CREATING A PRE-ARRIVAL PROGRAM THAT WORKS FOR NEWCOMERS!

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Pre-arrival settlement services were funded by the Federal Government in 2005. It took them a while to shift to digital service delivery. Now that is the norm. This report looks at the published data on outcomes and provides recommendations to the sector.

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY OF PRE-ARRIVAL PROGRAMS

You have to be an immigrant to understand the importance of pre-arrival services and how they can potentially fulfill a critical information need for the large numbers of immigrants moving to Canada at different steps in their journey. Immigrants don't migrate for a year, two, or ten, they leave the known for the unknown on this journey, and their information needs will change over the years.

Starting in 2005, under the Canadian International Innovation Program (CIIP) banner operating through the Association of Canadian Community College (ACCC), pre-arrival programs were offered through in-person services in China, India, and the Philippines. Initially, as the services were in-person, candidates were expected to travel to the 'head office' to attend a class for a whole day. Over time, as numbers were low, there were some video call-based interactions.

IRCC - 2018 REPORT ON PRE-ARRIVAL PROGRAMS[1]

A September 12, 2018, report by IRCC's Research & Evaluation Branch showed some interesting statistics:

- In 2017, 23 service providers were funded by IRCC.
- Half (50%) of the non-refugee clients received services in person only. 34% received services online only, and 16% received services both in-person and online.
- The majority (71%) of eligible newcomers surveyed were unaware of pre-arrival services.
- The overall cost per client to provide pre-arrival services was $1,910; however, costs per client varied significantly by SPO (i.e. from $48 and $27,779).

- The recommendations included:
  - Developing a strategic direction for program delivery.
  - Considering the cost of services and value for money.
  - Developing and implementing a pre-arrival services promotion strategy to significantly increase awareness and uptake.

"PREPARE FOR CANADA"

In 2011, with the financial support of Scotiabank, I designed the first private sector pre-arrival program called "Prepare for Canada."

Here's what was different:

1. It was 100% digital – there were no in-person programs as they were cost-inefficient and difficult to scale.
2. Designed by a skilled immigrant, lived experience helped create solutions to immigrant pain points.
3. It focused exclusively on the primary visa holder. (Spouses were included.)
4. The program has had over 1.2 Million subscribers since 2010.

We had no funding from IRCC or any other body, and our program was mainly funded by corporate Canada through advertising and sponsorship. Later, a significant part of our business helped IRCC-funded, visa-ready clients with outreach. Costs were covered by the commercial body, and there were, on average, six webinars every month speaking to hundreds of thousands of immigrants in that decade alone. We were ineligible for funding because we were a for-profit organization and because we worked with banks, cell phone companies, etc. I consider this to have been an opportunity lost.

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Key learnings include the idea that programs and processes for pre-arrival programs created by non-immigrants, bluntly, are not going to help. It is essential to understand the importance of authentic newcomer experiences and build communication around this. It is also important to ensure that identification with the target audience is deeper than the idea that it is 'any immigrant speaking to any immigrant'. Country-specific support and communications are increasingly important.

THE NEW CANADIAN NEWCOMER

The new 2013 points system changed the demographic of the newcomer audience dramatically: they had a higher level of English proficiency (CLB 8 most likely); they were significantly younger than previous cohorts (between 28 to 35 years old); they were from the generation of cell phones and Google, and sought answers to their questions themselves; they were natural networkers and used social media to get answers.

The new newcomer is mobile-first–physically, mentally, and in the way that he/she picks and consumes content and advice. They move quickly from one city to another and if something doesn't work, they change occupations based on demand, and they reach out and ask for help! From the moment they get their confirmation of permanent residence (COPR), they are in another world—from planning Uber pick-ups from the airport to temporary stays at hotels while they check out the housing alternatives they have narrowed down overseas, with deposits ready. Some have set up meetings to open up their bank account to address their financial needs. Did they stop to get a Canadian cell phone? No, they did that before landing, securing a QR code with a Canadian provider!

Just as the new newcomer's behaviour is different from previous cohorts, so is their media preference. A survey conducted by the CBC's Media Technology Monitor[2] shows interesting statistics:

- **Newcomers are 37% less likely to subscribe to cable or satellite.** They get their entertainment and information elsewhere (For streaming, they use Netflix and Disney. For access in different languages, they use Hotstar, iQiyi, and Shahid).
- **Newcomers are less likely to live in device-heavy households.** They have fewer laptops and TV sets.
- **Newcomer cell phone usage is higher than amongst Canadian-born individuals.** Cell Phone ownership among newcomers is virtually ubiquitous. iPhones are the most popular brand. Six in ten newcomers with a cellphone have one, compared to 5 in 10 Canadian-born respondents.
- **Newcomers have one cell phone, with two providers.** Many newcomers use their cellphone from their country of origin as it is cheaper than Canadian rates!

- **Newcomer WhatsApp usage is three times that of the Canadian average** for messaging, video calls, and voice calls.

- Facebook is still #1 for Newcomers.

- **Newcomers pay for YouTube Premium.** I love this one! Most Canadians do not know that YouTube has a Premium channel! It has no ads! Newcomers are more than three times as likely to be subscribing to YouTube Premium than Canadian-born respondents. **81% watched YouTube in the past month!**

- Newcomers are less likely to be stacking SVODs (subscription video-on-demand). 56% of newcomers have two or more SVODs compared to 62% of Canadian-born respondents.

- Their news is not on Cable—it is on social media—this is double the usage of Canadians!

SCAMMERS AND MANIPULATORS TARGETING UNREGULATED PRE-ARRIVAL MEDIA

Nature abhors a vacuum and with limited digital information available to the newcomer audience, it was only a matter of time before they created their own solution.

Unfortunately, the solution came with some concerning consequences., attracting manipulators and clickbait artists. These so-called YouTube and Instagram 'experts' use shock tactics to entertain and seemingly educate their audience, while coolly collecting checks from YouTube for increased views. No statement is too bizarre, or too far-fetched.

Someone sitting halfway across Canada may not question these fraudulent claims, assuming that Youtubers are all honest and have their best intentions at heart. There are also so-called professional experts, who charge exorbitant fees for services, such as resume-building, and newcomers may be unaware that they can access these services for free as part of the federal government's mandate. Services such as resume-building should be part of the digitization of services by IRCC. This is, in my opinion, long-needed.

SECTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Pre-arrival services should be re-imagined. The system seems to have been hijacked by individuals on YouTube, Instagram, and other platforms, selling questionable services. It will require a concerted effort to create an alternative system that works for newcomers. We have a moral responsibility to do so.

> "It is critical to have a more in-depth understanding of newcomer habits in their journey to Canada."

Providing pre-arrival information is not linear, and must follow pathways set by users. It therefore needs to contain authentic information, come from genuine partners, and be community-based. It is critical to have a more in-depth understanding of newcomer habits in their journey to Canada. We must keep talking to them to understand and create services for them.

There is a huge opportunity for Governmental bodies, immigrant-serving organizations, and allies to band together in creating informational community circles. (However, the worst thing that could happen is that these are 'owned' by the Government.) Ideally, these community circles would be integrated with local immigration partnerships and immigrant-serving organizations so that the journey may be seamless.

REFERENCES

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