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2022-2023 National Skilled Trades Advertising Campaign – Creative Testing and Evaluation

Executive Summary

Prepared for Employment and Social Development Canada

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

Canada 

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August 2022

This public opinion research report presents the results of the focus groups and three online surveys conducted by Earnscliffe Strategy Group on behalf of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). The focus groups were conducted in September and October 2022, the first survey was conducted in October 2022, the second survey and the additional focus groups were conducted in December 2022, and the third survey was conducted in March 2023.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Campagne nationale de publicité pour les métiers spécialisés 2022-2023 — test de concepts créatifs et évaluation.

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Executive summary

Earnscliffe Strategy Group (Earnscliffe) is pleased to present this report to Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) summarizing the results of the qualitative research conducted to pre-test creative materials for the 2022-2023 National Skilled Trades Advertising Campaign, as well as the quantitative methodology report for three online surveys conducted pre- and post- campaign using the Advertising Campaign Evaluation Tool (ACET) issued by the Communications and Consultations Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (PCO).

In Budget 2019, the Government of Canada committed to investing \$6M over two years to create a national marketing and advertising campaign to promote skilled trades as a first-choice career for young people. The campaign goals were to: change the perception around apprenticeship and careers in the skilled trades by promoting their merits as viable, well paid, and rewarding; and position apprenticeships and skilled trades as first-choice career paths (that is, a career in the skilled trades is a rewarding “Plan A” choice for youth and not a “Plan B” alternative).

Budget 2022 asserted that the skilled trades are vital to the future of the Canadian economy and offer workers rewarding careers in fields ranging from carpenters to electricians and boilermakers. It proposed to provide \$84.2 million over four years to double funding for the Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP).

The demand for skilled trades continues to be high. After a successful campaign in Spring 2022, ESDC will continue and expand the National Skilled Trades Campaign. This year’s campaign will have two streams:

- **Stream 1** will use lessons learned from previous campaigns to streamline the media mix and more effectively reach the primary audiences (youth aged 15 to 19 and young adults aged 20 to 34); and,
- **Stream 2** will broaden its advertising tactics with ads designed specifically for the secondary audience (parents, guardians, and/or caregivers).

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.

To inform the campaign strategy, ESDC engaged Earnscliffe to conduct a multi-phased research project involving qualitative creative testing and pre- and post-campaign quantitative research.

The research program began with an initial qualitative phase. The main objectives of the qualitative research were to collect feedback on creative concepts to inform final creative development and 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 total contract value of the multi-phased project was \$194,021.00 including HST.

To meet these objectives, Earnscliffe conducted a five-phased research project.

The first phase, qualitative concept testing, consisted of a series of six (6) online focus groups conducted between September 28 and October 5, 2022. The target audiences included parents, guardians, and/or caregivers of youth ages 13 to 19. Participants were between the ages of 35 and 60. Four groups were conducted in English with residents of Atlantic Canada, Ontario, the Prairies, British Columbia, and the Territories, while two groups were conducted with residents of Quebec in French. Those residing in official language minority communities (OLMCs) were invited to participate in a group in the official language of their choice on a day and time that worked for them. The focus groups were approximately 90 minutes in length and participants received an honourarium of \$100 as a token of appreciation for their time.

The second phase, pre-campaign survey, utilized a quantitative methodology, and made use of an Advertising Campaign Evaluation Tool (ACET). This survey was conducted online using Leger's proprietary opt-in online panel prior to the campaign to set a baseline on which to measure aided and unaided recall, message retention, and effectiveness. The survey was conducted among 2,024 Canadians, including 1,017 youth (16 to 19) and young adults (20 to 34) who are changing careers, continuing schooling, or who intend to go back to school; as well as 1,007 parents and caregivers. The survey averaged 8 minutes in length. Fieldwork was conducted from October 3 to 11, 2022. The sample of youth (16 to 19) was weighted to be reflective of the overall population by gender and age within region. The data from the remaining respondents in Stream 1 or for those in Stream 2 were weighted using the incidence rates determined by the research itself. 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 third phase, qualitative research testing experiential marketing approaches, consisted of a series of four (4) online focus groups conducted December 5 and December 6, 2022. The target audiences included young adults ages 20 to 34 and youth ages 13 to 19. There were two discussion groups conducted with each target audience, one in English and one in French. Those living in official language minority communities (OLMCs) – Anglophones in Quebec and Francophones outside Quebec – participated in a group that fit with their language preference and schedule. The focus groups were approximately 90 minutes in length and participants received an honourarium of \$100 as a token of appreciation for their time.

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.

The fourth phase, stream 1 post-campaign survey utilized a quantitative methodology and made use of an Advertising Campaign Evaluation Tool (ACET). This survey was conducted online using Leger's proprietary opt-in online panel following an ESDC marketing campaign, targeted to youth aged 15 to 19 and young adults aged 20 to 34, to measure aided and unaided recall, message retention, and effectiveness. The survey was conducted among 1,017 youth (16 to 19)

and young adults (20 to 34) who are changing careers, continuing schooling, or who intend to go back to school. The survey averaged 10 minutes in length. Fieldwork was conducted from December 5 to 8, 2022. The sample of youth (16 to 19) was weighted to be reflective of the overall population by gender and age within region. The data from the remaining respondents in Stream 1 were weighted using the incidence rates determined by the research itself. 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 K.

The fifth phase, also utilizing a quantitative methodology, made use of an Advertising Campaign Evaluation Tool (ACET). The Stream 2 post-campaign survey was conducted online using Leger’s proprietary opt-in online panel following an ESDC marketing campaign, which targeted parents, guardians, and/or caregivers of youth ages 13 to 19. The survey included 1,008 respondents and fieldwork was conducted from March 17 to 22, 2023. The data were weighted using the incidence rates determined by the research itself. 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 sampling procedures and response rate can be found in Appendix N.

Key findings

Phase 1: Qualitative concept testing

Creative concepts

- None of the three creative concepts were deemed to be unacceptable or inappropriate for the Government of Canada to use in any way.
- When asked to select their preferred creative concept initially, participants’ explanations for their selections seemed to be more heavily influenced by the headline, and the message that “funding was available”, than by the overall look and feel of the concept.
- Participants tended to appreciate larger photos that better depicted the work of those in the skilled trades. They also appreciated the diversity of individuals featured in the ad(s).
- The icons of a wrench and spatula that appeared in some of the creative concepts were felt to be more of a distraction than an enhancement to the overall look and feel.
- Overall preference of the three concepts favoured Creative C. However, when asked their preferred creative based on overall look and feel (separating the headline from the concept), participants’ preferences were more evenly split between the three.
- Overall, Creative C was described as dynamic because it was more colourful, and the images were larger; Creative A was described as more attention-grabbing because of the bright yellow background; and Creative B was described as contemporary because of the different shapes and content placement.

Campaign headlines

- The majority of participants preferred Headline B, “A career that pays, skills that last”. It seemed more complete (combination of all three headlines) and to touch on all of the elements they deemed most important as they reflected on the futures of their adolescent(s): career, pay, skills, last (longevity).
- Headline C, “A career that pays off”, was appreciated for its simplicity and the interpretation of the payoff of a career in the skilled trades that was not strictly financial but could also include experience, competence, accomplishment, success, helping others, etc.
- Headline A, “A career for the future” was also appreciated for being brief and to the point. It seemed to suggest one would find a lasting career, a career for life, and a career into which one could grow.

Voice overs

- Both voice overs were very well received, and neither would be unacceptable or inappropriate for the Government of Canada.
- What participants liked about both voice overs was the comedic tone and humourous approach. They described it as attention-grabbing and interesting.
- What seemed to differentiate the two was that Voice over B seemed to be more dynamic and impart more information about learning and the path toward a career in the skilled trades; whereas Voice over A seemed to be funnier and impart that one could turn a passion into a career.

Radio concepts

- Overall, participants tended to prefer Radio C and B.
- Radio C was particularly compelling because it was direct to the point and informative. Participants were especially surprised and impressed about the need for “hundreds of thousands of skilled trades workers”. It implied a sense of urgency which participants felt might motivate someone to act.
- Reactions to Radio B were also generally positive. What participants liked most about this ad was the comedic approach in the use of the sounds of skilled trades to convey the message about the “three hundred available trades” and the specific mention of paid apprenticeships. They felt this concept was attention-grabbing, informative, funny, and memorable.
- Those who preferred Radio A felt it was simple and to the point. The main message was that the skilled trades are in demand. Those more critical of this concept questioned whether it would capture their attention, motivate them to act, or be memorable.

Campaign messaging

- There seemed to be an overall preference for messages that highlighted that there are a variety of high-demand and life-long career options in the skilled trades and messages that spoke to the demand for skilled trades workers in Canada.

- The message, “Skilled trades offer flexible career options that stay in high demand at every stage of their career”, was very well received. The references to “flexible”, “high demand” and “at every stage of their career” were particularly compelling.
- The message, “Over 256,000 new apprentices are needed over the next five years to meet demand in Canada”, was well received because it conveyed the need or demand and immediacy for skilled trades workers in Canada over the next few years.
- Reaction to the message, “It’s rewarding for parents to see their children earning lucrative pay right away and creating a stable financial future”, was mixed. Most were uncertain as to the main message and thought the relationship to skilled trades was not explicit enough. Some appreciated the mention of “lucrative pay right away” and suggested that seeing their kids in stable, lucrative careers would be rewarding. Others were less comfortable with the word “lucrative” and tended to agree they want their children to have rewarding careers, however they choose to interpret the word.
- Similarly, reaction to the message, “Skilled trades offer high-demand careers aligned with the current direction of the economy”, was mixed. Some participants were reassured by the notion that someone was following employment trends and encouraging people to consider careers that are or will be in high demand. Other participants did not find that linkage all that compelling, arguing that not all skilled trades are in high demand.

Phase 2: Quantitative pre-campaign survey (October 3 to 11, 2022)

Stream 1 (youth aged 16 to 19 and young adults aged 20 to 34)

- In the past three weeks, just over half (54%) claim to have seen, read, or heard any advertising from the Government of Canada.
- The most common topics of ads recalled top-of-mind were COVID-19 or something relating to elections. In total, one in twenty (5%) of those who recall any Government of Canada ad mentioned something relating to employment opportunities.
- One in four (26%) claim to have seen, read or heard any Government of Canada advertising about exploring a career or training in the skilled trades over the past three weeks.
- Of those claiming to have seen such an ad, YouTube (32%), Facebook (21%), television (19%) and Instagram (18%) were the most commonly cited points of contact.
- Among those who claim to have seen, read, or heard any Government of Canada advertising about exploring a career or training in the skilled trades over the previous three weeks, promoting careers in skilled trades (17%), mentioning an incentive program to get people into the skilled trades (9%), unspecified messages about employment or work (9%), or promoting education or training (7%), are the most common messages they recall.

Stream 2 (parents, guardians and/or caregivers)

- In the past three weeks, just under half (45%) claim to have seen, read, or heard any advertising from the Government of Canada.

- The most common topics of ads recalled top-of-mind were COVID-19 or something relating to elections. In total, less than one in twenty (3%) of those who recall any Government of Canada ad mentioned something relating to employment opportunities.
- Less than one in five (17%) claim to have seen, read, or heard any Government of Canada advertising about exploring a career or training in the skilled trades over the past three weeks.
- Of those claiming to have seen such an ad, television (47%), Facebook (23%), YouTube (18%), radio (15%), and online news sites (11%) were the most commonly cited points of contact.
- Among those who claim to have seen, read, or heard any Government of Canada advertising about exploring a career or training in the skilled trades over the previous three weeks, promoting careers in skilled trades (23%), mentioning an incentive program to get people into the skilled trades (12%), expressing there is a need for skilled trades workers (10%), promoting education or training (7%), or unspecified messages about employment or work (5%) are the most common messages they recall.

Phase 3: Qualitative research testing experiential marketing approaches

Creative concepts

- None of the three creative concepts were deemed to be unacceptable or inappropriate for the Government of Canada to use in any way.
- Overall, participants reacted very positively to the notion of an experiential concept and described the idea as innovative, engaging, informative, and a unique way to make the skilled trades more accessible.
- Concept B was preferred by a plurality of participants who liked that it was engaging, interactive, and conveyed a lot of information. The hands-on and tactile nature of the concept was seen to complement the perceived manual nature of many trades nicely.
- A close runner up, those who preferred Concept A appreciated that it was visually appealing. They particularly appreciated the regional maps used to display employment data.
- Among those who preferred Concept C, the experiential and gamified experience was noted as unique and attractive. While this appealed to some, it was perceived as unprofessional by others who did not find it conducive to learning about a given profession.

Current mall behaviours

- The frequency with which participants went to malls varied considerably from multiple times a week to one a year. Many participants noted that they had shifted their shopping online.
- When asked about who they went to the mall with, there was a similar variety of answers with participants mentioning that they went by themselves, with family, or with friends.

Digital experience

- Overall, most participants felt that a digital component would be a valuable complementary way to access additional information regardless of the concept employed, with some mentioning the possibility of using QR codes as a bridge between the physical and digital experiences.
- Despite favourable impressions of an online presence, most participants were not enthused by the incorporation of social media and questioned why it was being included.

Message testing

- Overall participants liked messages which underscored the financial potential, be it the earning potential, the financial assistance, earning while learning or sense of reward/rewarding experience that comes with a career in the skilled trades.
- Other compelling messaging was around the variety of career options in the skilled trades and the high demand for skilled trades workers; as well as the specialized nature of the training such that one only needs to learn the skills necessary for the job (rather than theoretical learning that may not be directly applicable to the job).

Phase 4: Stream 1 post-campaign survey (youth aged 16 to 19 and young adults aged 20 to 34) post-campaign survey (December 5 to 8, 2022)

- In the past three weeks, just over half (56%) claim to have seen, read, or heard any advertising from the Government of Canada.
- Three in ten (30%) claim to have seen, read or heard any Government of Canada advertising about exploring a career or training in the skilled trades over the past three weeks.
- After being exposed to three ads used in the campaign, 26% of respondents claim to have seen one or more of these ads.
- Of those claiming to have seen the ad(s), television (49%), YouTube (44%), Instagram (22%) and Facebook (19%) were the most commonly cited points of contact.
- Over half (55%) of respondents say they did nothing as a result of seeing the ad(s), while one quarter (23%) say they spoke to someone about the skilled trades.
- After reviewing the ads used, interpretation of the main message varied, with the largest proportion of respondents (20%) claiming their message was to promote the skilled trades as a career, however a large majority of respondents (72%) agree that the ads clearly convey that the Government of Canada wants to encourage people to join the skilled trades.

Phase 5: Stream 2 post-campaign survey (parents, guardians and/or caregivers) post-campaign survey (March 17 to 22, 2023)

- In the past three weeks, half (49%) claim to have seen, read, or heard any advertising from the Government of Canada.
- One quarter of respondents (26%) claim to have seen, read or heard any Government of Canada advertising about exploring a career or training in the skilled trades over the past three weeks.
- After being exposed to three ads used in the campaign, 25% of respondents claim to have seen one or more of these ads.
- Of those claiming to have seen the ad(s), television (62%), YouTube (23%), radio (22%), and Facebook (31%) were the most commonly cited points of contact.
- Half (50%) of respondents say they did nothing as a result of seeing the ad(s), while one quarter (25%) say they spoke to someone about the skilled trades.
- After reviewing the ads used, interpretation of the main message varied, with the largest proportion of respondents claiming the message was government funding or incentive program (19%), skilled trades are in demand (18%), promoting the skilled trades (14%) and promoting the skilled trades as a viable career option (14%).
- Furthermore, a large majority of respondents (83%) agree that the ads clearly convey that the Government of Canada wants to encourage people to join the skilled trades.

Research Firm:

Earnscliffe Strategy Group (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 Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and Directive on the Management of Communications. 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: April 21, 2023



Stephanie Constable
Principal, Earnscliffe