

DRAFT Brief for ARB to secure a new Brand Marketing & Communications Services firm for GO Transit

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Metrolinx

Metrolinx is helping transform the way the region moves by championing and delivering mobility solutions for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). Created by the Government of Ontario in 2006, Metrolinx's mandate includes providing seamless, coordinated transportation throughout this region, which is Canada's largest and among North America's most rapidly growing.

GO, PRESTO and the Air Rail Link are Metrolinx's three consumer facing brands and act as independent operating divisions within the organization. In 2009 Metrolinx and GO Transit merged. Metrolinx became the legal entity, while GO has continued to provide transportation services under its consumer-facing name and logo of GO Transit.

1.2 More on GO Transit

GO Transit is the regional public transit service for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, with routes extending to communities across the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Since May 1967, GO Transit has evolved from a single GO Train line along Lake Ontario's shoreline into an extensive network of train lines and bus routes. Since service began, more than a billion riders have taken the GO Train or Bus – to work or school, to go home, or for leisure activities. GO provides its passengers with safe, fast, reliable, comfortable service to downtown Toronto and other urban centres.

As North America's third largest commuter system, GO operates 187 train trips and 2,075 bus trips daily, carrying about 217,000 passengers on a typical weekday — 160,000 on the trains and 57,000 by bus. Ridership has steadily grown over the past 45 years and today is used by 57 million riders annually. By 2015, this number is expected to grow to 75 million. At least 96% of train ridership is to and from Union Station. The GO Transit service consists of a fleet of 44 train sets with 57 locomotives and 520 bi-level passenger rail cars. GO Transit achieves over 80 per cent operating cost recovery through the fare box – the highest in North America. (This paragraph being checked for accuracy.)

GO is a highly-recognized brand with strong equity resulting from 45 years of operation. Its logo, and distinctive green and white trains and buses are instantly recognizable throughout the region.

In 2010, GO launched a brand revitalization as part of its larger Customer Service Strategy. Through this exercise, GO landed on the following:

GO's Vision: To be the preferred choice for interregional travel in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

GO's Mission: To be a customer-first regional transit service

GO's "Personality": To be dependable, smart, caring and responsive

GO's Brand Essence: Easy

The goal of all this work was to transform GO from a train and bus service delivery company into an organization able to anticipate customer needs and exceed their expectations while recognizing key moments of truth. In support of this, GO launched its Passenger Charter in November, 2010.

The first phase of GO's brand revitalization was heavily focused on employee attitudes, and on empowering front-line staff to make decisions in favour of the customer. The second phase of GO's journey will focus on brand design, and providing a branded GO customer experience that is more consistent, professional and reflective of its brand essence of "easy". Along with this will come a greater emphasis on the retail nature of GO's business.

GO has also successfully concluded its first market segmentation study, identifying the 7 distinct "riders" that make up its passenger base. This study is already influencing the way that GO anticipates and meets the needs of its customers.

2.0 THE NEED:

There is a good-news-story at GO that is simply not getting out. GO requires the services of a full-service Brand Marketing & Communications company to assist in developing and executing a communications and promotions strategy to inform users and non-users of GO about its many benefits.

Here is a sample of the type of initiatives that require further promotion:

2.1 All day two-way service

When customers and stakeholders talk about the need for all-day two-way service, they are usually referring to train service. But GO offers this today through its combination of integrated train and bus services. GO Bus Services have never been widely promoted, despite the fact that some commuters live within a block's radius of a GO bus stop. GO Bus also regularly has routes that are under-used, and which could benefit from promotion and advertising.

New train service is periodically added, and is one of the most important things that GO does. Each new train or weekend service needs to be assessed in terms of needing promotion. Adding more regular commuter service is usually rapidly communicated through GO's passenger base, but would benefit from higher public awareness. New train service on weekends requires dedicated promotion leading up to the launch, and then throughout the initial intervals of service. Examples of these are:

- Summer excursion trains to Niagara Falls and Barrie, and

- The introduction of 12-car train in fall, 2012, and an additional train early in 2013 on the Stouffville line

2.2 Municipal transit to GO service integration

The GO system intersects with 15 municipal transit services. On most of these systems, a customer taking municipal bus transit to connect to a GO bus or GO rail station pays only a small part of the municipal local transit fare—typically about sixty-five cents. GO Transit subsidizes the municipal transit agencies in the amount of \$10 million annually to help bring customers to its service, yet there is little public awareness of this benefit and zero-recognition of GO. Typically, a customer enjoying this benefit will say to himself, “Durham Transit is sure offering me a good deal”.

2.3 PRESTO

Since introducing PRESTO across its rail and bus systems, GO Transit has become aware of certain customer irritants, and impediments to full customer adoption. Some of these include:

- a) confusion on the part of customers about how much the cost of GO fare is using PRESTO
- b) confusion about how the override button works on PRESTO tap-on devices, and
- c) lack of awareness of wide availability of PRESTO devices at Union Station

The general campaigns being orchestrated by PRESTO on behalf of its 7 service providers in the GTA are fine for raising awareness. However, a special campaign, focussed on GO customer needs will be necessary to make further inroads into the 25% of ridership who have resisted converting to PRESTO. A good channel to use would be YouTube for demonstrating some features like the “override” functioni.

Finally, there has been no reduction in cash handling by bus drivers since the introduction of PRESTO. A greater promotional campaign will be necessary to influence customers to load their cards or buy their tickets before boarding the bus. Generally speaking, a dedicated campaign will be necessary to incent greater numbers of PRESTO customers to load electronically using a PC or their phone, rather than using the services of a GO front-line employee.

2.4 Special Events

GO is a key player in helping to transport crowds related to specific events. Often extra service is provided. Historically, these events have been promoted exclusively along the Lakeshore line which was the only corridor on which GO offered two-way all-day train service. Recently, GO has or will begin to provide weekend service to many of the following events:

- a) Indy 500

- b) Scotiabank Carribean Festival Parade
- c) Toronto Santa Claus Parade
- d) Labour Day
- e) Pride Day

Better promotion is needed to incent customers to take GO to these events, and build off-peak ridership—a key part of GO's business strategy to make full use of its rail and bus fleet throughout the day, and not just during prime commuter hours.

2.5 Construction

GO is using part of its \$2 Billion capital fund to improve stations. Currently a massive project is underway to lengthen platforms to accommodate 12-car trains instead of the 10-car trains available on most corridors. In addition to other improvements, *construction is taking place at two-thirds of GO's 64 stations.* These include:

- A more effective bus loop servicing Aurora
- Increased parking at King City
- A new station at Gormley which will relieve parking pressure further south on the Richmond Hill line
- The Agincourt grade separation which will enable faster train speeds, and
- New parking garages at Clarkson, Pickering, Ajax and Oakville

Good communication regarding station construction is important for a number of reasons:

- a) It helps to manage customer satisfaction when passengers are inconvenienced through dust, noise and loss of parking stalls
- b) It helps explain the greater benefit that is being delivered to customers (eg. more parking, better pedestrian or bicycling access, safety features, upgraded platforms, etc.), not to mention
- c) the economic benefit of job creation

GO requires promotional assistance to ensure its robust program of station improvement is being optimally communicated. GO would like to re-introduce a "Corridor News" issued each spring through its trains & stations which would explain to passengers the improvements they could expect to see on their line later that year.

GO also needs to make better use of billboards to explain the benefits that multi-million dollar investments will have for better GO service.

Dedicated communications and promotional support would also be needed for the hundreds of millions of dollars of improvements being made by GO at Union Station.

2.6 Customer Service Initiatives

Since 2010, GO has introduced quarterly customer satisfaction surveys, and an on-line panel of GO advisors (called “LetGOKnow”). These instruments have been helpful in GO’s development of a number of initiatives. All require greater promotion among GO’s ridership:

a) OnTheGO Service Alerts: These are electronic alerts sent to a customer’s desk top or mobile device which identify service outages, and identify alternatives. These are important because knowing how long a delay will be puts a measure of control back into the hands of passengers. Also, GO has seen that OnTheGO subscribers have customer satisfaction results that are about 10% above those who do not subscribe. GO needs to mount one or two OnTheGO subscription campaigns per year.

b) Passenger Courtesy Campaign: Every customer survey has identified that a big irritant for GO passengers are other passengers who are rude, put their feet up, put their bags on empty seats, or those who play music loudly. GO would like to organize a passenger courtesy campaign and requires promotional assistance for this.

c) Passenger Charter: GO’s Passenger Charter was introduced in November, 2010, to excellent media and public fanfare. Its one-year anniversary went by with no acknowledgement. GO has an opportunity to redress this for November, 2012, but will require promotional assistance.

d) GO Mobile: The success of this application is attested by the 140,000+ downloads it has received. Future releases need to be well publicized and marketed.

e) CAD/AVL & electronic signage: A technology is being implemented to enable “next bus” information to be received by customers on their mobile device. This is anticipated in 2013/14, and will be an important improvement to publicize. The current roll-out of electronic signage is also a good-news message and worthy of publicizing.

f) GO Train Service Guarantee: This 15” minute-or-it’s-free service guarantee will be launched in the fall of 2012, and aspects of its will need careful communication and customer education.

2.7 GO Green

GO would also benefit from a campaign comparing the cost of taking transit to the cost of driving not so much to drive ridership, which has increased by 6-8% annually in recent years, but as part of that “good news story” to make customers feel good about taking transit.

Passengers who take GO transit are contributing to better environmental practices by taking a system which relieves roads of millions of car trips annually.

GO's "green" story, and its advantages over automobile driving have never been explained and promoted.

2.8 Other Specialized Campaigns

Promotional assistance is also needed for other diverse campaigns, and the following describe only a few of them:

a) GO has now developed very effective and thorough bus services to several large universities – including York, Waterloo, Wilfred Laurier, UoT, McMaster and Trent. GO services connect students from cities to their campuses, but also directly from campus to campus. Students currently comprise 9% of GO's ridership, are favourably predisposed to both GO and PRESTO, and are important ambassadors for the service. GO coverage of universities is a good-news story that has not yet received the publicity it should.

b) GO used to only own 20 percent of its corridors. With the most recent acquisition, this has risen to 65%, enabling GO to begin maintaining corridors to a higher standard of quality. This heightened stewardship is one of the reasons behind GO's better On Time Performance. These are little-known facts.

c) GO is a leader in the industry, and has introduced many construction, equipment and technology innovations. GO's achievements in these fields have never been publicly noted.

2.9 Overall:

GO has benefitted from listening to its passengers, and trying to provide the service and amenities that are most meaningful to its customers. GO's intention in seeking a marketing and advertising partner is not so much to "boast" about its accomplishments as it is to:

1) make riders and non-riders aware of the unique customer-value proposition: That for reaching downtown, or travel between GTA suburbs and universities, convenient and value-priced GO transit offers "time for you" back to riders—to read, work, chat or sleep

2) make riders and non-riders aware of service, amenities and improvements being introduced for their benefit, and

3) to raise the level of pride that employees take in providing the best service-possible to the travelling public.

REQUIREMENTS & SCOPE OF WORK:

GO Transit requires an experienced Brand Marketing & Communications Services firm to provide some or all of the following services:

- Brand Strategy Advice
- Marketing Plan & Calendar
- Communications Plan
- Creative and Production Services
- Media Plan & Buy
- Digital Communications
- Promotions
- Public Relations, and
- Event Planning