

# The case for multicultural communications

By Lisa Skriloff

The ethnic market will comprise the majority of the U.S. population within our lifetime. Gaining in population, buying power and influence, it's imperative that public relations professionals include this audience in their client outreach activities.



Lisa Skriloff

I deliberately use the phrase "ethnic" when describing multicultural markets rather than "minority,"

because the three major ethnic groups combined (Hispanic, African American and Asian American) actually represent the majority of the population in NYC, LA, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, the states of California, Texas, New Mexico and Hawaii and a hundred-plus counties around the U.S.

Here's a rhetorical question: as a communicator, are those states and cities important to you?

Beyond the top three ethnic markets, outreach activities might also include Russian, Polish, Haitian and other ethnic groups, as well as other key consumer segments such as the GLBT market and people with disabilities.

So, you may ask, what is multicultural communications? How is that different than diversity initiatives? How does this impact my PR firm and my activities? How do I get started? Am I too late?

Multicultural communications refers to public relations, marketing, advertising and other communications outreach methods to target these consumer markets, whereas diversity initiatives generally stem from the Human Resources department and involve employee hiring, advancement and retention issues. Other activities might emanate from Purchasing, for example, in the area of Supplier Diversity or the office of Corporate Social Responsibility. All of these areas represent opportunities for the public relations professional to

expand their business by adding multicultural communications programs to client activities as well as helping a client gain exposure for their diversity initiatives.

## Numbers don't lie

Statistics makes one case for why communicators should establish a multicultural program. Twenty years ago, my first job in New York City was working for a Spanish radio rep firm as a Sales Account Executive and Editor of their marketing newsletter, *Hispanic Age*. In meetings with potential clients, I presented the rationale for advertising on the stations I represented, but before I could even make that point I had to address three issues: why advertise to Hispanics, why reach them in Spanish, why use radio and then finally, why use the stations I represented?

My clients were the handful of Hispanic communications firms and a small number of corporations who led the way in targeting this group.

I relied on 1980 census numbers to make my case.

Today, though much has changed, the conversation remains largely the same, though census 2000 numbers are used soon to be replaced by a stronger story: the census 2010 results.

## The face of 2010

What are the facts that make multicultural communications timely and imperative?

In the latest census estimates, released on May 14, 2009, (and reported in *The New York Times*):

The nation's overall minority population is 34% of the total population, with Hispanics the largest and fastest growing minority group, making up nearly one in six residents. Asians are the second fastest growing minority group.

Multicultural households are larger and younger than the general market. While 36.8 is the median age for the total population, the median age for Hispanics is 27.7; 30.3 for African Americans and 34.2 for Asians.

For the future, more of the same, as the Census Bureau reported that in 2008 nearly half (47%) of all children under the age five belong to a minority group.

According to the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia, the annual multicultural buy-

ing power of the three top minority groups combined is over \$2 trillion.

To sum it up, here are five key reasons why an opportunity exists for public relations professionals to increase visibility for their client's product or service in the multicultural community.

- Impressive numbers. A company might miss more than half the population if it doesn't reach out to ethnic consumers.

- Ready, willing and able to buy. With their more than \$2 trillion buying power, this audience has the money to spend on a product or service if you show them you care about their business.

- Responsive. Reaching out to this group yields results. And isn't ROI a key measurement in demand these days?

- More likely to buy your product. For many categories, from telecommunications to healthcare, ethnic groups over-index on purchase, usage or need.

- Resources abound to help you target these markets, making it easy and profitable for you.

## Opportunity abounds

For communicators, opportunities in the multicultural market are vast and multi-faceted. Consider just a few of the markets in which multicultural is currently flourishing:

**Healthcare.** Hispanics and African Americans have a higher incidence of diabetes, high blood pressure and many other illnesses, making them an essential market for medical information, services and targeting by the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry. New York City Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum recently introduced the Language Access in Pharmacies Act (LAPA), which will require pharmacies to provide free language translation services when filling prescriptions. This creates an opportunity for PR professionals working in these categories to expand outreach to the ethnic media.

**Entertainment.** Hispanics are very family-oriented; their households are larger than the general market, and they have a greater number of children. Communicators have a key opportunity to sell more tickets to events since you'll get the kids and grandma rather

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than just two tickets for mom and dad.

**Travel.** Key differences in travel habits underscore opportunities that marketers should take advantage of. As *The Minority Traveler*, a 2003 report from the Travel Industry Association revealed that Asian American travelers are the biggest spenders of all vacationers and are the most likely to travel by plane. African American travelers are four times more likely to rent a car than travelers overall and take twice as many trips that involve group tours. Hispanic travelers are more likely to visit theme and amusement parks and most likely to bring their families along.

**Automotive.** Speaking at a recent presentation during an NYU course in ethnic marketing, Saul Gitlin of Kang & Lee Advertising described how, in a troubled industry, Asian Americans are the group most likely to buy a new car, most likely to spend more than \$20K on the car and, while they make up only 4% of the US population, represent 18-20% of all new Mercedes vehicle registrations.

**Spirits.** Gitlin also explained how cognac sales are supported by the multicultural consumer; that the largest consumer group for cognac is African Americans, followed by Chinese and Vietnamese, who, together, account for 90% of all cognac sales in the US.

What's more, ethnic consumers have proven to be brand loyal. Once they're your customer, they'll stay with you. Word of mouth is very powerful in these communities.

Once the case for "why" has been made, you can identify clients that are top prospects for multicultural communications. You'll learn how to add Hispanic, African American, Asian American and GLBT media outreach to your mix, using the help of services like HispanicPRwire, US Asian Wire and Black PRWire. You can investigate internal client news that can be promoted to the ethnic and mainstream press, and you can partner with a public relations firm specializing in these target groups and partner with organizations serving the multicultural community, or join their fundraising events.

Get started. The time for multicultural communications is now.

*Lisa Skriloff is President of Multicultural Marketing Resources, Inc., [www.multicultural.com](http://www.multicultural.com). ■*

## Resources for multicultural communicators

### Newsletters/magazines

**Multicultural Marketing News.** Visit [www.multicultural.com](http://www.multicultural.com) to sign up for this free newsletter published by Multicultural Marketing Resources, Inc.

**DiversityInc** [www.diversityinc.com](http://www.diversityinc.com)  
DiversityInc is a leading publication on diversity and business with a magazine, email newsletter, Webinar series and events.

**HispanicAd.com** [www.hispanicad.com](http://www.hispanicad.com)  
Covers Hispanic marketing and communications

**Hispanic Market Weekly**  
[www.hispanicmarketweekly.com](http://www.hispanicmarketweekly.com)

**Hispanic Business**  
[www.hispanicbusiness.com](http://www.hispanicbusiness.com)  
Magazine, newsletter, awards, events, career placement, recruitment services, business research and surveys.

**Hispanic Magazine**  
[www.hispaniconline.com](http://www.hispaniconline.com)

**Target Market News**  
[www.targetmarketnews.com](http://www.targetmarketnews.com)  
Trade magazine delivered by email which covers American marketing and media.

### Organizations

**National Black PR Society**  
[www.nbprs.org](http://www.nbprs.org)

**Hispanic Public Relations Society**  
[www.hpra-usa.org](http://www.hpra-usa.org)

**PRSA – Multicultural Comms. Section**  
**PRSA – Diversity Committee**

**The Assoc. of National Advertisers**  
[www.ana.net](http://www.ana.net)

**AdColor**  
[www.adcolor.org](http://www.adcolor.org)

**Asian American Advertising Federation**  
[www.3af.org](http://www.3af.org)

**Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies (AHAA)**  
[www.ahaa.org](http://www.ahaa.org)

**Assoc. of Black Owned Advertising Agencies (ABAA)**  
[www.abaainc.org](http://www.abaainc.org)

### Online

**Multicultural Marketing Experts**  
(Join my group on LinkedIn to connect with other communications professionals with an interest in reaching multicultural consumers.)

### Research resources

"The Multicultural Economy: Minority Buying Power in 2007," Selig Center for Economic Growth, Terry College of Business, The University of Georgia, [www.selig.uga.edu](http://www.selig.uga.edu)

"The Source Book of Multicultural Experts," published by Multicultural Marketing Resources, Inc. Free copy available at [www.multicultural.com](http://www.multicultural.com)

"Hispanic Customers for Life: A Fresh Look at Acculturation," Isabel Valdes, [www.isabelvaldes.com](http://www.isabelvaldes.com)

"The Buying Power of Black America 2007," Target Market News [www.targetmarketnews.com/publications.htm](http://www.targetmarketnews.com/publications.htm)

"Latino Boom," Chiqui Cartagena, [www.latinoboom.com/bio.php](http://www.latinoboom.com/bio.php)

"Marketing to Hispanics: A Strategic Approach to Assessing and Planning Your Initiative," Teresa Soto, [www.aboutmarketingsolutions.com](http://www.aboutmarketingsolutions.com)

"Business Inside Out: Capturing Millions of Brand Loyal Gay Consumers," Robert Witeck and Wesley Combs.

"Selling to Latinos: Building a Bridge to Understanding," Andrew Erlich, Ph.D., [www.etcethnic.com](http://www.etcethnic.com)

"What's Black About It?," Pepper Miller and Herb Kemp. [www.whatsblackaboutit.com](http://www.whatsblackaboutit.com)

*Compiled by Lisa Skriloff*