

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECRUITMENT
MARKETING STRATEGIES
FOR SMALL, REMOTE AGENCIES

Article

By

Richard A. Harpole
Barstow Police Department

Command College Class XXXVI

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The Importance of Recruitment Marketing Strategies For Small Remote Agencies

“It is the doctrine of war that we must not rely on the likelihood of the enemy coming, but on our own readiness to meet him; not on the chance of his not attacking, but on the fact that we have made our position invincible”.

Gerald A. Michaelson
Sun Tsu-Strategies for Marketing¹

The future is coming like the enemy of which Michaelson refers to, and leaders of small, remote law enforcement agencies cannot face the future expecting that it will be kind. Failure to plan for future challenges in law enforcement recruitment will have the effect of allowing the enemy (the future) to dictate the nature and likely outcome of the battle. Leaders must instead prepare for the future and work proactively to shape their organizations. Just as the past presented many recruitment difficulties for small agency law enforcement, it is certain the future will bring new challenges as well as opportunities for those agencies that plan for it.

The world is changing, and law enforcement recruitment efforts must change to meet these new challenges. Agencies that wait until tomorrow to prepare for tomorrow’s recruitment needs, will likely find success difficult to reach. Small agency police chiefs and agency middle managers already know that recruitment will be one of the main challenges they will face in the next five years.²

While there is virtually no end to the number of people who want to be police officers, the list of people who both want to be police officers and who are qualified remains comparatively short. Added to the challenges presented by the shallow

recruitment pool is the 3%-at-50-retirement benefit, which has become the preferred retirement plan in California law enforcement. This benefit will further increase officer shortages in California.

The Future Challenge

Many publications have examined these continuing law enforcement recruitment challenges. One such article, "Who Wants This Job?" discussed the relationship of the national economic situation, low salaries, increased retirements, and a recruitment pool looking at other career opportunities. This article quoted one police chief who talked about the thousands of dollars his city invested in traditional recruitment only to find that old tried and true methods were not working.³

Researchers and futurists are forecasting a labor crisis by 2010, because they expect there will be 10 million more jobs in this country than workers to fill them.⁴ The laws of supply and demand will cause labor to become a seller's market, where employees will be in a position to demand higher salaries and benefit packages for their services. The private sector will of course be able to pay more and provide more creative benefit packages than the public sector. This will leave law enforcement managers with difficult choices such as hiring fewer officers and reducing services or lowering standards and filling the ranks.

The disparity between what private and public sectors can offer in salary and benefits will make law enforcement recruitment more difficult. Law enforcement agencies have always competed with a variety of industries and occupations for the attention of the same candidates, but the competition will soon become more intense. To offset this disparity, strategies must be implemented now to condition future job seekers

to perceive small agency law enforcement as a viable and preferred career choice.

What is Marketing?

Law enforcement agencies often view marketing solely as the newspaper ads they place when a vacancy exists. Marketing is much more than a newspaper ad. Marketing includes newspaper ads and radio spots, but it also includes websites, banner ads, promotional materials, and the service product of the agency. Newspaper announcements seeking applicants for a position will likely only attract people looking for a job. What law enforcement agencies need are people who are dedicated to building a career.

Small, remote law enforcement agencies will need to make a conscious effort to develop a proactive, consistent, and ongoing image building marketing message that can be adapted to a variety of media and forums. The message has to communicate excitement, the value of a future in a small, remote law enforcement agency, as well as the importance of law enforcement in a small community.

Additionally, the message of the agency service product has to match the message in the marketing effort, and this message has to be one that will appeal to the intended audience. When potential candidates look at the service product of the small agency, they need to see an image that will inspire them. All members of the law enforcement family need to understand that everything they do in the day-to-day routine of providing service contributes to the organization's marketing effort. An agency cannot advertise one message and deliver another through their service product. At the same time, an agency that provides superior service and commitment to the community can build upon that image through a proactive image building marketing strategy.

Rather than waiting for the job market crisis to become acute, law enforcement

managers should begin now to develop the proactive image building marketing strategies necessary to attract ideal candidates in a more competitive future labor market. If agencies are to be successful in this effort, they will need to understand Generation Y and the issues that will motivate them to pursue careers in a small law enforcement agency.

Generation Y?

Just as law enforcement managers began to understand the motivations of Generation X, the next generation, Gen Y (those born between 1980 and 2000) is beginning to enter the adult labor market. Agency managers are left to wonder if this group will be any different from the previous generation. Members of Gen Y are the younger siblings of Gen X but they are wired differently. Managers, who struggled to understand Gen X and had difficulty with their issues such as, why they need to answer to a boss and what is in it for them, will be encouraged to learn that Gen Y sees the world differently.

Some authors have defined Generation Y as those born after 1980, while the Zell Center for Risk Research defines the cohort as those born between 1977 and 1995,⁵ and *Generations at Work* sets the time bracket at 1980 to 2000.⁶ No information was found to identify the cohort following Generation Y.

For purposes of this article, Generation Y will be defined as those persons born between 1980 and 2000. Several labels—Generation Y, Gen Y, Generation Next, or Nexters, are commonly used to identify this cohort, despite the fact this group tends to reject these labels, instead seeing themselves as unique individuals.⁷ These terms will be used interchangeably throughout this article. This cohort is expected to have about 73 million members, which will be larger than Generation X, but slightly smaller than the

Baby Boomers.⁸ This cohort will be an economic powerhouse and will have a dominant role in the labor market. Nexters tend to be upbeat, confident, and self-reliant, and they not only understand technology but also expect that technology will be as much a part of their professional life as it is their personal life.⁹ These young people spend hours on the Internet searching for answers to homework, music for their MP3 devices, and instant messaging to keep up with their friends and family.

In 2010, Generation Y is expected to comprise nearly 30 percent of the American adult population.¹⁰ Based upon the influence of the digital world on this group, it is reasonable to believe they will get more information from websites created especially for them than from traditional sources. Bulletin boards and interactive news websites will also play an important role in how Generation Y gets information. Because of Generation Y, and how they obtain information, we will likely see a huge shift in how America gets its news and information. Today, only about 40 percent of Generation Y reads newspapers, while nearly 60 percent of baby boomers read daily papers. If this trend continues, newspaper readership may dip to less than 50 percent of the population by 2010.¹¹ With lower readership numbers, newspapers will have far less value as a means to sell any message to Generation Y. Additionally, according to Universal Press Syndicate, Generation Y receives most of their news information from radio and digital sources such as computers and cell phones.¹²

Nexters value education and embrace ethical and moral considerations rejected by earlier generations. As a group, they are willing to take on violence, injustice, and believe in the value of public service and volunteerism. Many Nexters have taken part in community service volunteer efforts. Small agency law enforcement can be marketed as

an extension of that previous community service—except with a paycheck. These themes should play an important role in future law enforcement recruitment marketing.

Because information and news is available in real time, Generation Y has been influenced by school shootings, war, and international terrorism. Collectively, they are concerned about violence and are willing to work to reduce violence in American society. Because of 9/11, this generation also sees law enforcement in a different light than previous generations. Gen Y has a positive attitude about law enforcement and other public safety occupations. Volunteer work and public service has also become important to Generation Y since so many universities and colleges expect to see volunteer work as part of the entrance application. Additionally, some high schools require volunteer work for graduation. These are positive trends for law enforcement recruitment, and recruitment messages should incorporate these and other themes that will resonate with Generation Y.

Market More Than the Vacancy

The Boeing Company provides a good example of an organization using a marketing strategy to build a corporate image similar to one needed by police departments. Boeing is one of the largest defense contractors in the United States and even though Boeing does not sell aircraft or defense systems to the average citizen, they spend millions of dollars on television advertising. This component of Boeing's marketing is not aimed at selling a product, but an image—the Boeing brand. When people watch the Boeing commercials, they cannot help but sense the excitement that comes from being part of the fast-paced and high-tech work that is so important to the defense of America.

Small, remote agencies need to sell a similar message. Small, remote agency law enforcement is also fast paced; it involves high tech tools and knowledge, and involves dedicated professionals who are making a difference in homeland security as well as the safety of ordinary people. Rather than trying to sell individual jobs, agencies must first sell the image and importance of the profession. This marketing strategy is important even if there is no current vacancy to fill. Marketing of the small, remote law enforcement image is not just intended for today's applicants but also for those of the future.

Cooperative Marketing

Unfortunately, individual agencies trying to sell the law enforcement image within the limits of their own communities will not be enough. Individual small agencies do not have the budget to "brand" the small agency image successfully. Further, every agency, large and small, receives applications from prospective candidates from other cities and communities, especially in Southern California, where people are part of a large regional community rather than individual cities. Because of the large market area, there will need to be a concerted regional or even statewide cooperative marketing effort to sell the small agency law enforcement image.

A cooperative, small agency, marketing effort could be similar to the marketing efforts of the California Milk Advisory Board and the Florida Citrus Processors Association. Each of those organizations advertises on a national and regional level, espousing the value of their products. The individual companies then advertise their individual brands in their local market, building on the common collective message of the

association. One of the most successful cooperative marketing campaigns has been the “got milk?” campaign.

Individual small agencies certainly cannot run statewide or regional image-building marketing efforts. As a collective, small agencies could develop a common theme, market the profession, and then build upon the common theme in their local area. These broad efforts could be adopted by existing organizations such as the California Association of Chiefs of Police, the California Peace Officers Association-Small Agency Committee, or the California Law Enforcement Image Coalition.¹³ These groups could provide the political influence and resources necessary to secure regional and statewide public service announcements, or secure private donations to reduce the costs associated with a statewide law enforcement image building effort. Small agencies would then build upon the professional image and the law enforcement “brand” by adding local color and flavor to the collective marketing messages.

Technology Impact

Generation Y is the first truly digital generation. Generation X was introduced to technology, but Generation Y grew up with technology. Generation Y uses technology for entertainment, communication, schoolwork and their jobs. Generation Y will expect technology to be part of their career, wherever that career takes them. Messages that demonstrate how technology and crime fighting work together will likely strike a cord with these tech savvy job seekers. At the same time, Generation Y will likely not consider agencies that do not make use of the latest technology.

Messages aimed at Generation Y need to make use of the latest technology as the vehicle to reach this tech-oriented audience. Websites, banner ads, emails, and

technology based promotional items will be important to any marketing effort that hopes to succeed, since Generation Y will likely miss any message not tied to technology.

Technology has made food, money, and information available nearly as quickly as the need is perceived. As Generation Y enters the adult workplace, they will expect the same instant gratification they get on the Internet, at the ATM, and at the fast food drive-through.

The slow pace of the law enforcement hiring process will serve as a negative factor. Law enforcement cannot shave much time off the background process, but by selling the importance of the job and the need to find the right people, Gen Y will understand the process and stick with it. Additionally, each serious candidate should have a department mentor who can stay in contact and guide him or her during the process to help keep everything on track. This mentor contact will serve to reinforce the agency's commitment to the applicant.

Expand the Labor Pool

If the labor market becomes too tight, agencies may need to re-examine hiring standards. In an informal sampling of small agencies, all respondents reported they only consider applicants for the position of police officer who are at least 21 years of age or older,¹⁴ even though the legal age for a peace officer in California is 18 year of age.¹⁵ If an agency finds itself in the position of choosing between maintaining standards and working with fewer officers, or reducing standards and filling the ranks, then the age of the candidate should be one of the first standards to reconsider.

With 24-hour news cycles, the Internet, and email, Generation Y is tuned in to a variety of issues, from local to global, at a much younger age. Many young people attend

advanced placement classes in high school, take summer school to accumulate credits sooner, and collect college credit before receiving their high school diplomas. Young people such as these demonstrate a serious intent about reaching their goals, the self-discipline necessary to accomplish difficult tasks, and the maturity to think beyond the moment and to make difficult choices.

Today, police academies are nearly six months long, followed by a three-month field-training program. This is about nine months of training before the 21-year-old would hit the streets solo. By dropping the age requirement to 20, small agencies could find themselves with a large number of strong candidates, since other agencies do not consider them until age 21. Agencies should consider 20-year-old candidates who have a solid post-high-school work history, strong academic records, and who have a two-year degree or perhaps one year of college credit.

Find a Soapbox

For many years, police officers have supplemented their incomes by serving as instructors at community colleges or law enforcement academies. Small agencies should encourage and develop department members to teach law enforcement-related courses at the local community college, county regional occupation programs, or law enforcement academies to promote the department image. Through the teacher's lectern, the instructor can sell the professional image of small, remote law enforcement agencies and at the same time establish a relationship between students and the agency. Through this relationship, agencies can market the professional image of their agency in an effort to create in the mind of the student a sense that a small, remote law enforcement agency would be a viable career opportunity.

Freebies

There are a variety of resources available to the small, remote agency seeking to conduct research on marketing ideas. One of the best is the California Law Enforcement Image Coalition website.¹⁶ The image coalition was created by the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) and includes representatives from law enforcement agencies throughout the state, as well as representatives from various media organizations. The image coalition's home page lists their mission as:

The California Law Enforcement Image Coalition is comprised of law enforcement and community leaders dedicated to enhancing the professional image of California Peace Officers.

The image coalition's website is a collection of articles, hyperlinks to law enforcement agencies, successful outreach programs, and information about current issues that can help any agency develop a proactive marketing plan. The image coalition can service as a valuable resource to small agencies working to develop an image building marketing plan.

Additionally, despite a significant amount of money spent by POST to provide resources to help agencies with their recruitment needs (such as space on the POST website to announce vacancies, and the POST *Symposium on Recruitment CD*),¹⁷ few agencies make use of the material. The material produced and published by POST is professional, eye-catching, and fast paced. Any agency that does not use the material only cheats itself of a free but valuable resource.

Conclusion

The labor market will become very tight in the coming years. Generation Y will play a large part in the recruitment efforts of every company and organization seeking to maintain staffing. Collaborative efforts and new strategies to market the professional image of small, remote law enforcement agencies will be needed to establish the small, remote agency brand and allow small, remote agencies the ability to compete with large agencies and the private sector in tomorrow's tighter labor. It is important to recognize that old tried and true recruitment efforts will likely fail with Generation Y. If the community of small, remote law enforcement agencies hopes to meet its future recruitment needs, the effort needs to begin now to develop the proactive image building marketing message that will resonate with Generation Y and then place the message where Generation Y will actually see it.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Michaelson, G. & Michaelson, S. (2004), *Sun Tzu Strategies for Marketing*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill
- ² In August 2003, the project author sent an email to small agency chiefs asking them to identify the three main challenges they expected their agencies to face in the next five years. Eighty emails were sent out with twenty-one responses (26%). Eighty percent of responses identified recruitment as one of the three main challenges.
- ³ Domash, S. F. (2002, May). *Who Wants This Job?* *Police*, 26(5), 34-39.
- ⁴ Challenger, J. A. (2003, September/October). The Coming Labor Shortage. *The Futurist*, 37(5), 24-28.
- ⁵ Zell Center for Risk Research, & Kellogg School of Management. (2002, November). *The Risk of Misreading Generation Y: The Need for New Marketing Strategies*. Conference conducted at Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University, Evanston, Indiana
- ⁶ Zemke, R., Raines, C., & Filiochak, B. (2000). *Generations at Work*. New York, NY: American Management Association.
- ⁷ Martin, C. A., & Tulgan, B. (2001). *Managing Generation Y*. Amherst, MA: HRD Press. xii
- ⁸ Zemke, R., Raines, C., & Filiochak, B. (2000). *Generations at Work*. New York, NY: American Management Association.
- ⁹ Martin, C. A., & Tulgan, B. (2001). *Managing Generation Y*. Amherst, MA: HRD Press
- ¹⁰ Negrón, E. (2004). *Why Gen Y? Newspapers have three years to get it right*. Media Management Center. Retrieved from www.mediamanagementcenter.com April 3, 2004.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² United Press Syndicate (UPS). (2004) *Consider the Next Generation*. Article retrieved April 3, 2004 from http://www.amuniversal.com/ups/features/gen_y/index.htm
- ¹³ The California Law Enforcement Image Coalition is a group of California law enforcement associations dedicated to an ongoing public awareness program to enhance the image of California law enforcement. More information about the coalition can be found on their website <http://www.calpoliceimage.org/>
- ¹⁴ In May 2004, the author sent an email to agency that had responded to an earlier email request. The email asked at what age each agency considered an applicant for a position as a peace officer. Every response indicated that the agencies only consider 21-year-old applicants due to issues of maturity.
- ¹⁵ California Government Code §1031(b)
- ¹⁶ California Law Enforcement Image Coalition. <http://www.calpoliceimage.org/>
- ¹⁷ POST (2002) CD: *Post Symposium on Recruitment*, Sacramento, CA

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