



## Mission Transition - Arming Veterans Nationwide with Employment Tools

---

MSLGROUP and Hodes and ScoutComms and Randy Plunkett and The Home Depot, Jan 1,2013

**Summary:** 2013 Silver Anvil Award Winner — Community Relations — Business Services

The Home Depot employs 35,000 veterans and is a champion of military and veteran employment. To address over-indexed military unemployment rates, we developed a program to prepare veterans for the civilian workforce. We held 110 educational workshops nationwide and launched an online Military Skills Translator that matches military experience with civilian terms, as well as available jobs at The Home Depot. We engaged the military community and drove participation from 88% of registrants, increased traffic to [homedepotmilitary.com](http://homedepotmilitary.com) by 3,499% and raised awareness through national media relations and targeted outreach in workshop markets, reaching 449 million and exceeding all program goals.

Community relations includes programs that aim to improve relations with, or seek to win the support or cooperation of, people or organizations in communities in which the sponsoring organization has an interest, need or opportunity.

### Full Text: **BACKGROUND/SITUATION**

The Home Depot employs more than 300,000 people. With 35,000 of these associates identifying as members of the military community, the company takes challenges facing this group personally. In fact, in 2012 alone, company volunteers completed more than 550 service projects to help veterans. Based on this company priority and the fact that The Home Depot is already a champion of military employment, the Human Resources team decided to address the over-indexed unemployment rates among this group by developing a program to educate and prepare our service men and women for the civilian workforce.

The two-pronged program consisted of

1. Civilian Career Workshops led by the company's HR field teams, store leadership and store associates, and
2. The launch of an online [Military Skills Translator](#) designed to match a veteran's military experience with jobs at The Home Depot in which the candidate may express interest.

The program was positioned as an educational initiative and not a hiring commitment. Working together, The Home Depot and MSL Atlanta sought to engage the military community and drive participation, as well as raise awareness among the general public.

### **RESEARCH**

To maximize the opportunity to connect with military personnel, we conducted both primary and secondary research to better understand this target's needs and concerns. We held two focus groups with the company's internal Military Associate Group (MAG), which provided insights around military associates' transition experience with The Home Depot, as well as previous employers.

The focus group revealed three key needs from this employee base:

1. How to tailor a resume to the civilian sector,
2. How to utilize social media or other networking tools and
3. How to verbally relate military experiences to skills needed in the civilian workforce.

MAG also acted as internal advisors, along with two external subject matter experts, Fred Wellman and Randy Plunkett, who both have more than 20 years' experience as veteran and military consultants. MAG, Wellman and Plunkett provided valuable feedback and input into branding aspects, content, imagery and verbiage that would be engaging yet appropriate to the military audience. Through these partnerships we performed a thorough competitive analysis to gain a holistic understanding of what other companies were executing regarding military focused initiatives.

We learned that while several major corporations had announced hiring commitments targeting the veteran population, there was a lack of effort to educate veterans about the job search process and assist with the civilian transition. This presented an opportunity for The Home Depot to fill a specific void and differentiate itself as a leader determined to help the military community tackle this problem head-on.

We analyzed Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports from 2011 and 2012, which revealed the number of unemployed veterans in the U.S. had hovered around 1 million for the past two years. We additionally conducted a media audit to find relevant data points and to uncover any trends in the media landscape related to this issue. We found that due to a lack of government involvement, the military community was more and more looking toward the private sector for support in addressing its unemployment challenges. Additionally, our research revealed that military/veteran unemployment rates are even higher among younger service men and women and recently returning veterans.

The Home Depot charged us with leveraging these insights to develop program messaging and prepare for national media outreach, ensuring The Home Depot fit into the stories media wanted to tell.

## **PLANNING**

Armed with these key learnings and an \$80K budget for PR, we first identified three primary communications goals:

1. Elevate awareness of the challenges that veterans face translating their skills into those needed for civilian jobs,
2. Establish The Home Depot as the leader in providing solutions to help veterans find employment and
3. Educate stakeholders about the company's initiative to support veterans during their employment search.

We branded the campaign "Mission: Transition" and developed key messaging to align with the communications goals and properly position the company's initiative.

The key strategic consideration when planning and implementing the program was to make sure we positioned Mission: Transition as educational for veterans seeking employment with any company, and not an explicit commitment by The Home Depot to hire any specific number of veterans that participate in the program. At the same time, we did want to ensure participating veterans interested in working for The Home Depot would know how to apply for any available positions and best present their qualifications.

Based on our research findings and communications goals, we recognized two core audiences:

1. Veterans able to attend workshops and/or leverage the Military Skills Translator and
2. The general public, to raise awareness about the Corporate Social Responsibility program.

We outlined an aggressive three-week national and local media relations action plan and worked with the HR team to identify program objectives:

- Reach an audience of 100 million and secure 150 media placements
- Boost traffic to [homedepotmilitary.com](http://homedepotmilitary.com) by 50%
- Obtain 75% of maximum registrants prior to Oct. 27 (Civilian Career Workshops event date)
- Secure attendance from 50% of pre-event online registrants
- Inspire 10,000 uses of Military Skills Translator in first month
- Double the number of people who opt to “stay in touch” with The Home Depot HR from September to October
- Increase the number of employment applications submitted by veterans or active service members by 30%

## **EXECUTION**

Program components included:

- Hosted 110 Civilian Career Workshops on one day. The workshops took place at The Home Depot locations across the country, from stores to regional offices. The workshops were comprised of three modules, which focused on resume optimization, job search strategies and interview techniques.
- Provided program materials to workshop leaders in advance of the events, which included handouts for attendees, a PowerPoint presentation and a media relations toolkit with talking points, interview tips and best-practices.
- Created the Military Skills Translator, an online tool available at [homedepotmilitary.com](http://homedepotmilitary.com), through which veterans could input their branch and job title to receive a list of skills translated into civilian terms. The translator additionally auto-populated available jobs at The Home Depot that might make a good fit.
- Worked closely with military consultant Fred Wellman and team to conduct niche military media outreach, partner with military/veteran organizations and influencers, and actively promote on military bases.
- Leveraged The Home Depot Careers, The Home Depot Foundation and The Home Depot brand’s owned social media channels to promote, including live tweets from event. Additionally supplemented by a paid media plan.

This was all supported by an aggressive media outreach campaign. The program launched with an announcement from CEO Frank Blake at the Atlanta Press Club. The team booked interviews with national media targets, including CBS Evening News, HLN’s Making It In America and Fox & Friends, by leveraging company spokesperson Joe McFarland and identifying veteran spokespeople going through the civilian transition. We simultaneously conducted a two-phased, local market media blitz to promote 110 Civilian Career Workshops taking place on the same day.

Our efforts included developing and distributing custom media advisories to local print, online and broadcast outlets in the 67 workshop markets to drive pre-event awareness and encourage online registration. Field representatives hosted media at the workshops to secure day-of coverage, and the team identified and prepared local The Home Depot HR and military/veteran associates for all interview opportunities, both pre-event and day-of.

## **EVALUATION**

Workshop participants surveyed revealed an overwhelmingly positive sentiment toward the program. Most respondents (89%) felt the workshop was a good use of their time, and a vast majority (91%) stated they will be able to put what they learned to use. Some comments from attendees include:

- “Many corporations say they care about our military, but The Home Depot truly ‘walks the talk.’”
- “I attended an incredibly successful Home Depot Mission: Transition workshop in Oxnard, CA on 27 Oct, it was an excellent source of information for my career transition out of the military.”
- “I had a great time at the Pearl City, Hawaii store. Great speakers and trainers.”

Objectives	Results
Reach an audience of 100 million and secure 150 media placements	Reached audience of more than 449 million through 415 media placements, including 125 broadcast segments, 42 print stories and 248 online stories
Boost traffic to homedepotmilitary.com by 50%	Achieved 3,499% increase in traffic to homedepotmilitary.com, with 67,042 visitors compared to 1,863 month-over-month
Obtain 75% of maximum registrants prior to Oct. 27 (event date), or 2,794/3,492 workshop registrations	Obtained 88% of maximum registrants, or 3,073 registrations out of 3,492 available
Secure attendance from 50% of pre-event online registrants	Secured attendance from 81% of registrants (2,500 total attendees) <i>Please note, several events in the Northeast were cancelled on the event day due to Hurricane Sandy</i>
Inspire 10,000 uses of Military Skills Translator in first month	Drove 60,000 uses of the Military Skills Translator in first 30 days after launch (2,000 per day)
Double the number of people who opt to “stay in touch” with The Home Depot HR from September to October	Increased the number of people who opt to “stay in touch” by 805.7%, with 951 registrants compared to 105 month-over-month
Increase the number of applications submitted by veterans or active service members by 30%	Increased the number of applications submitted by veterans or active service members by more than 50% over the previous year during the same time period

We exceeded each objective set and the program was considered a success not only by the Human Resources team, but also among the company Executive Leadership team. The program was so successful that the HR team is planning to extend Mission: Transition into an ongoing company initiative in 2013.