

HARD SELL: NATIONAL AD CAMPAIGN STILL HOPES FOR PEO SUPPORT

By Sharon Aschaiek

An innovative, five-year campaign by Engineers Canada to showcase the licensed profession of engineering nationally is off and running—without PEO’s financial support, for now.

The results of engineering are everywhere. The profession creates jobs, stimulates the economy and enhances public safety. Canadians need to be aware of the difference engineering makes in their lives, and companies need human capital with the best engineering education and experience to get the job done.

For these reasons and more, Engineers Canada and its constituent members (CMs)—the 12 provincial and territorial engineering regulatory bodies—have embarked on a national, public communications program to enhance the image of professional engineers and the engineering profession across Canada.

The idea for a promotional campaign to raise the profile of engineering first emerged in the fall of 2007, and developed over the course of a year of discussion and visioning by the national organization’s executive committee in conjunction with the CMs.

“We decided we wanted to stop being the invisible profession and get a campaign going to raise awareness about engineering,” says Ron LeBlanc, P.Eng., Engineers Canada director from Prince Edward Island, who chairs the campaign advisory committee, comprising representation from the

Engineers Canada board, and the CM councils, communications officials and registrars. “The average person may use a lawyer, doctor, dentist or accountant, but they don’t hire engineers, so they’re not aware of our contributions.”

To get the ball rolling, Engineers Canada sought the expertise and guidance of, respectively, marketing, media buying, and market research firms Blueprint Public Relations, Vector Media and Arcturus Solutions, to determine how best to reach its target audiences, which include employers of engineers, parents, engineering students, government and engineers themselves. The ideological thrust of the campaign was fine-tuned using the results of several focus groups.

Marshall Fenn Communications was brought on as creative consultant to develop concepts for the appearance and message of ads and accompanying web components. What emerged was a five-year plan that launched last November.

YEAR ONE

The first installment features two ads running in high-profile national Canadian magazines aimed at two key audiences. One is geared to employers, and features the slogan “A professional engineer can see what others can’t,” situated under a set of blueprints rolled into the shape of binoculars. Running in English in *Report on Business*, *Financial Post Business*, and *Canadian Business*, and in French in *L’Actualité* and *Affaires Plus*, the ad expresses the importance of hiring professional engineers to gain the best return on investment.

The ad leads readers to www.hireapeng.ca, an Engineers Canada microsite that discusses the experience, education and professional attitude licensed engineers bring to projects, and how these qualities lead to increased productivity, improved quality, and safety and technical assurance. Visitors will also find information on the importance of licensure, a list of Canada’s engineering regulators, and a link to a page on the Engineers Canada website listing the universities offering accredited engineering programs.

“A lot of employers hire engineers, but they don’t necessarily hire licensed engineers, or they may hire one, and everyone else



will work under their licence,” LeBlanc says. “What employers need to know is that engineering licensure comes with a Code of Ethics, and that professional engineers have respect for their work and participate in ongoing professional development.”

The employer campaign has an online presence in relevant areas of globeandmail.com, financialpost.com, canadianbusiness.com, lactualite.com and lesaffaires.com.

Each target audience was surveyed prior to the campaign’s launch about its awareness of and attitudes toward professional engineering to establish a baseline. They will be surveyed again this spring to measure any changes in awareness or attitudes as a result of the first phase of the campaign.

The second ad is directed at parents of students aged 12 to 17, and features two kids engrossed in a creative construction project, while their mom and dad cheer them on. Appearing in English in *Reader’s Digest*, *Canadian Living*, *Canadian Geographic*, *Chatelaine* and *Maclean’s*, the ad encourages parents to nurture the natural interests their children have in math and science to keep the doors open to exciting career opportunities in engineering. The ad is running in French in *Châteline*, *Coup de Pouce*, *Selection du Readers Digest* and *L’Actualité*.

The ad also promotes www.whyengineering.ca, another Engineers Canada microsite, which explains to parents why engineering is a viable career path, and how they can determine if the profession is a fit for their child. The site also features a list of creative engineering projects they can use to test their children’s engineering skills, links to the engineering licensing and regulatory bodies, and information on a contest to win a week-long experience at a summer science camp in their province or territory.

“A lot of parents plan what their kids are going to be—they’ll say, ‘Why don’t you try dentistry, or accounting, or carpentry?’ Engineering is rarely mentioned. They’ll also say, ‘Math and science are

hard, stay away from those.’ They’re not realizing that they’re limiting their kids’ career options,” LeBlanc says. “With the parents campaign, we’re pushing math and science to make sure children have all the tools necessary to get into engineering if they decide to do it.”

The online component of the parents campaign features banner advertising leading to the whyengineering.ca microsite in chatelaine.com, canadianliving.com, and coupdepouce.com, as well as ads rotated on relevant channels in the Yahoo!, MSN/Sympatico and Canoe.ca portals.

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Ron LeBlanc, P.Eng., Engineers Canada director (PEI)

LOOKING AHEAD

In years two to five, the campaign will target other audiences, including high school students, high school teachers and guidance counsellors, engineering students and unlicensed engineering graduates, as well as consolidate awareness built with the previous audiences. Suggested media could include billboard advertising, movie theatre commercials, and direct marketing to employers, in addition to continued print and online offerings.

“There’s been a realization of the need to not only raise the profile of engineers, but the contributions of the profession at large. That is the main objective we’re trying to achieve,” says Jim Wentzell, vice president of planning and strategy at Marshall Fenn.

Overall, the campaign is expected to cost about \$6 million over its five-year life—with the first year price tag of \$888,000 Engineers Canada’s responsibility. It’s intended the cost of the campaign’s remaining four years will be shared, with Engineers Canada covering half and the provincial and territorial regulators, together, paying the other half. To

date, every provincial or territorial regulator, with the exception of PEO and the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia (APEGBC), has voted to support the campaign at a level of about \$5 a member. In June 2008, PEO council voted 16 to eight against financially supporting the initiative. In APEGBC's case, support of the ad campaign was contingent on a fee increase that required a two-third majority to pass. Just 59.8 per cent of APEGBC members supported the fee increase.

ONTARIO'S PERSPECTIVE

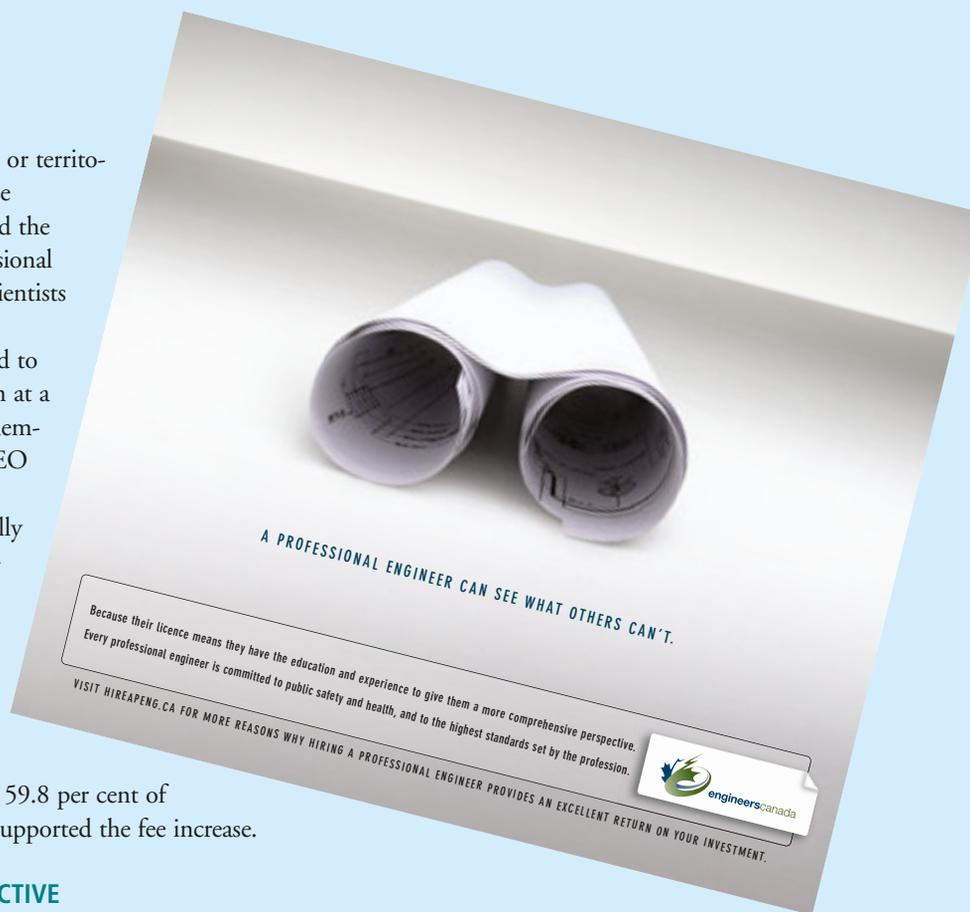
Former PEO Councillor Richard Weldon, P.Eng., one of those who voted against supporting the campaign, says that in his opinion the initiative does not align with the organization's main focus of regulating the profession. "This is an advocacy function, in a sense, and I'm always cautious about spending money on advocacy when PEO is a regulatory body," says Weldon, adding that he feels PEO already sufficiently promotes the profession through such initiatives as National Engineering Month and by leading engineering contests at high schools and events at shopping malls. With over 70,000 engineers in Ontario, PEO would have been committing to more than \$350,000 annually—the most of all Canadian engineering regulators—had it approved the plan.

Weldon says more active awareness-raising events are the responsibility of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE). "Ontario already has a society that does this kind of thing. It seems like we'd be paying the lion's share of the cost for the program and duplicating what OSPE should be doing," Weldon says.

However, with OSPE's membership a fraction of PEO's, Weldon acknowledges the society likely wouldn't have the funds to take on such an extensive ad campaign, even as part of a nationally funded effort.

In fact, for all its resources, PEO found it hard to single-handedly sustain a major mass market advertising campaign in the mid-1990s. Also conceived as a long-term, multimedia initiative, the campaign's initial momentum faded and its more than \$600,000 annual price tag couldn't be maintained when PEO's budget priorities changed. Consequently, the campaign was abandoned part way through, after incurring substantial development costs and without realizing the benefits of all of the planned advertising placements.

PEO Past President Dave Adams, P.Eng., who voted in favour of the current Engineers Canada campaign, nevertheless has mixed feelings about it. Overall, he thinks the



campaign is necessary and will serve the profession well, noting that engineering doesn't do as good a job of promoting itself as professions like accounting and medicine. But he also has a beef with the initiative's first-year focus on promoting the profession to parents, which he believes is "a wrong-headed approach" for Ontario's engineer saturation.

"We have far more applicants for university spaces allotted for engineering than we have spaces. I think the ratio is about six to one. On top of that, we have 3500 foreign-trained engineering graduates seeking employment in Ontario every year so, right now, we don't need more people going into engineering," he says.

Adams says he sought to work out a compromise between PEO and Engineers Canada in which the initiative would feature a tailored Ontario component emphasizing what he sees as the province's main issue: getting more engineering graduates

licensed. Engineers Canada was receptive to his idea, he says, and he presented it as a possibility when he took the funding request to PEO council, which defeated it nonetheless.

DISCUSSION ONGOING

"I'm disappointed," Adams says. "We should be building the P.Eng. brand nationally. But I do think the campaign has to be better directed to our needs in Ontario."

Without PEO's support, it may be difficult to execute years two to five as planned. LeBlanc says Engineers Canada hopes to work out a compromise with PEO to keep the initiative afloat.

Says LeBlanc: "Our meetings with PEO are ongoing. We want to see if we can reach a middle ground." Σ

TO DATE, EVERY PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL REGULATOR, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF PEO AND THE ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS AND GEOSCIENTISTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA (APEGBC), HAS VOTED TO SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN AT A LEVEL OF ABOUT \$5 A MEMBER.



HOW DO YOU CHEER FOR OUR BUDDING ENGINEERS?

There may be other interests you encourage, but engineering is a career that inspires a kid's imagination and engages their out-of-the-box thinking. And few other careers offer as many exciting opportunities the world over. It's a great reason to encourage your children to continue with math and sciences.



ENTER TO WIN AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUR CHILD TO ATTEND AN ENGINEERING CAMP, AND FIND OUT MORE ABOUT ENGINEERING CAREERS AT WHYENGINEERING.CA