

Recruiting-Focused Social Media

Creating a marketplace for relevant content

by Maj Danny Sanchez, Jr.

The Marine Corps wants recruits with a variety of characteristics (education, high ASVAB, stick-to-it-iveness, grit, etc.) and Marine Corps Recruiting Command competes against sister Services and the private sector for candidates that exhibit these attributes—a population that is in diminishing supply amongst the civilian youth population. To make things more challenging, a very small portion of this high quality—and age-eligible—youth population have a desire to serve in the military. They express a lot of reservations about military service and though enlistment bonuses can help to encourage recruits to join, the Marine Corps typically has been very reluctant to use them. The Marine Corps needs to find a way to leverage the talents of new Marines to assist in recruiting, rather than trying to find a new trail along a well-worn path.

Militaries throughout history have needed to satisfy resource requirements—including fighters, leaders, logistics, and talents of gold and silver—to fight and win wars: “War is a matter not so much of arms but of money.”¹ At the time of this quote, the primary currency of the Peloponnesian armies was gold, weighed in talents. A talent was equal to the weight of a man and a likely origin of the phrase that people are “worth their weight in gold.” The Bible more reasonably masses a talent of gold between 60 and 75 pounds. At an average weight of 180 pounds and gold at a spot price today of \$1,700 per ounce, the average Marine is worth about \$4.9 million—perhaps accurate if valued over a significant timeframe of earned income. In today’s vernacular, a talent generally means the accumula-

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tion of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Gen Berger speaks at length about the cultivation and management of talent.² Thus, we must look at our use of the word talent in the same way that Thucydides and ancient armies viewed talent: as an essential commodity. In line with the direction from the Commandant, the conditions are prime for at least one modernization addition to our manpower recruiting systems away from an “Industrial-Age”³ in order to maximize talent within the force and to add to it from society.

Personnel Economics 101

Recruiting occurs in a marketplace in which the buyer (the Marine Corps) and the seller (an applicant) agree on the price at which the seller will enlist. A definition of grit is: “firmness of mind or spirit: unyielding courage in the face of hardship or danger.”⁴ Grit is a modern *talent* and difficult to measure. It is as valuable today as a talent of gold was in ancient Sparta. As such, people who possess different levels of grit may view the going price of enlistment very differently. The intersection of supply and demand establishes the price and the quantity in a market. If your supply consists of people with varying levels of grit, then those who have low levels of grit will find that they are unwilling to accept the going price of Marine Corps service.

A military applicant will enter the

labor-supply exchange for a grit-price he can afford and at the price they are actually willing to pay. Bonuses might make the difference. The Marine Corps is not, however, a monopsony, or sole buyer, of military-age youth with grit. The supply of propensed military youth also is tight (approximately two percent of the age-eligible population) and our sister Services, as well as private-sector employers, value those with grit. Of note, an applicant with a high level of grit could enlist into any Service and would likely take a bonus without needing much convincing. This is the Marine Corps’ dilemma and a concept called, “First to contact, first to contract.” This creates a rent or surplus—if a high-grit applicant enlists into a Service that does not demand a high level of grit. This person’s grit would be undervalued until unique circumstances arise. For example, if such an individual joins another Service and then later serves in that Service’s special forces, it stands to reason that they may have been attracted to joining the Marine Corps had a Marine recruiter made first contact.

Marines in the fleet have boundless creativity and can support recruiters at little cost. This talent can help us to connect to the youth we seek to recruit. We must inform high-quality youth about who we are and convince them that they are a good fit. Self-efficacy, the ability to imagine oneself succeeding

and projecting oneself into the future, is important in helping Marine Corps applicants to build faith in their own grit.

There are many with grit who are unaware of their opportunities in the Marine Corps and those who do not reach slip away. Likewise, there are many with grit in our ranks from active, reserve, and in the inactive ready reserve who are capable of finding others with more talent and grit to replace themselves.⁵ This illustrates the importance of advertising to make youth with high levels of grit aware of the Marine Corps.⁶ The CG of MCRC in 2017, MGen Kennedy, stated that the average military-age youth is hard-pressed to distinguish the Army from the Marine Corps without prior research or personal knowledge.⁷ Branding has a distinct effect.

How could we innovate to use the talent within our ranks to find new talent with sufficient grit for tomorrow? Sharing information between our newest Marines and the youth that we seek to enlist is one way. At least 70 percent of new enlistees say that they are willing to share their experiences in the Marine Corps on social media.⁸ Young Marines have a wealth of talent in creating and curating social media content in a way that is relevant to the next wave of seventeen–nineteen year-olds whom we seek. Messaging from our newest Marines may be how we communicate our cause to find new fighters who will grow to become tomorrow’s leaders. Joint Advertising and Marketing and Research Studies program surveys indicate that today’s youth are disconnected and list several reasons for not joining the military, including fear of physical injury or death, PTSD or psychological trauma, or leaving family and friends.⁹ Perhaps we have organic capabilities to inform and connect to the public?

The Army is using social media to recruit by creating entire units to participate in esports or other social media platforms.¹⁰ Our recruiters need help, and it needs to be inexpensive, easy to procure, genuine, organic, and self-sustaining. There is a way to leverage capability and interest already inherent to the current generation: their affinity

for self-made videos. The command recruiting program (CDR) can empower our new Marines if it were expanded to allow them to generate content about the Marine Corps in a Media Content Marketplace (MCM).¹¹

Many Marines are familiar with the CDR by participating in the Permissive Recruiter Assistance Support Program immediately after bootcamp, through which two referrals can earn the Marine a meritorious promotion. Many others participate later in the program as lance corporals or corporals by returning home in Permissive Temporary Additional Duty status, avoiding a 30-day charge to their leave balance while helping their local recruiters. Each referral as a lance corporal or corporal results in 20 points toward a promotion cutting score and up to 100 points for corporal or sergeant.

Leave immediately following boot camp historically referenced to as “boot leave” provides additional manning to the recruiting station to assist in the recruiting effort. Changes and restrictions implemented to reduce and mitigate

tion it performed pre-pandemic. One way would be to leverage activities that Marines already participate in, such as social media. Newly graduated Marines, excited to have earned the title, would help generate leads by creating Marine Corps-affiliated social media content. This could be pictures, short videos, or memes created by Marines. Recruiters could re-post these items, and we could design a system that awards promotion points to the content generator.

The system would first require a content generator (a new Marine or a Marine in the fleet) to submit their content tied to their Electronic Data Interchange Personal Identifier into a secure site by category for vetting (checks and balances) by COMSTRAT Marines who would screen the content. Once approved, a COMSTRAT Marine moves content into a “marketplace,” or CDR-MCM, where recruiters could “shop” by category for approved content on a variety of topics (See Figure 1). Recruiters would log enlistments attributed to CDR-MCM content as data entries in the Marine Corps Recruiting Informa-

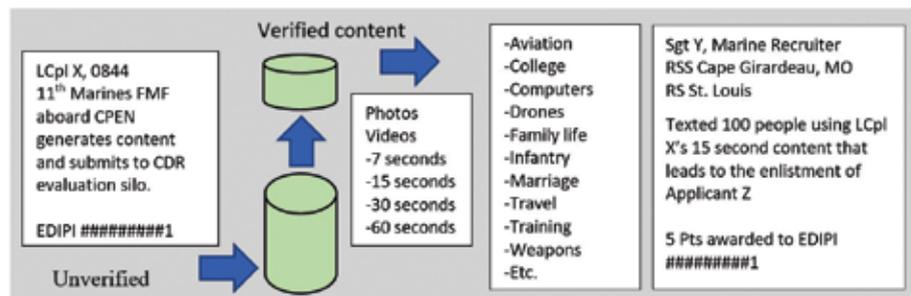


Figure 1. Command Recruiting Program Content Marketplace. (Figure provided by author.)

the COVID Pandemic resulted in a change to the post-graduation experience. Through the Permissive Recruiter Assistance Support Program and prior to COVID, new Marines on leave generated thousands of high-quality leads, showcasing the Marine Corps in their hometowns. The return of recruit graduation is hopefully a return to boot leave and a resurgence of lead generation. No reasonable amount of advertising spending can compensate for the loss of new Marines reconnecting in communities on boot leave. Boot leave may not return to an exact version of its former self, so we must be creative in meeting the func-

tion Support System and in the CDR content marketplace.

The promotion point policy would incentivize quality content. Better content should result in more use and more attributable enlistments. For example, perhaps 20 enlistments attributed to content for a private or private first class should result in a meritorious promotion as the paid advertising cost for such an achievement is about \$200,000. At the minimum, one enlistment credited to content for lance corporals and corporals should result in five points toward promotion, and up to 100 points for corporal or sergeant to include com-

ments about participation during junior Marine evaluation.¹² Enlistments attributed to content generated by sergeants and above should make them eligible for commendatory material and section I comments in the fitness report.¹³

Marine recruiters see the value of having access to small-scale and relevant content that they can use to gain interest. CDR-MCM could, for example, allow a lance corporal in Camp Pendleton, CA, to help recruiters across the country over several years. The CDR-MCM is another way to recognize our Marines' talents.¹⁴ It could help us to find new "talent" and warriors while advancing our brand within industry, the beltway, colleges, and high schools—ultimately bridging the civil-military disconnect. By providing a useful and institutionally beneficial outlet for creativity, we can stoke "the recruiter within each Marine" and help those already assigned to the duty. This can reduce costs through grassroots advertising, improving recruiter quality of life through this institutional support, and possibly increasing volunteers to recruiting duty while channeling Marines' creativity and reducing their boredom.

The Marine Corps already has introduced a tool with a similar purpose, called the *USMC Battles Told* app. Using the app, Marines can share stories about their battles and victories with the next generation of aspiring Marines. Active duty and Reserve Marines can use the app to capture unclassified pho-

tographs, video, or audio about the obstacles they face and defeat both on the battlefield and within themselves. The Marine Corps can use submitted stories in recruitment efforts and casting initiatives. Unfortunately, the tool has faced fielding delays. *The Battles Told App, or something like it such as the CDR-MCM, leverages the nature of people (Marines) in generating content in a way that helps teach others about our culture.*¹⁵

Conclusion

This tool can help us to recruit new, high-quality Marines who will fight alongside us in our Nation's battles in the air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace. A CDR-MCM marketplace would help to fill the gap left by boot leave in the interim and help to mitigate other unpredictable disturbances while also allowing the Marine Corps to leverage the social media talents and creativity of its newest Marines.

Notes

1. Quote attributed to Thucydides, 411 B.C.
2. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).
3. Ibid.
4. *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "Grit," available at www.merriam-webster.com.
5. *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*.
6. Lazear and Gibbs, *Personnel Economics in Practice, 3d Ed.*, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing Company, 2015).
7. Quote attributed to MajGen Kennedy, CG MCRC 2017.
8. Joint Advertising and Marketing and Research Studies Program, "New Recruit Survey," (Washington, DC: Fall 2018).
9. Ibid.
10. Aimee Picci, "One Casualty of the Tight Job Market: U.S. Army Recruitment," *CBS News*, (September 2019), available at <https://www.cbsnews.com>.
11. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCO 1130.62 Command Recruiting Program*, (Washington, DC: 2020).
12. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCO 1616.1 Junior Enlisted Performance Evaluation System (JEPES)*, (Washington, DC: 2020).
13. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCO 1610.7A Performance Evaluation System*, (Washington, DC: 2018).
14. *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*.
15. Ibid.

