Army Recruitment: Showing Young People There's More Than Meets The Eye To The Army

Background
Between 1994 when the iconic tag line "Be The Best" was introduced and 2012, Army recruitment relied on a consistent approach to recruitment using ATL media to encourage those who were up for the Army challenge to visit local recruitment centers, where knowledgeable soldiers allayed their fears and when they were ready, helped them fill in their applications forms.

Over the years, this approach had often proved effective, but also costly.

By 2012, government austerity measures meant the Army had to drive significant efficiencies across all areas from equipment to troops, and rely more heavily on Reserve soldiers who could be called upon when needed.

For Army recruitment this meant 3 serious changes:

1. A significant number of Army recruiting centres across the country closed and the entire application process moved online
2. The focus would be not just on recruiting for the Regular Army but also recruiting Army Reservists
3. An ongoing need to cut the cost of attracting Army recruits without compromising on quality or quantity.

The Challenge
Against this backdrop of increased efficiencies, in late 2013 Army recruitment was operating in the most difficult recruiting environment ever.

Recent Army Redundancies
The Army had undergone several rounds of public redundancies during 2012 and 2013 sparking large amounts of negative mainstream media attention.

Figure 1: Army redundancies received high profile press coverage before and during our campaign launch.

This negative recruiting PR, coupled with troop withdrawals from Afghanistan, led to a significant decline in awareness that the Army was recruiting and increased scepticism about whether joining the Army was a positive career choice.[i]

Figure 2: Between late 2011 and 2013 belief that the Army was recruiting declined rapidly.

Percentage of audience who believe the Army is currently recruiting
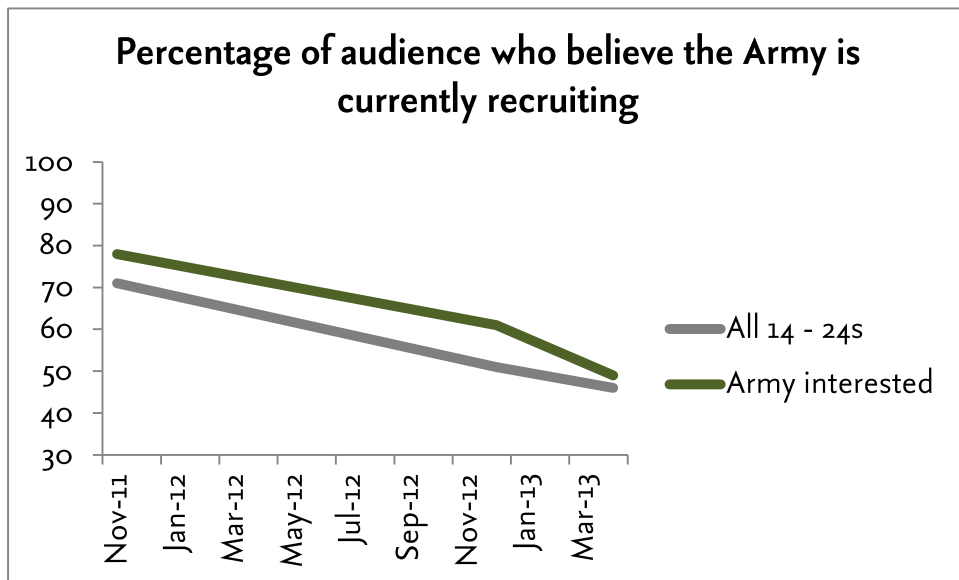
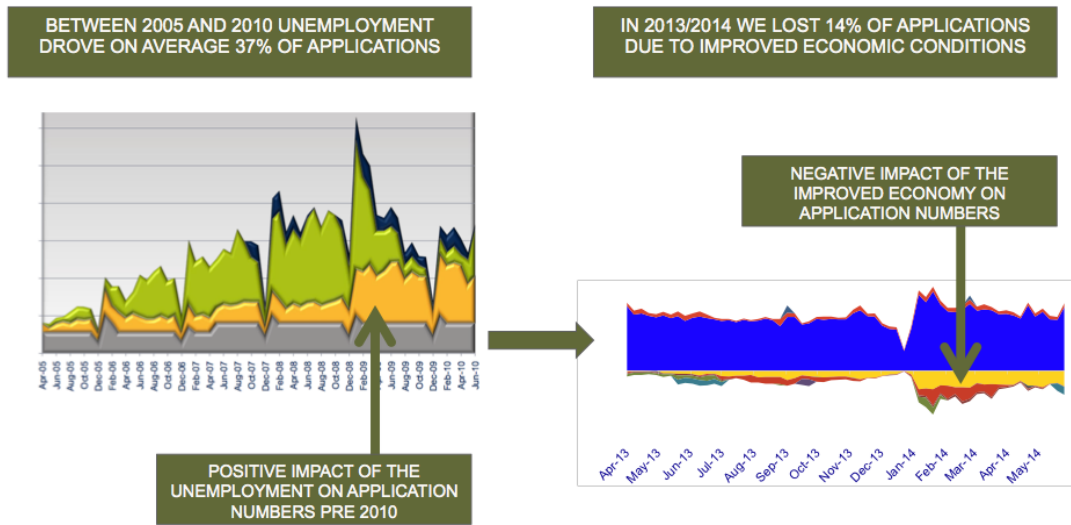**Increased Competition from Public and Private Sectors**

After years of economic stagnation, the private sector finally began recruiting young people in their droves, driving a sharp fall in youth unemployment. This trend was exacerbated by companies who, concerned about the impact of increased university fees, switched their attention from recruiting graduates to recruiting school leavers. This positive shift in employment depleted the available pool of potential applicants.

Figure 3: Before and during our campaign, youth unemployment fell sharply.

UNITED KINGDOM YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

SOURCE: WWW.TRADINGECONOMICS.COM |
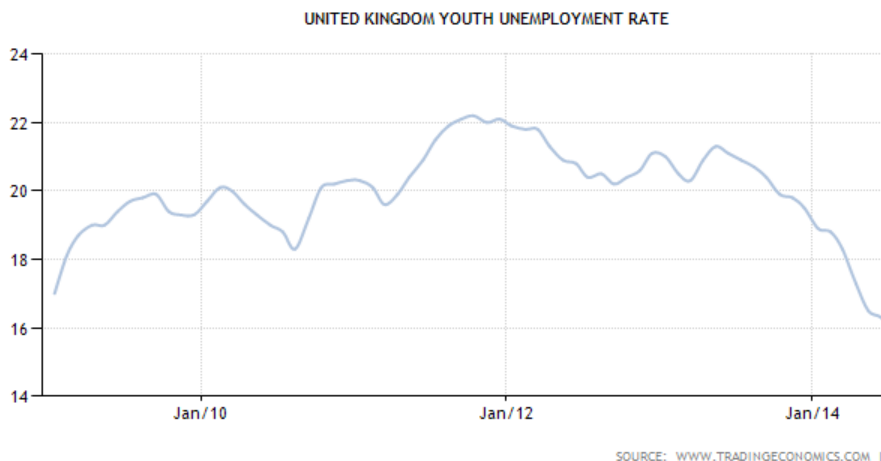
Econometric analysis showed this change to have a significantly negative impact on the number of applications driven by non-media sources, placing more pressure on communications to perform. Between 2005 and 2010 unemployment was responsible for driving 37% of Army applications; in 2013 no applications were driven by unemployment – in fact, the improved economy was causing the Army to lose out on an extra 14% of applications.[ii]
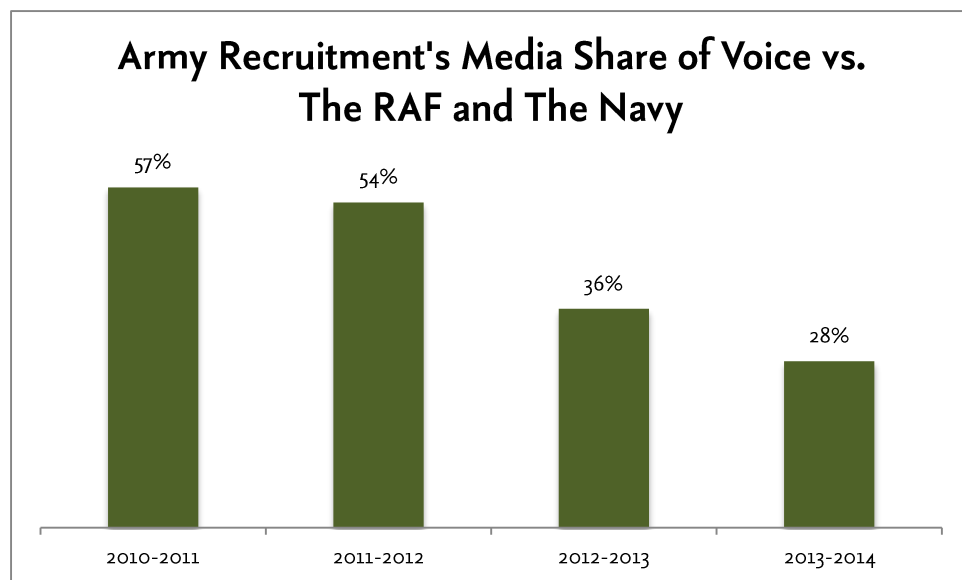
Figure 4: Econometric modeling shows the negative impact the improved economy had on our base rate of applications in 2013 and 2014.

BETWEEN 2005 AND 2010 UNEMPLOYMENT DROVE ON AVERAGE 37% OF APPLICATIONS

IN 2013/2014 WE LOST 14% OF APPLICATIONS DUE TO IMPROVED ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

NEGATIVE IMPACT OF THE IMPROVED ECONOMY ON APPLICATION NUMBERS

POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT ON APPLICATION NUMBERS PRE 2010

Increased Competition from Other Forces

At the same time as the job marketplace was improving for young people, the competition from the Navy and the RAF created a more cluttered media environment for the Army to compete in, siphoning applicants who were interested in a career in the armed forces to move away from the Army.

Figure 5: Increased media activity from the other forces meant Army Recruitment's share of voice in '13/'14 was half what it had been in '10/'11.
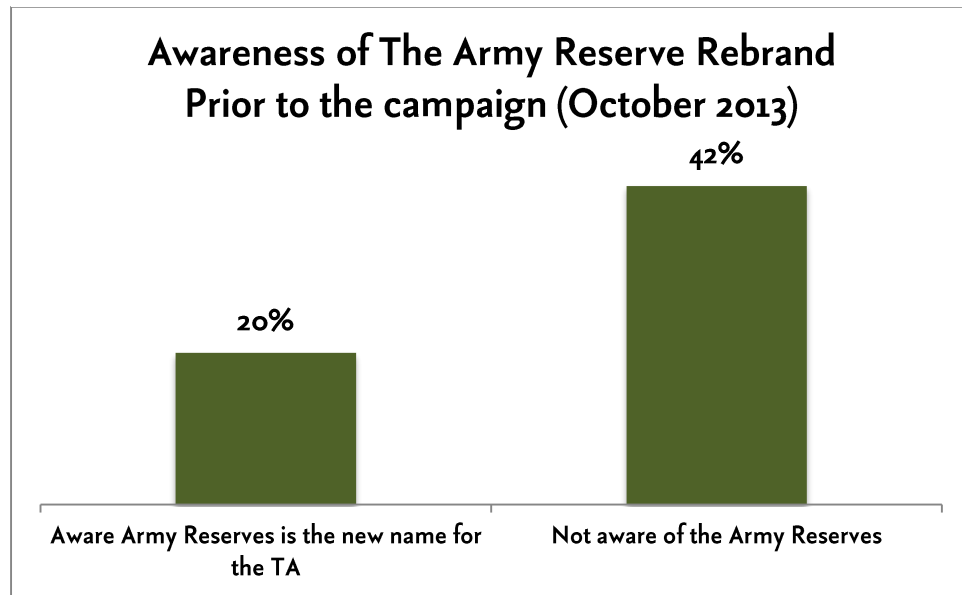

Army Recruitment's Media Share of Voice vs. The RAF and The Navy

57% 54% 36% 28%

2010-2011 2011-2012 2012-2013 2013-2014

The Re-branding of the Territorial Army

Meanwhile, in response to the government efficiencies, the Army was making changes to the structure and remit of the Territorial Army, which included rebranding the organisation as The Army

Reserve. These changes were not supported by a communications to educate potential applicants as to the role and remit of the Army Reserve, or the status of the TA. Consequently, the newly named Army Reserve faced significant awareness and understanding challenges for recruits.[iii]

Figure 6: Awareness of the recent Army Reserve rebrand was at just 20% prior to the campaign.

Awareness of The Army Reserve Rebrand
Prior to the campaign (October 2013)

42%

20%

Aware Army Reserves is the new name for the TA

Not aware of the Army Reserves

The Marketing Tasks

In response to government cuts, Army recruitment needed to make its communications spend markedly more efficient by significantly reducing the average cost per application.

Our task was to reduce the cost per application by 50%.

Against this challenge, we defined the tasks for Marketing as:

1. Raise awareness that the Army (Regular and Reserve) is recruiting

2. Communicate the motivating aspects of both the Regular Army and the Army Reserve through one campaign

3. Educate our audience about the wide range of roles which make up the Army

Our Communications Model

In order to reduce the cost per application driven by communications, we identified key stages across the Army recruitment candidate journey where our marketing spend would need to have a bigger impact than previous campaigns.

Figure 7: By identifying the stages in the communications model where our campaign would need to have a greater impact we were able plan a more efficient campaign.

Reduced Cost Per application
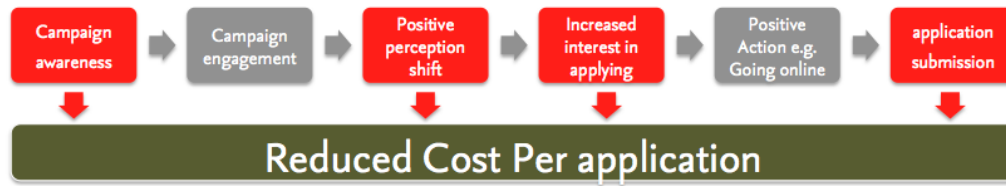
The key areas of performance for our campaign became:
-   Create high campaign awareness
-   Generate a significant shift in perceptions
-   Sharply increase the pool of people most interested in applying
-   Increase the conversion rate of site visits to completed application forms.

Understanding our Audiences

Young people today value transferrable skills more highly than ever. For millennials the idea of "climbing the ladder" within one organisation is an out-dated concept. Studies show this generation expect to have a career which spans many different sectors and consequently see jobs as stepping stones where they can learn transferrable skills to apply to their next role. Consequently 89% of millennials think it is important to be constantly learning new skills in their jobs.[iv]

Figure 6: The concept of the "lattice pathway" defined during a study by Deloitte characterizes how millennials perceive their future careers and skills development.
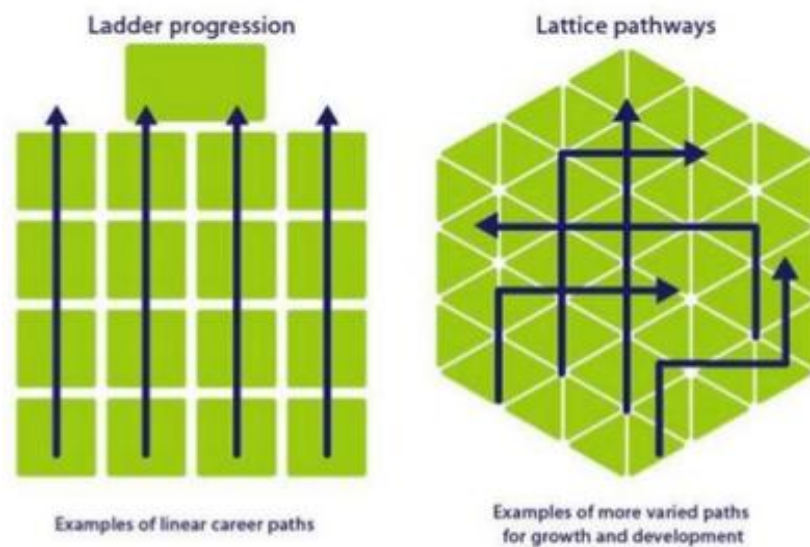
Quantitative research identified a group of "Army Interesteds": approximately 2 million 16 – 29 year olds who had some level interest in joining the Army (Regular or Reserve).[v] They were looking for action, adventure and challenge, and were not put off by frontline action. They were a perfect fit for The Army, but the majority were failing to take any action towards applying.

Brand tracking and qualitative research found the way 14 – 24 year olds perceived the Army had fundamentally changed. Having seen the Army engaged in high-profile overseas conflict for as long as they could remember, they saw the Army as warriors - men and women whose only role was to engage in front line combat overseas. This peaked their initial interest in the Army also made it

difficult them to see what the Army could offer. As the war in Afghanistan went on, the perception amongst our target audience that the "Army gives you skills highly valued in civilian life" dropped by almost 40%.[vi]

In short, many people attracted to the Regular Army because of the action and adventure it would provide also believed that by signing up they would be forfeiting the opportunity to develop useful skills that they could apply later on in life. They were not aware of the breadth of roles and skills which exist within the Army - from welders to web coders, to engineers, plumbers and linguistic experts. They did not understand the Army takes people with few qualifications and trains them up, providing them with a specialist, transferrable trade alongside their military training. For this reason they tended to choose vocational training or a low-skilled civilian roles over the Army.
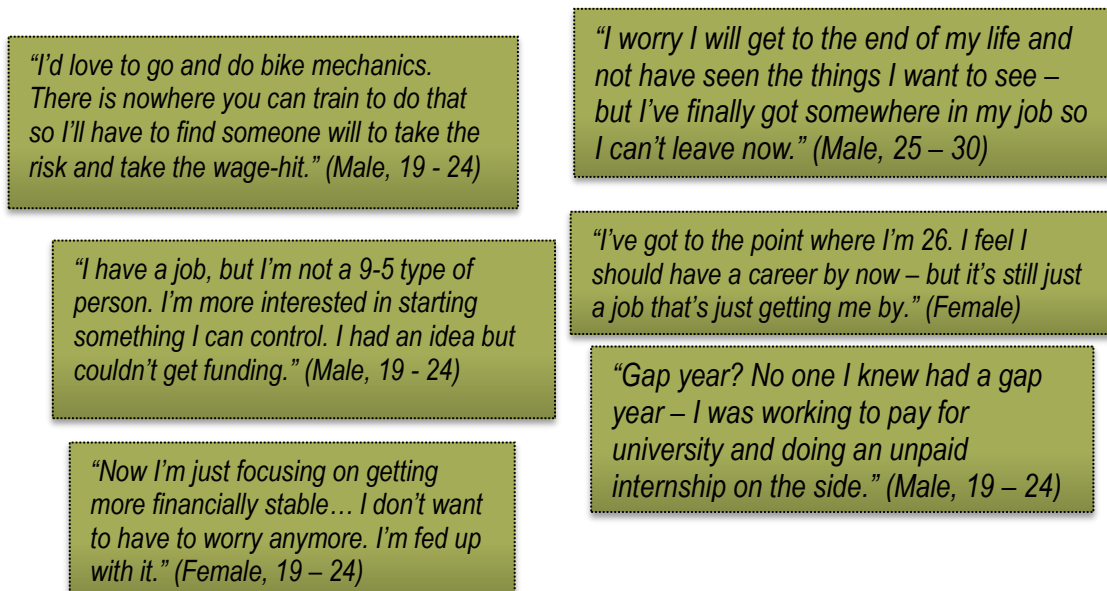
The Army Reserve
In addition to the challenges facing the Regular Army, research showed a specific challenge for the Army Reserve. Despite the name change, the preconception that Army Reservists were not "real" soldiers – that they played a domestic role, which entailed none of the adventure or excitement of the Regular Army – endured. Few people understand that they go through the same training, have access to the same equipment and (once trained) serve alongside the Regular Army.

The Insights
According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, under 30s were worst hit by the recession.[vii] Whilst youth employment is rising significantly, many of these new roles are unskilled and offer no on-the-job-training. This, coupled with the spiralling costs of higher education and increased competition for graduate roles means young people are forced to make trade offs – between pay and skills development, between fulfilment and financial security, between adventure and progress.[viii] Consequently they are 50% more likely than the rest of the population to say they only go to work for the money.[ix]

Figure 7: Qualitative research showed young people were expecting to have to make trade offs between skills, financial security and adventure.

"I'd love to go and do bike mechanics. There is nowhere you can train to do that so I'll have to find someone will to take the risk and take the wage-hit." (Male, 19 - 24)

"I worry I will get to the end of my life and not have seen the things I want to see – but I've finally got somewhere in my job so I can't leave now." (Male, 25 – 30)

"I have a job, but I'm not a 9-5 type of person. I'm more interested in starting something I can control. I had an idea but couldn't get funding." (Male, 19 - 24)

"I've got to the point where I'm 26. I feel I should have a career by now – but it's still just a job that's just getting me by." (Female)

"Gap year? No one I knew had a gap year – I was working to pay for university and doing an unpaid internship on the side." (Male, 19 – 24)

"Now I'm just focusing on getting more financially stable... I don't want to have to worry anymore. I'm fed up with it." (Female, 19 – 24)

Unlike other jobs open to young people the Army entails no such trade off. To drive our "Army Interesteds" to apply and to make the Army stand out from their other options we needed to show

them Army recruits get the best of all worlds – the real adventure they crave and the opportunity to develop the transferrable skills they want.

Meanwhile by positioning and marketing the Regular Army and the Army Reserve as full and part-time versions of the same organisation, we could draw on the Regular Army's perceptual link with combat to elevate perceptions of the Army Reserve.

The Strategy

Creative Strategy

Our communications needed to excite "Army Interesteds" with the prospect of action and adventure they could expect to experience in The Army and educate them about the breadth of training opportunities on offer. Our solution was the More Than Meets The Eye campaign, which juxtaposed the action-packed undertakings of Regular and Reserve soldiers with the specialist qualifications and training their role in the Army also entails. A soundtrack, specially recorded by premier beat-boxer Faith FX, was created to cut-through with our young audience.

Channel Strategy

Figure 8: The More Than Meets the Eye campaign covered every stage of the customer journey, from igniting initial interest to nudging registered users to complete their applications forms.


Our channel strategy focused on driving efficiency to enable us to deliver more with the same budget. We moved to a more consistent presence on TV at lower weights to create a drumbeat of messaging to keep the Army top-of-mind. Cinema and radio were used to reach a carefully targeted audience motivated by action and adventure. We have also increased our investment in digital to reflect the changing media consumption of our audience; using VOD to reach those TV light viewers and leverage the growing trend of time shifted viewing. Always-on digital display ensures that we're reaching our audience in the online environments they are already engaged in, while search ensures that we're efficiently harvesting and converting interest created by the campaign into applications.

To encourage more website visitors to actually complete an application form, we re-designed the website to give Regular and Reserve equal weighting on the homepage, created a clearer call to action and put skills and qualification front and centre. To encourage more web visitors to apply we conducted usability testing on our online application form, used the findings to make it significantly shorter and more-user friendly and introduced weekly web chats on Facebook with serving soldiers, each with a different role and specialism.

Results

The campaign created greater impact and efficiency at each stage of the candidate journey model.

Figure 7: By identifying the stages in the communications model where our campaign would need to have a greater impact we were able plan a more efficient campaign.
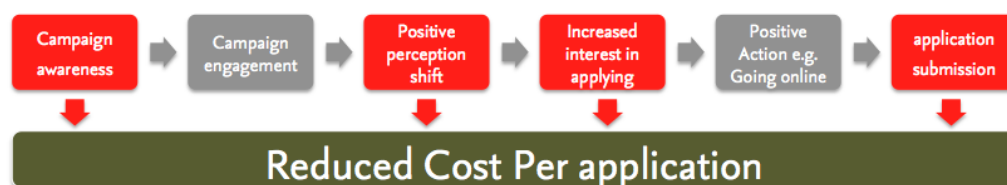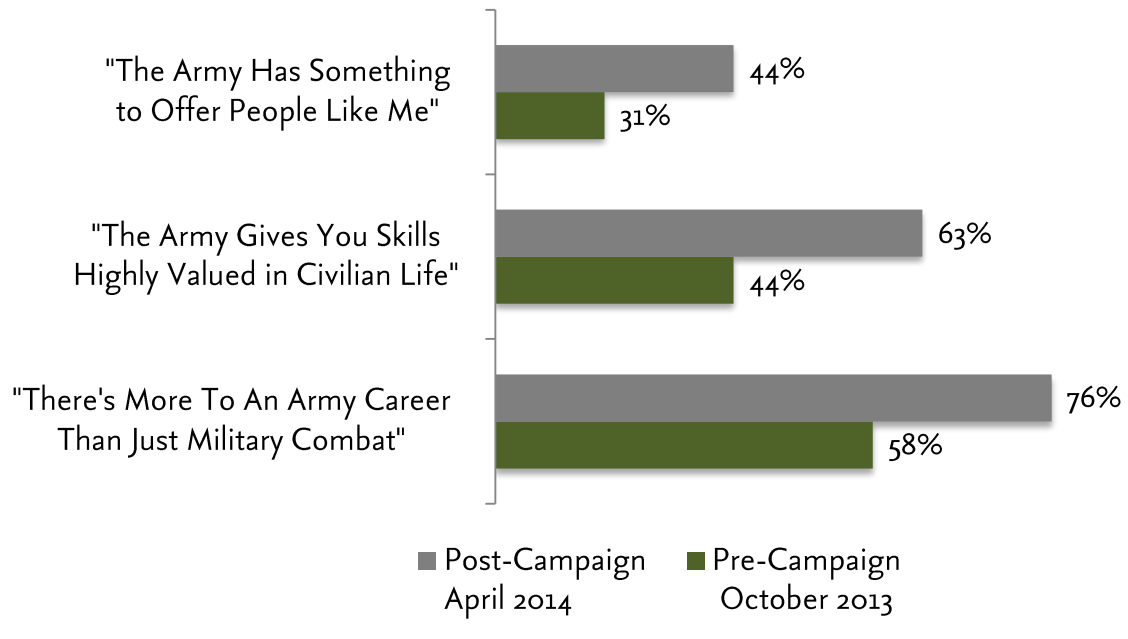

Campaign Awareness
After 3 months on air, our highly engaging creative and smart media placement meant 76% of our core audience recognised the campaign, far outperforming the industry benchmark of 42% for similar levels of media spend.[x]

Perception Shifts
The campaign successfully convinced its audience the Regular Army could provide them with skills that would enable them to prosper in the civilian world – reinvigorating the belief that the Army is a skills provider. In doing so we successfully convinced this audience the Army had something to offer them personally.[xi]

Figure 9: The campaign had a highly positive impact on the audience's perception of The Army as skills provider.
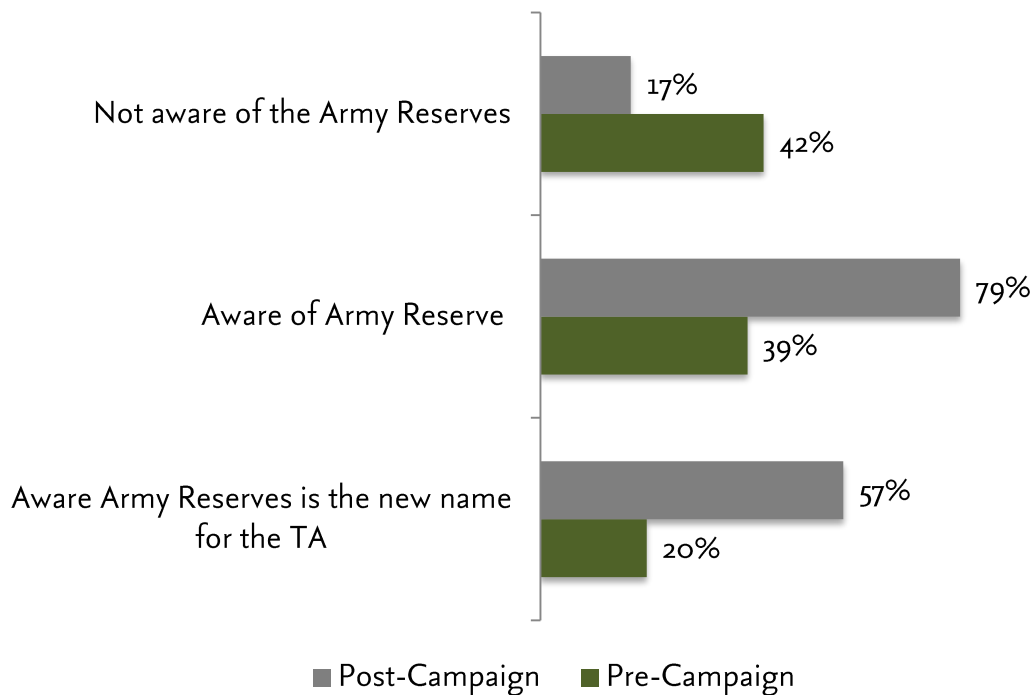
**Campaign Impact On Audience's Perception of The Regular Army
(14 - 24s, Any Agree)**

"The Army Has Something to Offer People Like Me"
- Post-Campaign: 44%
- Pre-Campaign: 31%

"The Army Gives You Skills Highly Valued in Civilian Life"
- Post-Campaign: 63%
- Pre-Campaign: 44%

"There's More To An Army Career Than Just Military Combat"
- Post-Campaign: 76%
- Pre-Campaign: 58%

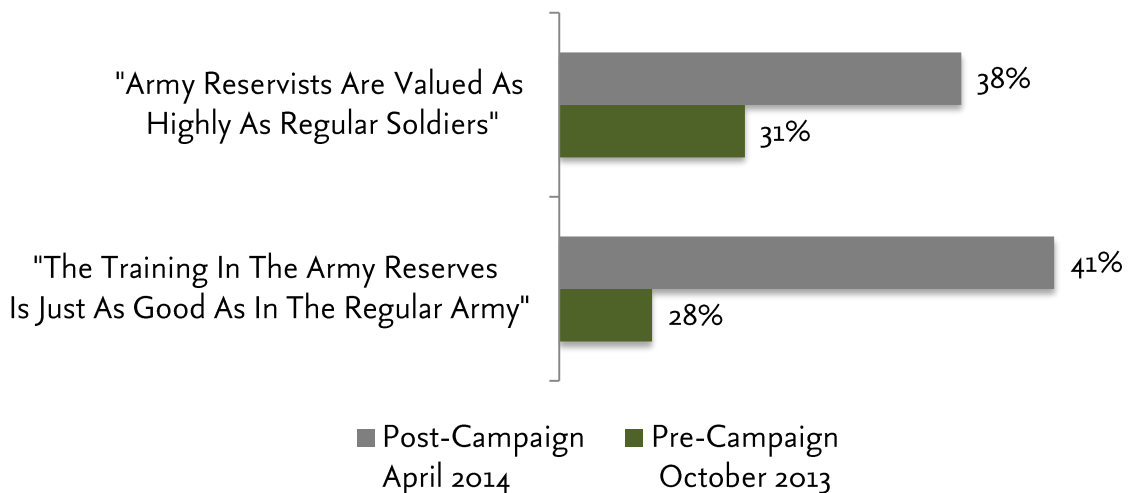■ Post-Campaign April 2014   ■ Pre-Campaign October 2013

By successfully positioning the Army Reserve as the part-time version of the Regular Army we increased the belief the Army Reserve have access to the same level of training as the Regular Army.

Figure 10: The campaign had a highly positive impact on the audience's awareness and understanding of The Army Reserve

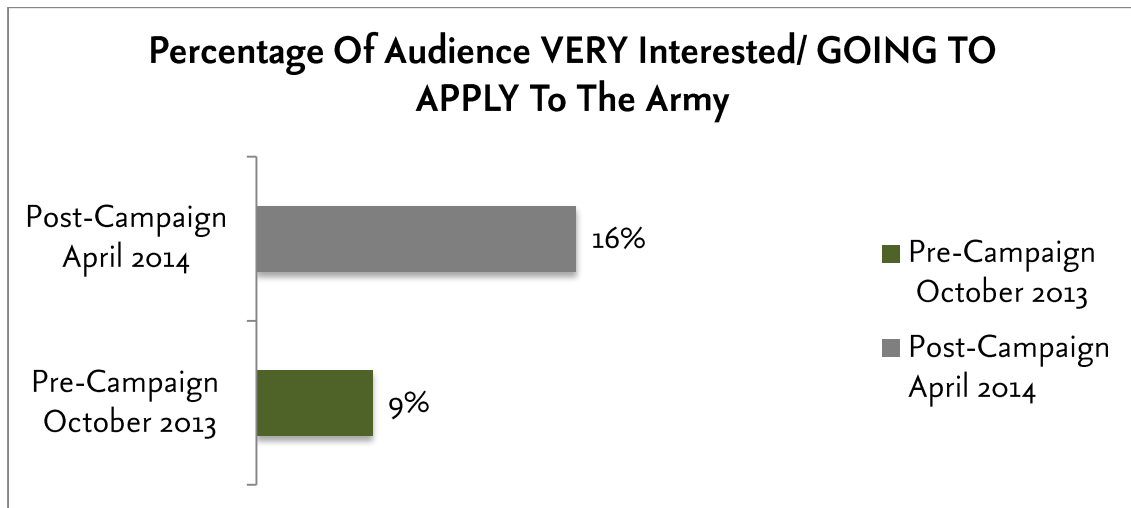## Awareness of Army Reserve Rebrand Pre and Post Campaign

Not aware of the Army Reserves
- 17% (Post-Campaign)
- 42% (Pre-Campaign)

Aware of Army Reserve
- 79% (Post-Campaign)
- 39% (Pre-Campaign)

Aware Army Reserves is the new name for the TA
- 57% (Post-Campaign)
- 20% (Pre-Campaign)

■ Post-Campaign ■ Pre-Campaign

Campaign Impact on Audience's Perception of The Army Reserve
(18 - 35s, Any Agree)

"Army Reservists Are Valued As Highly As Regular Soldiers"
- 38% (Post-Campaign)
- 31% (Pre-Campaign)

"The Training In The Army Reserves Is Just As Good As In The Regular Army"
- 41% (Post-Campaign)
- 28% (Pre-Campaign)

■ Post-Campaign   ■ Pre-Campaign
April 2014   October 2013

Impact on Levels of Interest in the Army
By reinvigorating perceptions of the Regular Army and increasing the positive feeling towards the Army Reserve the campaign increased the number of people "very interested in" or "intending to apply" to the Army, by almost 100%.[xii]

Figure 11: The campaign significantly increased the pool of "Army Intenders".

Percentage Of Audience VERY Interested/ GOING TO APPLY To The Army

Post-Campaign April 2014: 16%

Pre-Campaign October 2013: 9%

Legend:
- Pre-Campaign October 2013
- Post-Campaign April 2014

Increased conversion rate for Submitted Applications

By redesigning the website and streamlining the application process we more than doubled our conversion rate from web visits to completed application.[xiii]

Highly Efficient Media Planning

The post-campaign econometric study showed our campaign budget allocation was just 3% short of an optimum channel mix.[xiv]

Figure 12: The econometric evaluation of our channel mix showed it to be highly efficient.

Actual Spend / +3% Applications / Optimised Spend

Legend:
- TV
- VOD
- Radio
- Cinema
- Search
- Display
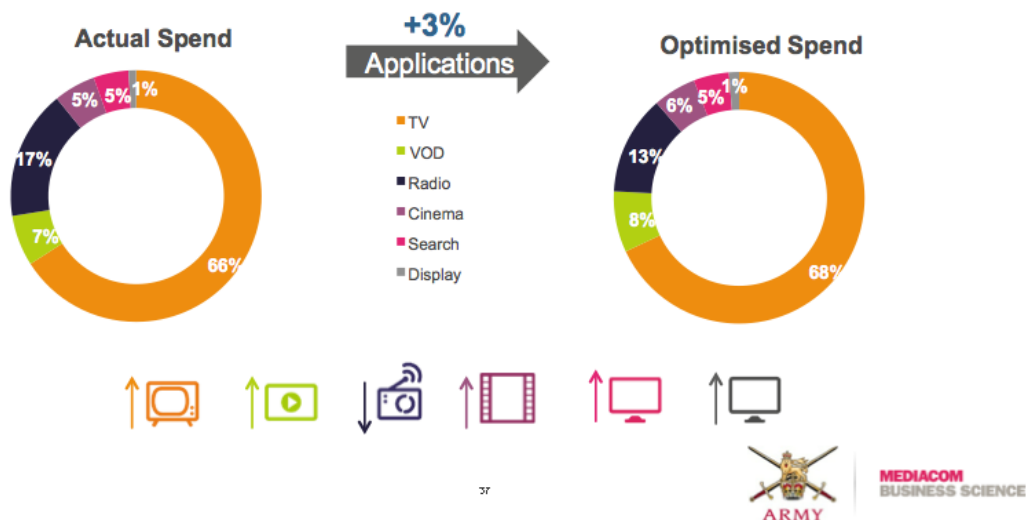
Reducing the Cost per Application

The same econometric study has shown that, during its first 6 months, the campaign drove a cost per application (recruitment marketing's inverse equivalent of ROMI) of £269. In doing so, the campaign created a 65% cost reduction per application when compared to the average cost per application driven by Army Recruitment campaigns over the last 10 years.

This translates into an astonishing annual saving of approximately £7 million for Army Recruitment and is well above our 50% target saving.[xv]

Word count: 2,299 Excluding titles and captions.

i Data taken from Army Recruitment's quarterly tracking studies conducted between 2011 - 2013
ii Data taken from an econometric study conducted June 2014
iii Data taken from Army Recruitment's quarterly tracking study conducted October 2013
iv Taken from *The Corporate Lattice: Achieving High Performance In The Changing World Of Work* by Cathleen Benko & Mollie Anderson Deloitte, 2010
v Segmentation study undertaken April 2012
vi Data taken from Army Recruitment's quarterly tracking studies conducted between 2011 - 2013
vii http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-28305804
viii Taken from qualitative research conducted May 2012
ix Taken TGI audience proxy 2014
x Data taken from Army Recruitment's quarterly tracking study conducted April 2014
xi Data taken from Army Recruitment's quarterly tracking studies conducted between October 2013 and April 2014
xii Data taken from Army Recruitment's quarterly tracking studies conducted between October 2013 and April 2014
xiii Data taken from an econometric study conducted June 2014
xiv Data taken from an econometric study conducted June 2014
xv Data taken from an econometric study conducted June 2014