Communications Security Establishment   Centre de la sécurité des télécommunications

CSE Recruitment Branding Testing

Executive Summary

Prepared for Communications Security Establishment

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

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This public opinion research report presents the results of focus groups conducted by Earnscliffe Strategy Group on behalf of Communications Security Establishment. The research was conducted in February 2022.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Évaluation de la stratégie de recrutement du CST

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Executive Summary

Earnscliffe Strategy Group (Earnscliffe) is pleased to present this report to the Communications Security Establishment summarizing the results of the qualitative research undertaken to test creative recruitment branding concepts.

The Communications Security Establishment (CSE) is one of Canada's key security and intelligence organizations. CSE plays an integral role in helping to protect Canada and Canadians against foreign-based terrorism, foreign espionage, cyber-attacks, kidnappings of Canadians abroad, attacks on our embassies and other serious threats with a significant foreign element, helping to ensure our nation's prosperity, security, and stability. Recruitment and human resources play an essential part of its overall initiatives. CSE brings together the smartest minds and leading-edge technology in our world-class headquarters in Ottawa. The result: a dynamic, innovative, and rewarding work environment. CSE have been named one of Canada's Top Employers for Young People for several years running.

Most recently, with the launch of CSE's Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, CSE has a growing public profile and takes a lead role in managing national-level risks associated with cyber security. CSE is no longer a secret organization, but rather, an organization with secrets. With this evolution, CSE is updating its recruitment branding and required public opinion research to gauge reactions to the draft concepts.

The primary focus of the research was to explore reactions to a series of branding concepts to understand which approaches, from both a design and messaging perspective, were most appropriate for the target audiences: students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and mid-career professionals. The information gained through this public opinion research will be shared throughout the Department to inform the development of communications products and strategies. The total contract value for this research was $56,419.37 including taxes.

To meet the research objectives, Earnscliffe conducted a series of six online discussion groups with a total of 57 participants on February 16, 2022. Two markets were studied, with 4 groups conducted (in English) among Canadian citizens living in GTA/Southern Ontario/Eastern Ontario and 2 groups conducted (in French) among Canadian citizens living in Montreal/Western Quebec. Three of the groups were conducted with students in STEM and three were conducted with mid-career professionals. Students were defined as aged 18-29 who are either university students currently enrolled in a STEM program or recent graduates from a STEM program (past 2 years) or working in cyber/network security or intelligence. Mid-career professionals were

defined as aged 30-45 working in a government setting (federal, provincial, or municipal) or in a STEM field or in cyber/network security or intelligence. Two of the groups, one with each target audience, were conducted with those fluent in both oral and written Chinese.

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.

Key Findings

Career aspirations and goals

- For the most part, participants want to be challenged professionally and feel that they are doing something meaningful and/or impactful. They also want to feel supported by their employer, have a good work/life balance, as well as have flexibility in terms of their work environment, location (including working remotely) and hours/schedule.

- In some respects, these aspirations seemed incongruous with their perceptions of a career in the public service. When probed, a career in the public service did not seem all that exciting or challenging though the discussions also demonstrated that few have any real awareness or familiarity with public sector careers.

Reactions to branding concepts

- Worth noting, there seems to have been an issue with how the colours of all the concepts appeared on screen, with orange text and elements appearing more red. Also, the French versions of Concept D and C had issues with parts of the graphics shifting and transparency of the image layers.

- Overall, reactions to the four branding concepts were lukewarm to generally favourable though enthusiasm did vary somewhat from one concept to the other. No one seemed to react overly negatively to any of the concepts and almost all felt it would be appropriate to communicate about a career with CSE in these ways though there were very different feelings evoked with each concept.

- Many participants commented that none of the concepts seemed to provide much in the way of detail about CSE, which they understood may be intentional (to pique their curiosity).

  o Worth noting, very few had any unaided awareness or familiarity with CSE and there was a desire to learn more and to better understand what a career opportunity with CSE would entail.

- Asked if they would be motivated to do anything, several participants thought that depending on when/where they saw an ad, they might go to the website or search online for more information. With respect to the social media executions, most were skeptical they would like or share them, mostly for personal reasons and not due to the post itself.

- In terms of preference, participants (across both target audiences) preferred Concept A, followed by Concept D. Concepts C and B were selected much less frequently.

- What participants really liked about Concept A, was the wireframe face; the minimalist, modern design; and the limited but effective (high contrast) use of colour. This concept conveyed technology, digital and analog, artificial intelligence, and security (for a few). It was also described as attention-grabbing, memorable, and seemed to motivate different reactions (i.e., desire to see more examples of wireframe icons, visit the website).

- Reactions to Concept D were also generally positive. Those who liked it, appreciated the sombre colouring and the sense it conveyed of mystery and intrigue. The message participants took away was space, technology, engineering, and security in that the icon looks like a keyhole.

- With respect to Concept C, the icon of the camera lens was interesting and conveyed space but also innovation, technology, and security for some. A few participants, among mid-career professionals, felt the placement of the CSE logo in the orange circle at the centre of the lens conveyed surveillance, a big brother vibe, and that CSE is always watching, which was troubling and off-putting. Students, however, liked the use of colour and felt it was eye-catching and vibrant.

- Participants felt Concept B was cluttered, lacked focus or a central theme, and was not all that attention-grabbing or memorable. It did not seem to convey technology or security but more administration, human resources, and consulting. No meaning attached to the orange arrow or to the circle to which it pointed. What participants did appreciate, though, was the use of colour. It was the most colourful and brightest of all the concepts tested which seemed to appeal to students.

- With respect to the Chinese concept, reactions to this ad were neutral to positive but were especially positive among students. Those who liked it, described it as bright, colourful, eye-catching, and dynamic. Students very much appreciated that it was an ad that seemed to be targeted to them. They explained it made them feel proud and appreciative that Canada valued their contributions enough to reach out specifically to them. The mid-career professionals did not as readily see themselves in this ad and a few seemed to feel targeted in an uncomfortable way.

- With respect to the Chinese translations, among the mid-career professionals, there were mixed views as to whether both translations should appear in the ad. Some felt that not having both translations was culturally insensitive. Others felt that having both translations may add to the clutter and the simplified Chinese translation was, therefore, sufficient.

Reactions to taglines

- Overall reaction to the proposed tagline, *Be part of a mission that matters*, was generally lukewarm. Participants did not feel it was all that inspiring and described it as generic and something every organization says.

- Reaction to the alternative, *A mission that matters*, was equally neutral, if not slightly more negative in the sense that the personal connection implied by, "Be part of…", was removed.

- With respect to the Chinese taglines, most preferred the taglines, *Create your future with CSE,* or, *Build your future with CSE*. Both were deemed forward-looking and inspiring. *Job security with CSE*, was the least inspiring and seemed to be most incongruous with their descriptions of their ideal profession.

- With respect to the Chinese translations, there was a sense they were a little too long, wordy and clunky, and the translations for, *Start your career with CSE* did not seem to convey the same thing in Chinese.

Reactions to messages

- The message, *You will make an impact defending Canada*, was mostly well received. For some, it was inspiring and conveyed a sense of pride and seemed to connect with their desire to have a profession that challenges them and is meaningful/rewarding. For others, it related to the military which was not always received positively.

- The other messages, *You will never be bored, You'll be part of a team, You will know you're making an impact,* were deemed to be fairly generic and applicable to any profession.

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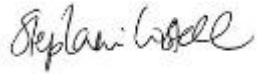
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I hereby certify as a representative of Earnscliffe Strategy Group that the final deliverables fully
comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the
Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures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

Signed: Date: March 4, 2022

Stephanie Constable
Principal, Earnscliffe