

The U.S. Marines Partner With Radio to Create Effective Campaigns



Photos courtesy U. S. Marine Corps

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Sgt. Paul A. Robbins Jr.,
U.S. Marine Corps Orlando
recruiting station, 6th Marine
Corps Recruiting District

The U.S. Marine Corps Orlando recruiting station, 6th Marine Corps Recruiting District, is one of the top-performing Marine recruiting stations in the country. In the past two years, the recruiting station has surpassed the national average by consistently delivering more than 10% over attainment goals.

Sgt. Paul A. Robbins Jr., the recruiting station’s marketing and public affairs chief, gives part of the credit to a change in concert marketing, which leans heavily on radio. Two years ago, the recruiting station decided to complement the Marines’ award-winning national advertising campaign with local outreach that focused on radio partnerships. Sergeant Robbins says the 2009 and 2010 increases can be partially attributed to creating a unique connection through the right medium: radio.

“The Marines are looking for a different type of recruit, and we have a very clearly defined target,” he says. “Radio helps us become a part of the events we attend and draw more people to our booth, so they can witness the intangibles of the Marines, like honor, courage and discipline.”

The need to have a strong local impact and deliver uniquely targeted messages, coupled with budgetary challenges, lead the recruitment station to shift dollars from other media into radio and live events. Sergeant Robbins says the plan enabled them to bridge the Marines’ national brand to the local level, allowing them to build a connection between highly popular local events and the Marines.

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"We realized early on that these types of messages are not easily delivered in standard advertisements, and that we needed to deliver personally targeted messages that would lead to the opportunity to speak to potential recruits in person, face to face. Radio provides that for us," Sergeant Robbins says.

In early 2009, the recruitment station began working with radio to increase their local footprint. In partnership with a radio station in Florida, the Orlando recruiting station launched a campaign that included on-air commercials, online advertising and custom event integration. They became the "Official Guardians of the 98 Rock Autographed Guitar" for Tampa's 98 Rockfest (WXTB-FM). This promotion included on-air tags, promos and commercials, on-site visibility with announcement tie-ins and a guitar give-away. The campaign drew nearly triple the amount of participants to the booth, compared to previous years.

The Official Guardians of the 98 Rock Autographed Guitar campaign, and similar partnerships in the Tampa and Orlando markets, lead to increased interest from the local community and helped the recruiting station end 2009 at 114% of their recruiting goal. They continued with the radio and event tie-in strategy in 2010, ending the year with similar results—108% of goal. This outreach model now serves as a template for the Marines'



Two Marines with Recruiting Station Orlando, 6th Marine Corps District, stand guard over the official 98 Rock autographed guitar during 98 Rockfest in Tampa, Fla. The Marines are the official guardians of the radio station's official guitar give-away each year.

concert marketing across the nation.

Data from the 2010 issue of Arbitron's annual *Radio Today* study demonstrates why the Marines' radio strategy is so effective. Nationally, radio's weekly reach exceeded 90% of all Men 18-24 (*Radio Today*, 2010). In Tampa, where the Official Guardians of the Rock Guitar campaign was focused, that number was even higher. In March, radio reached just over 94% of all Men 18-24 (Tampa PPM™ Data, March 2011).

"Radio speaks to our core demo in a very personal way. When we started significantly integrating radio advertising and events into our recruiting efforts, we immediately recognized success. Since then, the strategy has spread and been implemented with other recruiting command areas," Sergeant Robbins says.

Radio executives have often called their medium the "original social media." Sergeant Robbins agrees. "For local impact that will set you apart by establishing a personal connection, radio is definitely worth considering," he says.

Top Trends to Watch:

#1 The Reallocation of Dollars to Maximize Efficiency. Most branches of the military have cut advertising budgets since 2007, requiring the reallocation of advertising dollars to media that are more efficient. This is where event tie-ins, sponsorships and the creative use of social networking, all a natural fit for radio, come into play.

#2 Budgetary Cuts Are the New Norm. Evaluating the Marine's traditional media expenditures and allocation from 2007 to 2010 shows that the Marines experienced continued success with recruitment, even during major budget cuts. With cuts to traditional media expenditures (2010 levels were a mere 50% of the 2007 levels), the Marines made their ad dollars work smarter by moving those dollars to radio (Kantar AdSpender, 2011).

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