

More about the Army National Guard

The National Guard has played an active role in the war against terrorism. Indeed, since September 2001 the Guard reports it has committed 71 of its 75 infantry battalions to the war on terror. The Guard makes up 32 percent of the 108,916 Army troops in Iraq and 44 percent of the combat force in infantry and armored units. That's an all time high and it's making it more difficult to woo new recruits and re-enlistments alike. Unless the gap closes by the end of the fiscal year in September, Guard Bureau Chief Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum warns that the forces could be below normal strength for the first time in 16 years.

That stark reality is propelling the Guard to deploy a multi-faceted attack against a fierce labor shortage. Savvy to the fact teenagers are high-technology-minded, the Guard has designed 1800GoGuard.com. The flashy Web site features "Guard Force," a video game that offers players a chance to see if they have what it takes to lead America's finest into combat, stealth and humanitarian missions. The site aims to keep this demographic coming back to the site again and again. Television and radio ads are also part of the Guard's marketing mix. But the newest weapon in the military's arsenal is tabletop displays.

More from EDPA's Mark Johnson

Johnson says the use of portable tabletop displays is on the rise because they are easier and quicker to set up than larger exhibit displays that are intended to sit on a trade show floor for several days a time. Tabletop displays were designed specifically with rapid deployment in mind and are popping up at schools, sales meetings and corporate events because the return on investment is so significant.

That said, setting up a tabletop display alone is not enough to ensure success. Johnson says the number one objective of any marketing tool is to consistently communicate an effective message. That's why the National Guard's tabletop display features text and graphics that correspond with Web, TV and radio initiatives. Since tabletop displays are smaller than their larger exhibit counterparts, Johnson recommends using more graphics than text to maximize the benefit of the display. Images of Guard heroes in action speak a thousand words. Combined with a snappy slogan, the tabletop display serves its function: to draw people to the recruiter who can sell them on the benefits of enlisting in the military.

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