

ATTRACTION/RETENTION UPDATE



Providing Professional PA Support Key to Success

Attracting and retaining cadets requires effective, on-brand communication and delivery

By Capt Mark Giles, RCSU-Central PAO

In recent months it has become increasingly apparent that public affairs (PA) support to the chain-of-command (CoC), and regional and local staff, is needed to enhance our collective efforts in attracting and retaining young Canadians in the Cadet Program. These coordinated efforts are particularly important after 17 months of pandemic-related limitations have challenged our ability to conduct in-person activities, causing virtual fatigue.

Developing and delivering attraction-related campaigns is resource intensive. While recognizing that providing PA support is a high priority, we must also acknowledge our limited resources and be realistic in what we can deliver. We have some attractions material, including templates for promotional, media and other products — and narrative development — available on the Cadet Portal at <https://portal-portail.cadets.gc.ca/en/Pages/publicAffairs.aspx>,* and are committed to dedicating some time and energy to providing advice and support to areas and local units. We are also drawing on our national PA tech-net, including

working closely with the Atlantic Region PAO who is developing a current visual identity guide.

Successful attraction and retention is directly linked to effectively delivering and communicating our intended brand — i.e. what it is that we do (youth development) — while reducing any perception-reality gap between this and what the Canadian public perceives (believes) it is that we do, or at least what the program represents to them.

We are currently in the midst of the summer Cadet Activity Program (CAP), which — as some of the imagery in this newsletter shows — offers fun, safe and meaningful activities for our cadets across Central Region. These types of activities, which build leadership, citizenship, fitness and community service skills — all linked to our overarching theme of youth development — form the basis of our intended brand. If communicated effectively, then our intended brand will match our actual brand — blending the experiences of the internal audience, including current

*Attractions toolkit: Log in to the Extranet (left side) using CCO credentials, then go to “Public Affairs” on top right. This is a work in progress, however, there are many promotional, media and other products of use. Please call the PA team for advice regarding the use of various products.

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cadets, with the perceptions of the external audience, including potential cadets.

In other words, to be successful at attraction and retention our delivery and communication need to match. In doing so, our Cadet Program will be one that people are more likely to want to join and continue participating in over several years.

Brand and reality-based communications

A great program that isn't effectively communicated will have trouble with attraction, whereas a marginal program that is exaggerated (over-communicated) will have trouble with retention. So, first, we need to deliver a great program, which I think we are, and then we can strengthen our brand — internally and externally — through effective and reality-based communications. This doesn't mean that we can't highlight some of the unique and special activities we may do from time to time, however, these shouldn't distract from the day-to-day realities of the program, and the overall theme (youth development) and its supporting aspects of leadership, citizenship, and community service.

This is what we mean when we refer to on-brand communications and delivery. If we deliver what we say we do, then new cadets we attract are more likely to be satisfied and, therefore, more likely to stay. And these new cadets, and more senior ones already involved for several years, are also more likely to have good things to say about the Cadet Program to their colleagues and communities, boosting internal morale and the brand. Our organizational credibility remains high, internal and external awareness increases, and this can only help attract and retain cadets.

Here are five action items to assist local corps and squadrons in building and communicating the Cadet Program brand effectively in support of ongoing

Five tips from PA

1. Link all communications and supporting products to the brand, ensuring reality is reflected in our efforts to attract and retain cadets.
2. When preparing to communicate or craft a product, ask yourself what is the intended take-away (and consider running a quick, informal focus group to measure). Communications products (speeches, presentations, imagery — photo/video — posters, give-away products, media opportunities, etc.) should provide the desired take-away, meaning they should link to the brand while softly influencing intended audiences (potential cadets, cadets, parents or other potential influencers) that joining – or remaining with — the Cadet Program is a worthwhile endeavor.



An action-oriented, reality-based image that tells the story of where we are in summer 2021, as we plan our transition back to in-person activities.

3. External products and communications opportunities should, where possible, use the national logo/image (Cadets Canada with red “swoosh” on page 13). Adding a local corps or squadron crest for identification is fine, but don't use more than two identifying images (logos) — national and local — or a communications product becomes too intense, distracting from the main image(s) and supporting message(s).

4. Strive for text-imagery balance, as we have tried to do with this newsletter. Good imagery, which tells the cadet story, is key to successful communications. Try to use action-oriented (as opposed to posed shots), which are more likely to effectively highlight the fun, safe and meaningful aspects of the program.
5. KISS – don't try to get too fancy or complicated: simple, straight-forward communications and supporting products often work more effectively.

For additional support, please contact the RCSU-Central PA team – Capt Mark Giles (mark.giles@forces.gc.ca) or Lt Anthony Vukojevic (anthony.vukojevic@cadets.gc.ca).