



Business Outlook and Innovation for Success Campaign Evaluation

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

A. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) conducted public opinion research for an advertising campaign aimed at increasing awareness of the programs and services that support Canadian businesses looking to start-up, scale-up and export.

The campaign was designed to drive small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) owners and entrepreneurs to innovation.canada.ca where they can access information on programs and services targeted to their needs.

In addition to creative testing prior to launch, the research comprises pre- and post-campaign evaluation designed to establish a baseline for Government of Canada campaigns with the Canadian business audience and to capture the current business environment and outlook for Canadian entrepreneurs.

Specifically, the research objectives for this project were to

- evaluate the impact of the campaign on building awareness and usage of the innovation.canada.ca website and Government of Canada programs promoted via the website;
- establish benchmark data for government to business advertising on selected media;
- understand attitudes towards the ads tested; and
- get an updated read on SME's outlook on the current business environment, their key challenges and perceptions of the performance of the Government of Canada in supporting businesses, assess if these have shifted from the baseline survey, and drill down further on the needs of SMEs.

B. METHODOLOGY

1. Qualitative Phase

A total of three creative concepts were tested qualitatively via focus groups. Eight focus groups were conducted in total among the various business audiences listed in the table below. Two of the focus groups took place in-person among business owners and entrepreneurs in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and the remaining six focus groups were conducted online targeting business owners and intermediaries from across Canada, including French speakers, women entrepreneurs and youth. Fieldwork took place between December 10th – 13th, 2018. The focus groups ranged from 90 to 120 minutes in length, and participants received a remuneration between \$250 and \$300 (full information is available in the Screener, Annex B).

STATEMENT OF LIMITATIONS: When interpreting the qualitative findings, it is important to note that the objective was to uncover views in-depth as opposed to producing statistically representative results. Therefore, the results are not projectable to the population. The insights from the research were used to refine the concepts and to inform the quantitative research phase.

In-person GTA focus groups	
Small business owners (0-99 employees)	1 group in English
Women entrepreneurs	1 group in English

Online focus groups	
Intermediaries (accountants, lawyers and financial services branch managers that provide services to small business owners)	1 group in English
Medium business owners (100 to 499 employees)	2 groups in English 1 group in French
Women entrepreneurs	1 group in French
Young business owners (18-34 years old)	1 group in English

2. Quantitative Phase

The quantitative phase consisted of two online surveys, including a pre-campaign baseline and post-campaign evaluation each with a national sample of SME business owners or decision makers. In total, 713 online surveys were conducted in the baseline survey and 793 were conducted in the post-campaign survey. Quotas were placed on the proportion of completed surveys by business size, women-led businesses , and businesses led by young entrepreneurs (18-34 years old).

The surveys were conducted in English and French with the baseline survey taking place between January 31 and February 19, 2019 and the post-campaign survey taking place between June 11 and 22, 2019.

Random Iterative Method (RIM) weighting was employed to balance demographics by two variables (business size and region) to ensure that the survey sample’s composition reflects that of 2016 Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe.

The following table shows the definition of business size and the sample sizes for each.

Business Size	Sample Size Unweighted		Sample Size Weighted		Proportion	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Micro < 5 employees	307	413	399	444	56%	56%
Small 5 < 99 employees	299	285	299	333	42%	42%
Medium 100 < 499 employees	107	95	14	16	2%	2%
TOTAL	713	793	712	793	100%	100%

STATEMENT OF LIMITATIONS: The quantitative research was conducted with respondents from an online panel. Since the samples used in online panel surveys are based on self-selection and are not a random probability sample, no formal estimates of sampling error can be calculated. Although opt-in panels are not random probability samples, online surveys with the general population resemble a random sample closely if they are well designed and employ a large, well-maintained panel.

C. CONTRACT VALUE

The contract value for this research was \$244,748.73 (HST included).

D. REPORT

This report begins with an executive summary outlining key findings and conclusions, followed by a detailed analysis of the survey data. The Annex contains a full report on the qualitative findings, as well as the discussion guide and baseline and post-campaign surveys. In the quantitative findings, to improve readability, the results of the baseline survey are referred to as “Pre” and results of the post-campaign survey are referred to as “Post”.

E. USE OF FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

The findings of this study will help ISED improve the effectiveness of its communications, marketing and outreach efforts in support of its mandate to help businesses innovate, thrive and continue to contribute to the success of the Canadian economy.

F. KEY FINDINGS

Concept Testing

- The main findings from the qualitative creative test were incorporated into the final execution, including, a shift toward the winning ad that was found to knit together the trifecta of FUNDING + ADVICE + PARTNERSHIPS perfectly with what many SMEs were looking for, as did the narrative around ‘new markets’, ‘growth’ and ‘tailored advice’. The selection of creatives that were inclusive of service, rural, urban and high-tech businesses was borne of these findings to underscore that “all businesses are welcome” on the innovation portal; this inclusiveness was well-received by test audiences and subsequently by the advertisement’s target audiences.

Campaign Impact

- The campaign was successful in driving visits to innovation.canada.ca. The site had more visits during the 15 weeks of the campaign than it had over an entire year. This surpassed the expected number of unique visits during the campaign.* Incorporating a recommendation from the qualitative to place the Government of Canada logo more prominently to strengthen the brand link, and increase the credibility of the ads, in order to promote stronger click through, likely contributed to the strong click through rate achieved.
- Almost 2 out of 10 SMEs in Canada -- over 800,000 business owners and entrepreneurs -- recalled the campaign and 31% of them visited the website. Visits were highest among businesses looking to scale-up. This was foreshadowed in the qualitative research where the winning concept performed well on delivering the message that the site will help businesses looking to grow.

*Source. Web metrics/Innovation Canada Ad Campaign Internal Report prepared by The Strategic Communications and Marketing Sector, Fall 2019

- A key learning from the research was the value of using mixed media with the Canadian SME audience. Those who recalled the campaign through two different mediums were significantly more likely to visit the website. In total, 50% of these SMEs indicated visiting the website. Those who saw more than one ad also reacted more positively to the campaign – e.g., agreeing the website would help their business.
- The campaign performed well not only in the call to action to the site, but in educating SMEs about where to go if they want more information even if they did not visit the site. In total, 81% of those who recalled the campaign indicated knowing where to go for Government of Canada programs for businesses.

Attitudes Towards the Ads

- The campaign was well received (after exposure), with over half (56%) agreeing the ads clearly convey that the Government of Canada has built a website to help Canadian entrepreneurs and businesses, and that the ads talk about an important topic. However, less than half (46%) agreed the ads provide new information. This may indicate a predisposition to notice the ads among those already aware of programs and services offered by the Government of Canada and/or with the call to action being to visit the website the ads themselves didn't explicitly discuss the programs and services enough. While 55% of those who recalled the campaign felt the ads clearly conveyed the Government of Canada is trying to help businesses, only 27% who did not recall the campaign felt this way after exposure to the ads. This indicates that direction to the website alone may not have been enough to effectively communicate government support. More explicit narrative about what programs and services are available through innovation.canada.ca portal is recommended in future outreach or campaigns.

Business Outlook for SMEs

- The qualitative phase provided a strong indication that the issue weighing most heavily on the minds of SMEs is how to scale up effectively. While starting up is a challenge, the struggle to scale up is tougher. This was validated in the quantitative where helping businesses scale up was found to be among the top areas that SMEs want the Government of Canada to prioritize.
- These discussions also revealed that access to financing, and supports and advice in building a customer base are the fundamental barriers to scaling-up.
- Accessing financing is a common preoccupation among SMEs and may cause them to focus more strongly on what financing the Government of Canada can provide, while overlooking the programs and services available to help them to access more financing than government loans alone. Also for this reason, SMEs may overlook the utility of the government programs in helping provide advice and support in building a customer base.
- Future advertising and outreach should make a stronger effort to couple any messaging around financial support with tangible examples of the value of advice to guide businesses looking to grow their client base and scale up effectively. It is not just about the money, it is also about how best to use the money once you get it.
- In terms of both messaging and tone, the research found that business advertising may be over-using the word technology and references to tech. Many SMEs do not see themselves as a tech company even though they may be using new technology in their business. Future campaign concepts should have an option where the tone is not solely focused around tech.

Government of Canada Support for SMEs

- When we asked business what the Government of Canada should emphasize to support SMEs, their top-rated priorities were :
 1. Ensuring Canada has a competitive business tax regime
 2. Helping businesses ready to scale up and grow gain access to relevant financing
- However note that business assigned these two priority areas relatively low ratings in terms of performance by the Government of Canada.

G. POLITICAL NEUTRALITY STATEMENT AND CONTACT INFORMATION

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Colledge".

Mike Colledge

President

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