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National Community Tree Foundation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tree Plan Canada is a key part of the Government of Canada's 1990 Green Plan. The programme recognizes the fundamental importance of forests in addressing the problem of global warming. The National Community Tree Foundation (NCTF) was formed to ensure that Tree Plan Canada's goals became realities. The NCTF is responsible for leveraging the federal government's initial investment by involving corporate and private sector 'partners' - tree-planting groups, corporations and the media - to reach its established targets.

Although the forestry sector was doing a good job in replanting wilderness areas, not much was being done to create and maintain new urban forests. The Foundation's challenge was to convince Canadians of their important role in planting new trees in and around their communities.

The communication strategy consisted of three phases:

- Public awareness and education.
- Public involvement and action.
- The importance of tree care and maintenance.

The media strategy was to create and manage a high quality television public service announcement (PSA) campaign that would establish long-term media partnerships and generate optimal donated media value.

The creative strategy targeted Canadians' lack of understanding of the vital importance of trees to human survival. The ultimate objective was to get volunteers to appreciate the need and reasons for planting new trees. The creative set out to show the public the value and benefits of trees as 'living, breathing air filters'. It also sought to interest people and move them to action - to get them involved in improving the environment (and the future) by 'pitching in'.

The campaign results are impressive.

- Pre- and post-national attitude benchmark surveys showed that awareness of Tree Plan Canada doubled and that Canadians better understood and appreciated the benefits of tree planting.
- 79% of the calls received by the Foundation were directly attributable to the PSAs, many of which aired during prime time.
- The total value of media (time) contributions rose to \$10.1 million in two years.
- Total audience impressions climbed significantly to three-quarters of a million over a two-year period.

In addition, partnerships were formed with other major media and corporations because of the awareness generated by the television PSAs.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

In the 1990 Green Plan, the Government of Canada made clear its commitment to providing a safe and healthy environment for present and future generations of Canadians. A key part of the Green Plan is a programme called Tree Plan Canada. It recognizes the fundamental importance of our rural and urban forests to address the

problem of global warming and to improve the quality of life for all Canadians.

The National Community Tree Foundation (NCTF) was formed as a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization to manage the Tree Plan Canada programme and to ensure that its goals became realities. The fundamental purpose of the NCTF is 'to foster and encourage the planting and care of trees in and around more than 5,000 cities, towns and villages by 1998'. In so doing, the Foundation's challenge was to leverage an initial investment by the federal Government four-fold by involving partners - tree-planting groups, corporations and the media - in reaching the targets.

Tree planting is certainly not a new idea in this country. After all, trees have historically been an abundant, renewable resource. Indeed, the forestry sector plants millions of trees each year. But virtually all of these trees are planted to compensate for the effects of timber harvesting or forest fires. So the first tough hurdle facing the Foundation was to educate Canadians that they too had an important role to play in planting new trees in urban and rural areas. If the targets were to be reached in the timeframe specified, then average Canadians would have to be motivated to plant trees in and around their communities.

It is in the cities of Canada that pollution is greatest, where we find the highest concentration of ozone-depleting carbon dioxide and where energy use is high. Trees assist in providing an efficient and aesthetically pleasing solution to these problems. They act as an environmental filter, taking carbon dioxide out of the air and converting it to oxygen. While this is something we may have learned in grade school, most of us have either taken it for granted or simply forgotten it over the years. For the Foundation to achieve its mandate, the challenge would be to create broad awareness, if not change a mindset, with regard to the value and benefits of trees and, in so doing, prompt Canadians to take action in planting our urban and rural forests. It was a challenge tailor made for mass consumer advertising.

STRATEGY AND EXECUTION

The first task was to develop a six-year communications strategy to achieve the objectives of the Foundation. In simplified form, this communications strategy consisted of three phases.

Phase I (1992-1994) - Public awareness and education

A campaign aimed at informing Canadians in general, and children in particular, about 'why trees matter', with a primary focus on the environmental value of urban trees.

Phase II (1994-1996) - Public involvement and action

A campaign with a call to action, showing the civic pride that can be created when people work together in common cause, again with an increasing emphasis on youth.

Phase III (1996-1998) - Importance of tree care and maintenance

This campaign will focus on the 'why' and 'how to' of caring for the trees we plant.

MEDIA STRATEGY

To reach a national, bilingual audience in Phase I of the communications strategy, a total advertising budget (media and production of three, 30-second television PSAs) of \$424,333 was allocated. The initial target audience consisted of Canadian 'adults in general' - the broadest possible constituency we could reach with this mass consumer medium. In addition, we targeted both the ethnic media and youth speciality channels.

Television was chosen for its intrusiveness, capacity for immediate high reach and ability to effectively convey our message. But with a campaign conceived to run for a full six years, NCTF needed a strategy to create long-term media partnerships and generate optimal PSA contributions. The strategy we devised consisted of three principal elements:

1. Create PSAs with high production values (indeed, award-winning calibre) that the stations would be proud to run in fulfilment of their CRTC allocation.
2. Solicit media support and commitment through a cross-country visitation tour during which the program would be described personally in face-to-face meetings with media representatives during which other

NCTF memorabilia would be handed out.

3. Maintain regular contact with the stations to monitor their contributions and to acknowledge the media's participation with a high quality lobby plaque, thus further enhancing the profile of the programme.

The campaign retained a 'media relations manager' with established contacts in the industry to oversee this PSA solicitation and management program.

CREATIVE STRATEGY

The central idea behind the creative strategy was that Canadians would only plant trees if they understood the benefits of trees as an integral part of the urban ecosystem. The public's affinity for trees and forests was a starting point: with their aesthetic appreciation and a belief in the 'goodness of green'. What was still needed was crystal-clear communication of the solid science that make trees vital to human survival.

But if the message was only seen as a lesson, we would lose our audience - just more boring facts about an issue that they believed they already understood.

In the first phase of the communications strategy, we wanted Canadians to know that trees are the lungs of the earth, that they filter the air we breathe and remove pollutants. This, in effect, is the 'position' we wanted to establish for trees. We created a public service announcement that, in 30 seconds, would dramatically illustrate trees as living, breathing air cleaning units. We wanted Canadians to appreciate that a mature tree just keeps on cleaning and cleaning, at no charge, for many decades.

Three executions were created to meet this objective and two are presented here. 'Filter' depicts an animated tree, standing up in a stiff breeze, sucking in dirty air and replacing it with pure air. Immediately, we can see the city and its parks and its inherent beauty, something that was completely obscured before the tree cleaned the polluted air. The second execution, 'Maintenance', shows a maintenance man in a park, changing the 'air filter' equipment in a tree. The air filter special effect, while it seemed a little corny and literal, turned out to be a wonderful mnemonic for the key message of filtering the air.

Phase II creative is the logical follow-up: 'Neighbourhood' shows people pitching in and 'getting it done'. Three commercials were produced, all high on emotion and civic pride. Old folks, kids, families, everyone in the neighbourhood is working to restore a derelict site by planting trees. They not only beautify the neighbourhood, their collective effort helps clean the air and change the future.

CORPORATE CANADA: A KEY AUDIENCE

We wanted our work to persuade more than individual Canadians. We also wanted to get the business community interested and involved in sponsoring tree-planting projects. The PSAs were therefore also instrumental in raising corporate awareness of the public relations benefits of aligning with the NCTF cause. TV, of course, had the power to add to the legitimacy of the message besides appealing to the private sector with its broad reach.

RESULTS

The television PSAs were tagged with an 800 call number ('for further information on how your group can get involved'). This enabled us to track measurable results on the impact of the spots. The campaign began airing in January 1993 (See [Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#)).

The first month saw an increase of 900% in calls received that were directly attributable to the PSAs. Of over 12,000 calls received during the term of this campaign, 9,545 or 79% were generated by the television campaign specifically.

It was especially gratifying to note that our PSAs were being aired during prime time and not during the fringe periods normally associated with most not-for-profit PSAs. This we attribute to our media solicitation and management strategy. The close personal contact of the media relations manager paid off.

The total value of the media (air time) contributions and total audience impressions (see [Figure 3](#) and [Figure 4](#)), climbed geometrically over the term of the campaign as a function of the media management strategy.

The PSAs caught the attention of other major media. Mediacom, Canada's largest outdoor media company, made a three-year commitment for outdoor advertising space to the NCTF, directly as a function of the cause and the quality of the creative message.

Corporations started getting involved with the work of the NCTF, citing as their reason the awareness generated by the television PSA campaign. In meeting with new corporate prospects, the executive director found that a surprisingly high percentage had seen, enjoyed and remembered the commercials and were favourably disposed to the NCTF because of the TV communication.

Pre- and post-national attitude benchmark surveys were conducted to test the impact of the PSA campaign. The significant results of this research are as follows:

1. Surveys indicated that 27% of those who recall seeing the NCTF television PSAs said that the advertising prompted them to get involved in some kind of tree planting. Furthermore, the age skew on this finding showed younger people are more likely to be influenced by this advertising.
2. When Canadians were asked to identify the benefits of tree planting, the specific message and focus of our PSAs ('cleaning pollution from the air' and 'helping us breathe') topped the list of environmental benefits by a wide margin.
3. Awareness of Tree Plan Canada had doubled during the period between the two benchmark surveys.
4. One in four Canadians identified the key message advertised as 'more trees should be planted', a significant increase (double) from the previous year's study. The secondary message identified by Canadians ('air is cleaned by trees') saw a three-fold increase from the previous year and again reflected the fact that Canadians are getting the message.

Perhaps more important than the dramatic data of audience impressions and attitudinal shift on the key message, is Canadians are planting trees in our urban and rural communities in unprecedented numbers. By the end of 1994, the NCTF was able to report that, as a result of its efforts, 40 million trees had been planted in and around 5,000 communities from coast to coast. Clearly, the advertising created for the NCTF is teaching Canadians the value and importance of planting trees. In the process all Canadians will benefit for generations to come.

CLIENT

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NOTES & EXHIBITS

FIGURE 1: 1-800 CALLS

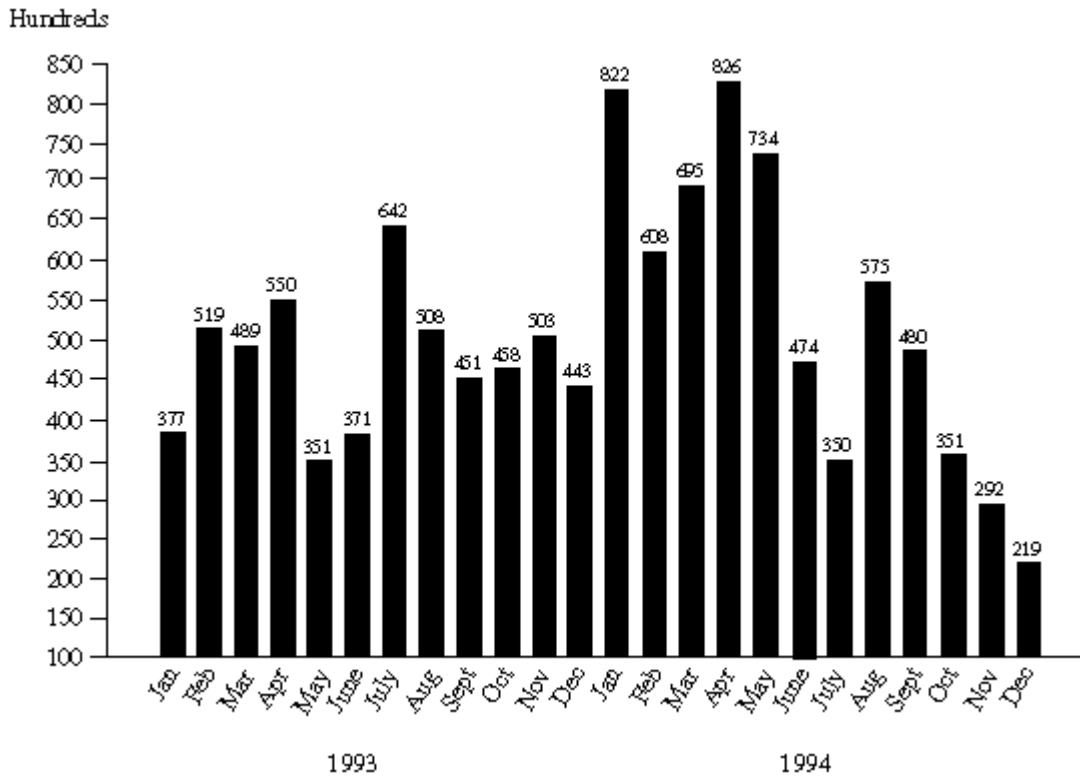


FIGURE 2: CALLS DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTED TO PSA'S (BY MONTH)

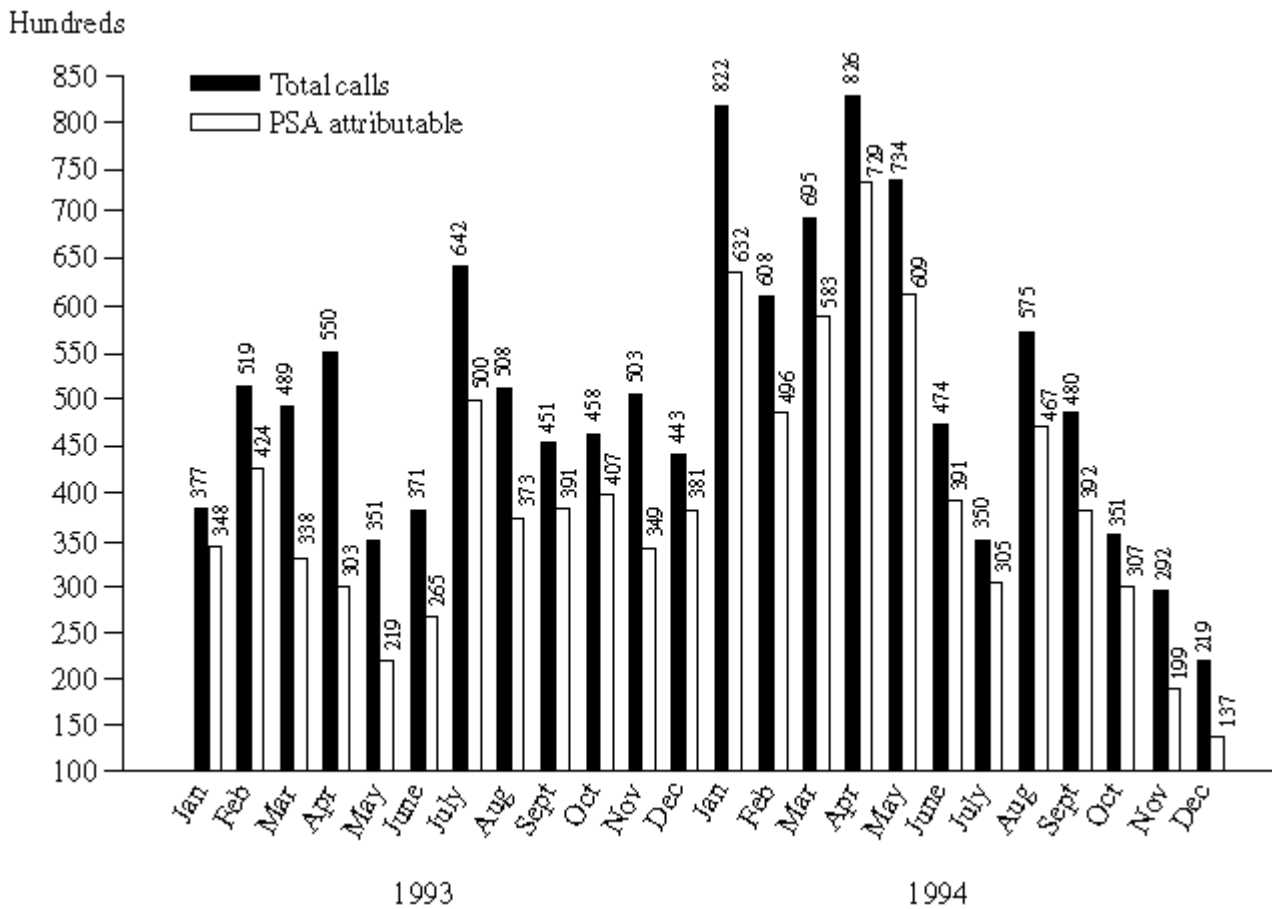


FIGURE 3: VALUE OF DONATED PSA TIME

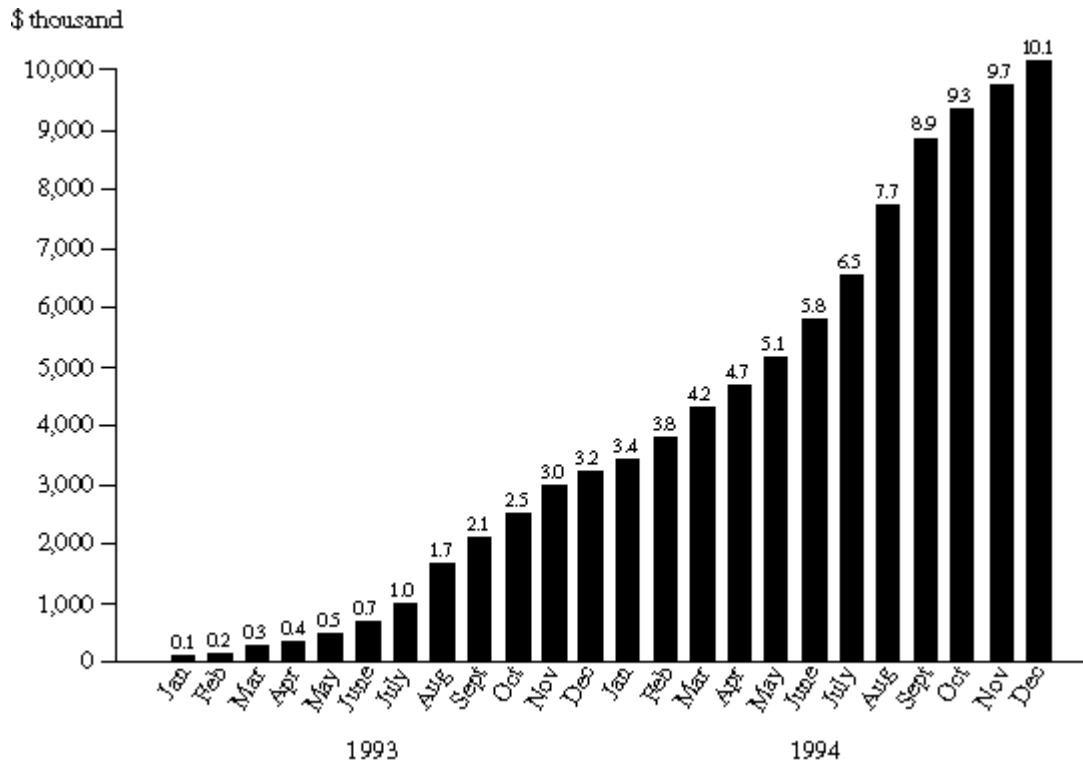


EXHIBIT 4: TELEVISION PSA VIEWER IMPRESSIONS

