

The “Super-Sizing” of America

Advantage Communications, Inc.

Since our inception in early 2000, Advantage Communications, Inc. has taken great pride in our approach to not being your “traditional” group of marketers. We consider ourselves to be a different type of agency in that we specialize in speaking to the needs of ALL consumers. Additionally, we have established ourselves as both domestic and international communications gurus. Our “sweet spot”, however, is health communications as it pertains to addressing public health challenges and advocating constructive behavior modifications.

“Understanding the number of obese minorities will not decrease overnight, it will take a collective effort to make a difference.”

To name just one example of our success in the realm of public health, Advantage Communications, Inc. has been and remains a long-standing pioneer in the fight against minority tobacco consumption. But now, we’ve come to realize we’re on the brink of a new tobacco... a public health issue that is currently affecting many Arkansans and citizens of the United States, particularly minorities ...one that will continue to plague us if we do not adopt an aggressive approach for social and physiological change...one that can be fought, but the first step is acknowledgment.

The name? OBESITY.

Why is it that so many of us feel as though we’re invincible or somewhat immune to certain ailments and illnesses? Look at the facts. African Americans and Hispanic Americans are disproportionately affected by diabetes, high cholesterol, heart disease, colon cancer, prostate cancer, and now obesity -- which largely contributes to many of these illnesses. Understanding there are several intangible factors (such as hereditary and/or genetic dispositions) that may influence why one person is affected by an illness and another of a similar demographic profile is not, we must also understand that some factors we do control. **Eating is one of these factors.**

Below are just a few of the startling statistics we found from the *Office of Minority Health* about the impact of the obesity epidemic on African Americans and Hispanic Americans:

- African American women have the highest rates of being overweight or obese compared to other groups in the U.S. About four out of five African American women are overweight or obese.
- In 2011, African Americans were 1.5 times as likely to be obese as Non-Hispanic Whites.
- In 2009-2010, African American children between ages 6-17 were 1.8 times as likely to be overweight than Non-Hispanic whites.
- From 2007-2010, Mexican American women were 40% more likely to be overweight, as compared to Non-Hispanic Whites.
- In 2011, Hispanic adults were 30% less likely to engage in active physical activity as Non-Hispanic Whites.

Beyond these statistics, a 2009 press release from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated, "Blacks had 51 percent higher prevalence of obesity, and Hispanics had 21 percent higher obesity prevalence compared with whites." Dr. William H. Dietz, Director of CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity said, "If we have any hope of stemming the rise in obesity, we must intensify our efforts to create an environment for healthy living in these communities."

With the increasing diversity of the U.S. population – soon to be more than half the total population over the next few years – comes a tax. The tax is a disproportionate incidence of obesity closely aligned with minority growth rates. Of course, this is not to say minorities are the only groups affected by obesity. Yet, we continue to feel the heavy burden.

According to a 2010 New York Times article entitled "A Shift Toward Fighting Fat", The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the nation's largest private funding source for fighting smoking, has pledged to spend \$500 million in five years to battle childhood obesity. Just as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has risen to the occasion to "face the fat", such must also be the case for the communications and media industry.

We know African Americans, in particular, consume more television in late night, daytime and primetime on average than all other U.S. homes. We control how, when and where

messages are positioned so why would we not want to use this type of power to positively educate minorities? The communications industry is essentially driving the increase of obesity amongst all populations but disproportionately against minorities.

On the other hand, I also know several of my counterparts depend on the obesity-fueling industry of fast food as their life line. In fact, many of the larger multicultural agencies manage diversity accounts for McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's and the like. However, my agency is ready to take a stand against this revenue-generating, yet fatal industry. We're ready to stop blaming obesity on the personal choices of one person to the next and say it is our fault for not advocating healthier ways of living to our own people.

We see this not so much as a challenge but an opportunity to rise above common stigmas about minorities involving our overindulgence in junk foods and lack of exercise. Many of us prove this to be untrue in the ways we live our lives, but many still do not know. It is our job to let them know.

Understanding the number of obese minorities will not decrease overnight, it will take a collective effort to make a difference. I challenge each of my fellow marketers to join me as we push the needle on a topic that is affecting each of us in one way or another. I challenge each of them not to abandon their fast-food clients but instead bring a new level of innovation to the marketing of their products and services. I challenge each of them to use the multicultural segment as a means to secure healthier lives for our children and their children.

Join Me.