



MRS Awards 2020
International Research

Finalist
Antedote
Clif Bar and Company

Marketing to a new country:
Challenging the American stereotype
that Canada is the 51st state

SUMMARY

US brands are notorious for treating Canada like the 51st state. CLIF wanted to get below the surface stereotypes, get curious about their Canadian cousin, deeply understand what 'Canadian' means and ultimately develop products and communications more culturally attuned to Canadian consumers.

CLIF, like us, relished the chance to get curious, experiment with new tools, bring different perspectives... and help the budget punch above its weight.

To uncover new consumer thinking we brought together:

1. **New AI powered research tools:** for a deeper understanding of emotional responses and real world behaviour;
2. **Fresh and different perspectives:** American expats and the Québécois brought an 'insider' perspective;
3. **Cultural insight:** to identify underlying dynamics shaping Canadian identity.

"What we learned was nothing short of astounding... The results were a major unlock for me and my team, ultimately enabling a deep sense of consumer empathy... Net, we were able to refine our approach to innovation across the portfolio. Additionally, we were able to lean into new campaign development for multiple brands and products, leveraging insights from our research to guide positioning, as well as tone. Ultimately, our marketing plans underwent a step-function change as a result."
Aniefre Essien, General Manager/Head of Marketing, CLIF Canada

SYNOPSIS

When it comes to expanding from the US into Canada, brands are notorious for treating Canada like the 51st state and, beyond adding some French to the labelling, not doing a lot more to meet the needs of Canadians. While CLIF wanted to get below the surface stereotypes, get curious about their Canadian cousin and deeply understand what it means to be 'Canadian'.

From their values and beliefs to needs, expectations and desires from products, communications and the companies and brands that made them, CLIF wanted to know how Canadians were similar and different from their US neighbours, and how they could better create products and develop marketing communications that were culturally attuned to Canadian consumers on a deeper level'.

With lots to get curious about – after all we had to get to know an entire culture and then hone in on the opportunities for CLIF – we needed fresh consumer thinking. CLIF, like us, relished the chance to experiment with new tools, bring fresh perspectives... and help the budget punch above its weight.

The insights we uncovered didn't just go beyond the stereotype of Canadians, they also challenged the intrinsic values Canadians would attribute to themselves too.

As Aniefre Essien, General Manager/Head of Marketing for CLIF Canada *"We worked with our partners at antedote to field Canada specific consumer research, and what we learned was nothing short of astounding."*

Avoiding stereotypes, capturing data rich content and creating space for intuitive understanding and a breadth and depth of topics from the general to the specific.

To get to new consumer thinking we brought together:

1. **New research tools:** to get beyond rational reactions and get a deeper understanding of emotional responses and real world behaviour;
2. **Fresh and different perspectives:** as well as the 'core' Canadian target, we sought out an 'insider' perspective; involving American expats living in Canada and hearing what the Québécois had to say about their English speaking relatives,
3. **Cultural insight:** to help us identify underlying dynamics around Canadian identity, shaped by history, politics and sociology.

1. New research tools

We experimented with new innovative tools that were AI powered as well as more familiar tools like digital ethnography, to create a comprehensive source of learning from a range of perspectives. The resulting methodology comprised of:

Vox pops – using an AI-powered platform we captured consumer stories and personal thoughts and feelings around specific topics or provocations. Some of the most compelling

viewing included shorts about “What makes Canadians different and “What don’t foreigners always get about us?” as well as “Tell us about US brands that got it right and got it wrong when they came to Canada”.

Facial emotion tracking – using a video tool that tracks and measures micro expressions and emotional responses, we explored how consumers felt about advertising, brands, more deeply understanding emotions such as ‘pleasure’ and ‘surprise’.

In the moment pop up adventures – to get closer to the moment of decision making and evaluation while shopping, we used pop-up video surveys and text to trigger tasks for consumers to complete while in-store. Using this technique, we were able to provide in the moment instructions and capture in the moment system 1 and system 2 responses and reactions visually and verbally.

Social immersions – we analysed social media activity of respondents and category posts to both help build a picture of the Canadian consumer and explore differences with their US counterparts.

Product eating experience – consumers consumed specifically selected CLIF bars and competitors, sharing their thoughts and feelings about the product eating experience and captured on close up video for digital analysis and emotional tracking of micro-expressions.

Digital ethnography – a selection of self-guided ethnographic activities with moderation and probing to explore Canadian values, consumer needs and perceptions as well as product behavior and brand perceptions and attitudes.

Shop-alongs and in-home interviews – we went shopping with our Canadian consumers and visited them at home to conduct ethnographic inspired interviews and dig deeper into key topic areas. Each respondent was selected based on their responses to one of the digital or remote methodology, and the interviewed was tailored specific to the area of interest they represented.

For example, one of the fascinating insights we uncovered by analysing information from multiple sources was the manifestation of the value that Canadians do not like to put other people down. Using the emotional tracking tool, we discovered just how big an impact this value can have on a brand, when Canadians watched a competitor ad that discredited another brand. This knowledge combined with a suite of insights into language and semiotics helped us create a communications toolkit for navigating and honouring the cultural values and beliefs of Canadians in advertising and marketing comms.

2. Fresh and different perspectives

Alongside involving the ‘core’ Canadian consumer, our approach included:

Expat tales – who better to give us the insider view than Americans who had relocated to Canada? We involved Americans who fit the target segment who had recently migrated to Canada (so that their ‘compare and contrast’ would

be contemporary) and investigated their first-hand perspectives of the Canadian culture and the similarities and differences between the US and Canadian way of life, work, food and much more.

A Québécois deep dive – a proud nationality in their own right but with one foot in Canada too, we explored the nuances between the similarities and differences between French speaking Canadians, English speaking Canadians and their US counterparts. It was a fascinating exploration into a culture within a culture and unsurprisingly unearthed a lot more than the need to have bilingual packaging.

In talking with Expats, we were able to capture another layer of nuanced understanding. For example, a Canadian would be quick to tell you how fair and accommodating Canadians are, and in the US the stereotype does exist that Canadians are so friendly you could get them to agree to almost anything. What we discovered from our expats was this friendly and fair-minded demeanour, while true, is not as simple as you might think and can result in Americans making assumptions that Canadians are easy-going and relatively passive. With this insight in hand we were able to provide clear guidelines for avoiding the stereotype while celebrating the positive implications implicitly and explicitly.

3. Cultural insight

Using desk research and the perspective of a cultural anthropologist, we looked closely at the origins of Canada and how these can impact and influence Canadian ideals today. With both the France and British Empire having an influence in the creation of the Canadian, we uncovered interesting national characteristics and tensions that helped us get under the skin of the national psyche.

It is common knowledge that Canadians are not a boastful nation, and it is probably not surprisingly when you think about the mix of English politeness with French pride and confidence. We got to dig under the skin of this heritage and were able to create a simple set of rules and watch-outs when it comes to communications in Canada.

Outcomes and applications

Seeing it all written down, it is hard to believe we achieved so much with the resources and investment available to us. This mixed method innovative approach provided us with a rich and diverse set of data points; visually, verbally and in the written form. Combined provided they gave us a fresh perspective on the Canadian consumer from which we built a detailed and textured profile including their differences and similarities to their US counterparts and guidelines and watch-outs for how to specifically apply the learning to product innovation and marketing communications linguistically, semiotically and visually.

“The research yielded deep insights that outlined what are the key functional needs of our Consumers, and for what problems they turn to Nutrition Bars to solve. Further, we came to understand how our target Consumer lived their lives, what they deeply valued, and what people often got wrong about them, along with so much more.

The results were a major unlock for me and my team, ultimately

enabling a deep sense of Consumer empathy; which I believe is paramount for all areas of marketing.

Net, we were able to refine our approach to innovation across the portfolio. Additionally, we were able to lean into new campaign development for multiple brands and products, leveraging the insights from our research to guide positioning, as well as tone. Ultimately, our marketing plans underwent a step-function change as a result of the findings produced by our research partnership with antedote.”

Said Aniefre Essien, General Manager/Head of Marketing