



REES: Building Awareness On Campus

INTRODUCTION

On March 25, 2023, a week before the start of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, Mary Lobson, Founder and CEO of REES Technology Group Inc. met with her team to discuss the future of the company's campus marketing strategy.

Founded in 2019, **REES (Respect, Educate, Empower Survivors)** first launched their innovative online platform for reporting sexual harassment, misconduct, and assault in 12 Manitoban post-secondary institutions. Since then, REES has been adopted by 24 campuses across Canada, and has entered the Corporate, Sport and Music Festival markets. Lobson and her team were thrilled with the start-up's accomplishments to date, as the tool's successful implementation across various verticals demonstrated its necessity and value. Despite the numerous opportunities available to REES, they were confronted with a large issue: campus user engagement was inconsistent among campus partners. Lobson felt it was important to take a step back and develop a plan to boost the company's campus brand recognition and usage to ensure its long-term success.

REES (RESPECT, EDUCATE, EMPOWER SURVIVORS) BACKGROUND

The Founding

While Lobson's entire career revolved around addressing gender-based violence, after watching *The Hunting Ground*, a film about sexual violence on campuses in the United States, she became more connected to the issue as it pertained to campuses.

Approximately 70% of undergraduate students experience, or witness, unwanted sexualized behaviour on campus and 1 in 4 female students are sexually assaulted, yet only about 5% report to their institution. The months between September to October are the highest risk periods and referred to as the "red zone."

Lobson knew that there was opportunity to do more. After consulting with the post-secondary institutions in Manitoba and gauging their interest in a reporting platform, she was able to secure funding for a province-wide pilot of REES. The company was founded and incorporated in December 2019.

The Company and Product

REES Technology Group Inc. is a business-to-business technology company that created an online reporting platform. REES can be adapted for use across any sector or industry and has users in higher education, sports, music festivals, start-up accelerators and the corporate sector. In higher education, REES is used for reporting campus sexual violence. In other verticals it is used for bullying, abuse, harassment, discrimination, and ethics reporting.

The name, which stands for **R**espect, **E**ducate, **E**mpower **S**urvivors, is a direct reflection of the trauma-informed and survivor-centric lens that the company operates through. When creating the tool, Lobson was very intentional about designing it in a way that reduces barriers for users to come forward by providing multiple reporting pathways. From the tool's language to its robust privacy and data security features, REES makes reporting an incident simple and secure (see Exhibit 1). Not only is the product optimized for the user, but the partner organization also benefits. The platform enables organizations to collect data and insights that can identify patterns and trends to inform development of prevention, education, and support strategies. Enhanced data collection and transparency through REES also helps organizations mitigate risk and minimize losses associated with sexual harassment and discrimination, as it allows for early identification of issues and individuals that may pose harm in the campus community.

Distribution, Sales, and Marketing

The Partnership Liaison team oversees sales outreach and creating relationships with REES's partners. Partners typically sign a multi-year agreement. There is a one-time set-up fee and an annual user fee. Pricing is based on the number of potential users in a customer's institution at a cost of X dollars per user (the cost per user depends on the size of the institution and the vertical it is in). After the customer has been onboarded, they are provided with numerous marketing assets that they can distribute on campus to promote REES. These include wallet cards, posters, stickers, digital graphics and content to post on the institution's social media (see Exhibit 2). During the agreement period, the Partnership Success Coordinator maintains regular communication with the partner to ensure that they are deriving value from the tool.

REES's online presence includes their website, and channels on Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook and TikTok (see Exhibit 3). Instagram is mostly used to put out top-of-funnel content, that spreads knowledge on the topic of sexual violence. LinkedIn is used to make business announcements and keep a network of professional connections. TikTok features more top-of-funnel content that is geared towards informing in a fun way. The core of what REES promotes is reporting, creating safer spaces, and overall culture change.

PARTNERS AND COMMUNITY

Campus Partners

The 12 post-secondary institutions in Manitoba were the first to adopt REES. In addition to Manitoba, REES partners with universities and colleges in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia (see Exhibit 4).

Corporate

In the corporate sector, REES is used for bullying, abuse, harassment, discrimination, and ethics reporting. In addition to creating a safer, more productive workplace, REES helps enhance corporate strategy. It aligns well with corporate DEI efforts and helps organizations manage their risk related to workplace sexual harassment and discrimination.

Sport

REES launched into sport in July 2022 in response to the identified gap for reporting and information.

This market is composed of various sport organizations including National Sport Organizations (NSO's), Provincial Sport Organizations (PSO's), and professional or amateur sport leagues. REES's sport partners include Football Manitoba and the Fraser Valley Volleyball Club.

Youth Advisory Board (YAB)

To engage with students on campuses, REES has formed a Youth Advisory Board. The YAB is composed of students from both partner and non-partner institutions across Canada. It was established with the goal of ongoing student engagement, to received input and feedback and to identify opportunities for collaboration with initiatives on campuses.

For the 2023/23 academic year the YAB will only include members from current partner institutions to provide increased focus in the area of campus partner engagement.

COMPETITION

While REES currently faces no direct competition in the Canadian higher education market, there is a well-established case management system in the United States called Maxient. Founded in 2003, Maxient has established relationships with over 1300 client institutions and focuses solely on student conduct and incident reporting in post-secondary institutions in the United States. Maxient emphasizes their all-inclusive price, user-friendly platform, unmatched knowledge in conduct reporting, and being the industry leader. Maxient's tool is not trauma-informed, and their social media presence is limited to Twitter and LinkedIn with little engagement.

REES is currently expanding into the US and does not consider Maxient as a direct competitor. REES has the specific goal of aligning with sexual violence prevention efforts and is a supplement to the Maxient case management system.

ONGOING CHALLENGES

REES had achieved significant growth in the higher education market, however, it was launched in 2020 on campuses during the Covid-19 pandemic when there was only remote learning. The 2022/23 academic year was the first year students were in-person and able to see REES's marketing efforts in-person on campus.

Although there were no immediate signs that the company's growth trajectory was at risk, Lobson knew that there was an opportunity to increase brand awareness and usage on campus. Usage of REES was inconsistent across campus partners and feedback from partners indicated an overall decline on student engagement post-pandemic.

Lobson expressed this concern:

The 2022-2023 academic year is the first year students are back in person. We've heard feedback from institutions that student engagement has notably declined. Whether it's joining clubs or signing up for events, the numbers have decreased

post-pandemic. Information about REES has to be relevant and accessible for all students regardless of how they are choosing to access their education.

I'm wondering how we can increase our brand awareness on campuses despite this trend. How do we connect with all students including those that aren't physically on campus?

Apart from increasing awareness and usage, the team was also considering how best to segment campus communities for targeted marketing efforts. Lobson explained:

Our marketing efforts may need to change based on the user segment. We have diverse campus partners and some with unique needs. How can we target each segment effectively?

Some considerations included:

- Campus enrollment ranging from 300 to 30,000 students
- University 4-year degree program/graduate studies v. College 1 or 2-year programs
- Commuter campuses v. on-campus residences
- Faith-based institutions
- English and Francophone institutions
- Large international student populations
- Remote, Northern campuses

Lobson also noted the opportunity to engage male-identified students and athletes in order to effectively address sexual violence on campuses. She was eager to find ways to raise awareness and allyship amongst these under-engaged demographics.

CRAFTING A STRATEGY

Lobson walked to the front of the meeting room and began writing down the issues that had been listed. The REES team recognized that in order to increase the awareness and usage of the platform on campuses, they would have to find new ways of engaging with students and educating them about REES. As well, Lobson wondered about the extent to which REES should engage with students compared to the role that partner institutions should take in this

initiative. Lastly, being a start-up, while Lobson was looking for shorter-term, low-cost solutions to these challenges, she also wanted to think big picture and did not want to limit the ideas brought to the table if it meant creating a sustainable competitive advantage.

With all these questions floating around the table, Lobson and her team wondered what their campus marketing strategy should look like and how they would implement it.

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: The REES Platform

The screenshot displays the REES platform interface. At the top left is the REES logo with the tagline "A Safer Community by a Community that Cares". To the right are navigation links: "Access Support", "FAQ", "Report a Repeat Perpetrator", "Settings", and "Logout". Below the navigation is a dark blue header with the text "My Account" in pink. A pink button labeled "Create a record" is centered below the header. A note follows: "Note: You can make changes to your Record at anytime. If you have already submitted a Report and would like to send an updated copy of your Record you will need to click 'Report' on that copy and send the Report again." Below this is a dark blue section with the REES logo and contact information for the Provincial Sexual Assault Crisis Line (1-888-292-7565, Supports Across Canada). A pink line separates this from a pink text prompt: "If you are in immediate danger, call 911." Below this is another navigation bar with "Access Support", "FAQ", "Report a Repeat Perpetrator", "Settings", and "Logout". A dark blue header contains the text "What Happens Next is Your Choice" in pink, followed by a horizontal menu with links: "About You", "When", "Where", "About Them", "Narrative", "Additional Information", and "Explore Options". The main content area contains text explaining that the record is saved and encrypted, and users can choose reporting options. It lists options: "Anonymous Report", "Connect to My Campus", "Report to Police", and "Formal Complaint", each in a pink button. A "Return to My Account" button is in a dark blue box. A feedback link "We want your feedback" is above the buttons.

Users first login or create an account, then have the option to create a record. Before creating the record, the user would be prompted to set a passphrase so that only they would have the ability to write, edit, submit or delete the record. After answering a series of questions and finishing the record, the user has the option to submit it as an anonymous report, connect to their campus for support and resources, report to the police, or submit as a formal complaint.

Exhibit 2: Marketing Assets

Campus Social Media Content Examples:

With REES, Create one Record and choose a reporting option that best suits your needs



REES Bookmark:



REES Wallet Card:

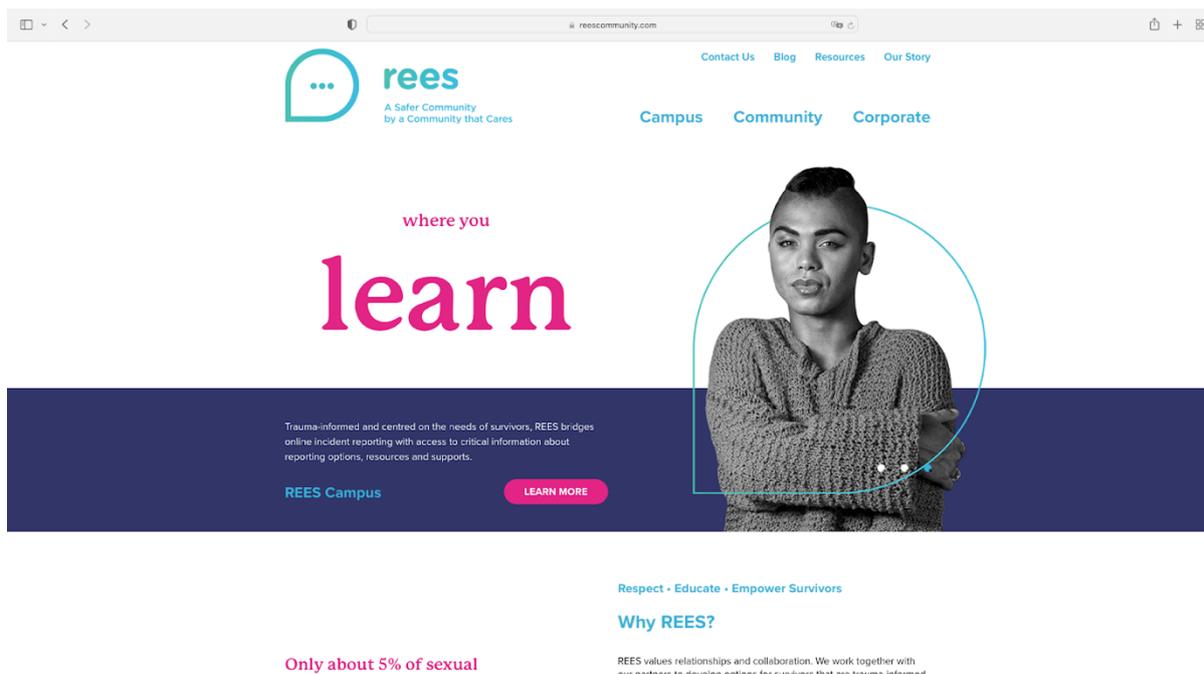


REES Co-branded UMSU Poster:

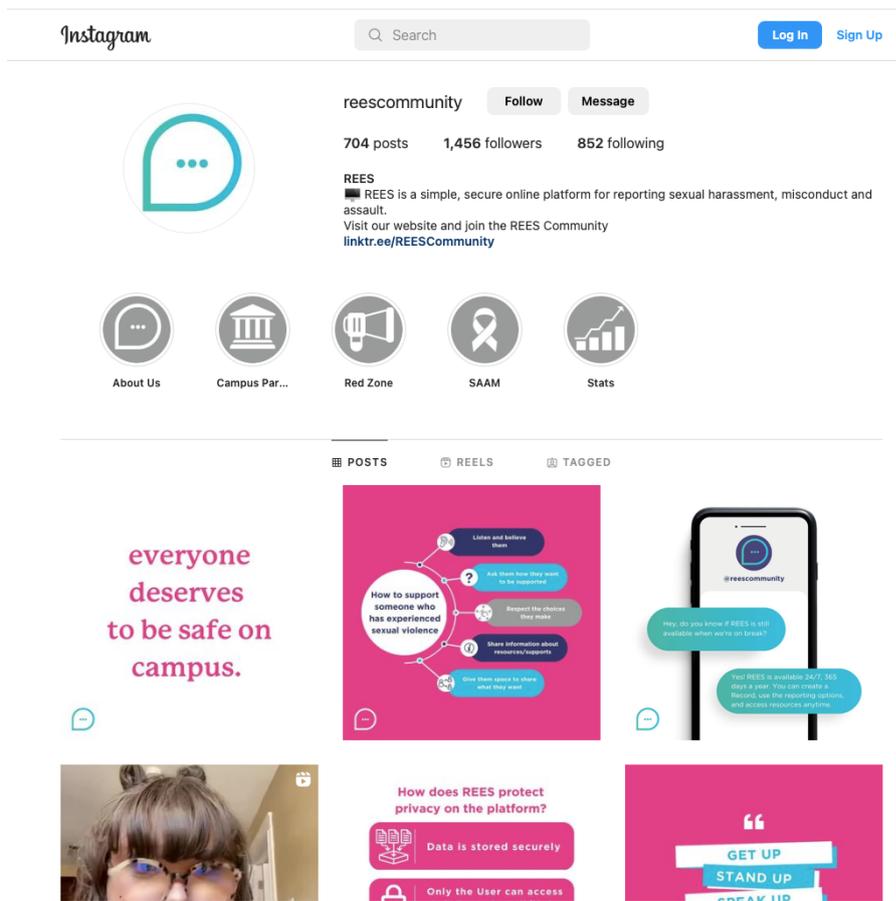


Exhibit 3: (Screenshots of Website and socials)

REES Website:



REES Instagram:



REES TikTok:

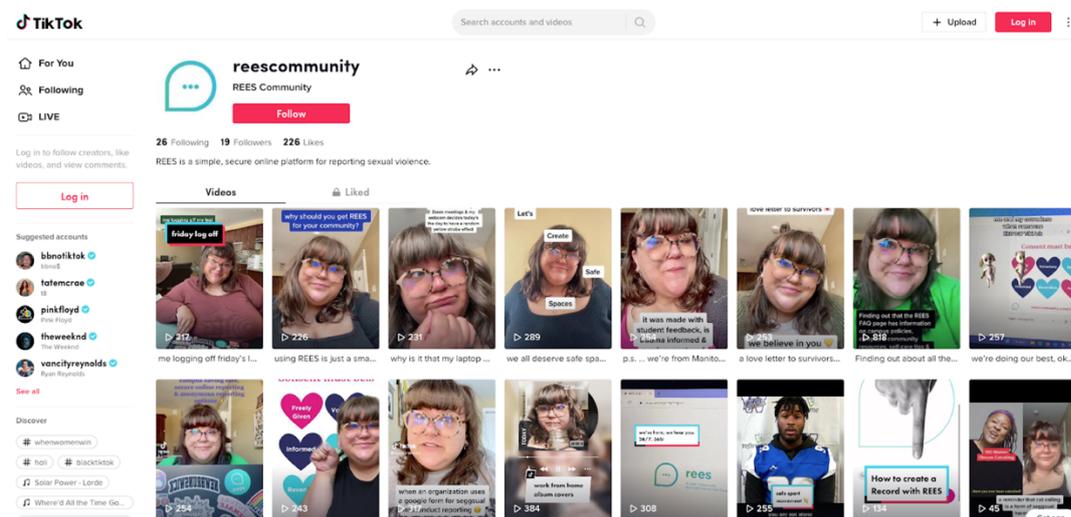


Exhibit 4: Canadian Campus Partners

Manitoba	Assiniboine Community College Booth University College Brandon University Canadian Mennonite University Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology Providence University College & Theological Seminary Red River College Polytechnic Steinbach Bible College The University of Winnipeg University College of the North University of Manitoba Students' Union (UMSU) Université de Saint-Boniface
Alberta	The King's University Burman University
British Columbia	Columbia Bible College Okanagan College Vancouver Community College
New Brunswick	Mount Allison University
Nova Scotia	St. Francis Xavier University
Ontario	St. Clair College Université de Hearst University of Windsor Western University - Students
Quebec	Bishop's University