March 1-11, 2022.

For both phases of the research, quotas were set for gender and age within region for the sample of youth (16-19). Since the profile of those young adults (20-34) looking to switch careers or go back to school was unknown at the outset of the first study, no quotas were set for this group for the pre-campaign survey. However, upon completing the first phase, we were able to build a profile of young adults (20-34) looking to return to school or work that was developed during the first phase and set quotas based on that profile.

The sample of youth (16-19) was weighted to be reflective of the overall population by gender and age within region. The sample of young adults (20-34) was weighted by gender and age within region to be reflective of the population of Canadians of that age group who are looking to change careers or go back to school.

Since a sample drawn from an Internet panel is non-probabilistic in nature, the margin of error cannot be calculated for this survey. Details regarding the weighting procedures and response rate can be found in Appendix E.

The key findings from the research are presented below.

Key Findings

Concept Testing

Participants were presented with three advertising concepts, in storyboard format, and were asked to use their imaginations to consider them as fully executed/produced 30-second video ads. Each of the three concepts was presented one by one in randomized order. After each concept was presented, participants were led through a group discussion to gauge their overall reactions. Once each of the three concepts was reviewed, participants were asked about their overall preferences.

- Overall, reactions to the concepts were on balance favourable though enthusiasm did vary somewhat from one concept to the other (ranging from slightly negative or lukewarm to positive reactions).

- Participants appreciated that the concepts depicted a multitude of trade. However, in some instances, presenting too many different trades made for a cluttered and disjointed ad. Some had a hard time following the arc of the story.
- A few participants commented that none of the concepts depicted or indicated what a person needs to do or what the process is to become a skilled tradesperson. In fact, some of the concepts seemed to convey a sense that a career in the skilled trades was easy and ‘anybody can do it’.
- Asked if they would be motivated to do anything if they saw any of these ads, several participants thought that depending on when they saw the ad, they might search online for more information or to find out where they offer courses/training.
- Trading Places was the preferred concept overall, particularly among youth (16-19). Participants appreciated that it was short, simple and inspiring. They felt the comedic approach was attention-grabbing and made it memorable. Participants could see themselves in this concept and felt it was more targeted at a broader audience than the other two concepts, including younger people uncertain of their future career paths and older people who might not be happy in their current professions.
 - Participants who reacted less favourably to this concept, typically young adults (20-34), felt it was unrealistic to believe someone could really become an expert at, let alone have a passion for, something at which they are awful.
 - And, while interpretations of the main message were generally favourable, there appeared to be some confusion around the call to action with some interpreting it simply as self-improvement and not necessarily about consideration of a career in the skilled trades.
- Reactions to the Let’s Build concept were generally positive though participants found it less attention-grabbing and memorable than the other concepts. Participants liked that the concept displayed a variety of skilled trades and appreciated the main message of teamwork, collaboration and community.
 - Those with less favourable impressions of this concept found it vague, a bit overdone, and uninspiring. To them, this concept seemed to be promoting the wide range of careers in the skilled trades, rather than an exciting career in the skilled trades.
- The Grand Pivot was the least popular concept. While each of the story lines on their own were generally well-received, they were often difficult to follow, and participants had a hard time understanding the arc of the stories until the end. They also struggled with the discomfort of those left behind in the ad.

Design Directions

Participants were then presented with three different design directions. The design directions provided examples of the colour palette, typography, and imagery to convey the spirit of the potential creatives. Participants were asked to discuss their overall impressions of each direction and to select the direction they felt would best fit with their preferred advertising concept.

- Overall, almost half of participants selected Direction A as their preferred direction and it was the preferred direction for youth (16-19). The remaining participants’ preferences were divided between Direction B, the preferred direction for young adults (20-34), and Direction C.

- Participants’ reactions to Direction A were a little less polarized than reactions to Directions B and C. Direction A seemed to be regarded as the “goldilocks” option; not necessarily beautiful or exciting but not negative or off-putting. The colours were a little more muted (than Direction B), though still eye-catching and pleasing, and the imagery was unexpected for some and creative (described as surreal or dystopian). Most felt that this direction could fit with an ad about the skilled trades and was in line with a Government of Canada ad. A few participants felt the typography was a little outdated and suggested using the typography from Direction B instead.
- Almost half of young adults (20-34) preferred Direction B. While some found it positive and upbeat, others described it as too bubbly and unrealistic. Those critical of this direction felt it did not relate to a career in the skilled trades and would be more appropriate for a fashion ad/apparel company or a mobile phone company.
- Reactions to Direction C were a little more divided. While those who preferred this direction appreciated the artsy and edgy feeling it evoked, those who reacted unfavourably to it felt it was too dark and edgy. A few suggested it evoked a masculine and industrial feel which seemed to fit well with a career in the skilled trades though these choices seemed more obvious and predictable.

Campaign Taglines

The final part of the discussion explored participants’ reactions to three campaign taglines. Participants were asked to provide their overall reactions to each tagline and to select their preferred tagline.

- Overall reactions to Follow Your Passion were favourable. Participants felt that it was aspirational, inspiring, and relatable. They tended to connect with this tagline on a personal and emotional level.
- Reactions to Your Time is Now were less favourable. Participants felt it was threatening, more menacing than motivating, and stress-inducing. It evoked a sense of urgency that did not sit well with most, particularly youth (16-19).
- Let’s Build Together received neutral and critical reaction. Neutral reactions tended to revolve around the concept of teamwork and working together. Critical reactions tended to revolve around the sense that it was vague and not all that inspiring; participants did not connect with this tagline on a personal level, and it seemed narrowly focused on the construction dimension of the skilled trades.

Research Firm:

Earnscliffe Strategy Group Inc. (Earnscliffe)

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I hereby certify as a Representative of Earnscliffe Strategy Group that the final deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, and standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed:

Date: March 18, 2021

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Constable". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Stephanie Constable
Principal, Earnscliffe