

## Simply Smart Marketing

Advantage Communications, Inc.

Despite what some may say...marketing IS here to stay. However, marketing goods and services has been and continues to remain under assault by a battery of educated professionals that have lost their way. While I've never disputed the value of a strong education, I have seen a precipitous decline in "new-age" marketers being well acquainted with the very basics of Marketing 101. I anticipate part of this decline is a result of our ever-changing, dynamically diverse consumer marketplace.

We now live in an age where consumers have become immensely smarter and savvy with their decision-making for goods and services. The implications of this increase in knowledge demonstrate that marketers must become smarter with their marketing assets.

In previous years, it appeared as though the majority of marketing agencies refused to hire minorities. Such practices created a void in the breadth of services and capabilities marketing agencies could have provided to speak to growing targeted audiences – which were most often African American, Hispanic, Asian and the LGBT community. In today's terminology, we have deemed these audiences as diverse or "multicultural."

Today, several agencies are attempting to address this void by implementing changes to attract and retain minorities – but some say it's still no easy feat. According to Bill Gray, co-CEO of Ogilvy North America, "Hiring minorities, particularly mid-and senior-level employees, into the business is tough for several reasons. You've got to have senior, visible minorities who can act as validation that the industry has opportunities."

(source:adage.com). Nevertheless, we **know** this void must be aggressively addressed.

According to the 2010 Census data, nearly 40% of the total United States population is African American or Hispanic American, an increase of nearly 17% from the 2000 Census. This speaks volumes to the need for marketers to truly understand to whom they

are speaking. Marketing consumer goods and services, in particular, requires a solid understanding of the needs of the consumer audiences as well as those things that will most closely resonate with their culture and socioeconomic status. Consumer goods marketing to diverse audiences must answer the question, "What's in it for me?"

"Our job is to convert positive brand image (which should equate to a consumer's personal identification with the brand) to transactions- without exception."

Upon gaining such consumer learnings, a marketer is equipping himself/herself to be sufficiently prepared for the development of successful tactics and programs. However, before cascading learnings into tactical execution, it is essential that objectives and strategies are set. Too often, it appears as though our young marketers simply ignore this vital step. Of course, it is more fun and exciting to develop advertisements and facilitate flashy programs. I understand this. But I continue to stress to my associates at Advantage Communications, Inc., that you must allow your objectives and strategies to set the tone for your tactics – never the inverse. I ask my associates "What good is an idea without a goal?"

Many of you are familiar with the concept of SMART objectives – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-oriented. This concept still reigns true today. We would all love to change the world overnight, but that's not realistic. Objectives must satisfy each of the elements of the SMART concept. With this, complementary strategies may be developed to assure objectives will be successfully accomplished.

My point to marketers, particularly those within the multicultural spectrum, is this - we can no longer rely on hanging signs with brown faces in 'certain' neighborhoods or simply having a presence in minority-targeted media outlets and events as a means to encourage minorities to consume our clients' products. Now is the time for us to be more strategic in our efforts. However, strategy is built on the foundation of knowledge and in this case, what you may have learned in business school is not enough.

Today, we must focus our efforts on both above - and below-the-line program activation. In other words, we must be integrated versus adjunct in our work. What does this look like? I see it as a simple model of "conversion". Essentially, our job is to convert positive brand imagery (which should equate to a consumer's personal identification with the brand) to transactions – without exception.

I've noticed that today's multicultural advertising agencies consider themselves to be industry leaders in marketing to African American, Hispanics, Asians, and other groups. However, at Advantage Communications, Inc. we not only consider ourselves to be multicultural experts but also specialists in targeted marketing or market segmentation. What some may misconstrue is that the word "targeted" implies reaching ethnic groups solely. This is not the case at our agency. We utilize market segmentation to identify targeted audiences by:

- Ethnicity
- Age
- Gender
- Geography
- Sexual Preference
- Consumer Trends and Habits
- Economic Status
- And More!

Diversity is our niche.

Several marketing giants such as McDonald's and Nike also understand and utilize targeted marketing strategies to reach consumers of all types. In fact, they openly target minority consumers without hesitation as they can easily represent the differences between profits and declines. These are simply segments that cannot be ignored. Marketers must understand that the monolithic – or one message for all approach - is no longer effective. Our consumers need multiple messages disseminated via multiple mediums.

We as minorities have very different consumption behavior and cannot always be reached via the same methods as the majority population. It just doesn't work for us. We tend to use products **differently**, view and consume media **differently**, behave **differently** and soon will become the majority! Obviously, the key word here is "difference."

So allow me to ask this question, Are your communications plans suffering from a bad case of what I call "monolithitis"?