

The “Brown” Age

Advantage Communications, Inc.

It's no secret that the U.S. minority population has steadily increased over the last several years. Nor is it a surprise that minorities are projected to become the majority by 2042, with the nation projected to be 53 percent minority in 2050, according to a 2008 U.S. Census Bureau press release. The real surprise, however, is that the innovative marketing and communications industry has not quite grasped the implications of this forecast. According to an *Advertising Age* 2009 White Paper entitled, “New U.S. Census to Reveal Major Shift: No More Joe Consumer”, “the message to marketers is clear: No single demographic, or even handful of demographics, neatly defines the nation. There is no such thing as “the American consumer”.

It is even more important - now than ever - to understand that a new paradigm is upon us and its name is “market segmentation”. As one of the fastest-growing, multi-cultural, advertising, marketing and public relations agencies located in the mid-south, Advantage Communications, Inc. has not only accepted but whole-heartedly embraced this paradigm. Our expertise has been built on our efficiencies to generate buzz, alter attitudes and perceptions and drive consumers to action specifically in diverse markets. This is the environment in which we live and to effectively communicate, we must first understand this new America.

“We live in a world where trends are here today and gone tomorrow.”

To this end, here are just a few things we KNOW:

- The idea that “one message for all” will suffice is no longer the case. Consumers want to feel as though messages are targeted directly to them to satisfy their needs, address their concerns, fill a personal void, or the like.
- Minority populations (especially African American, Asian and Hispanic) have a higher propensity to consume messages that are disseminated through targeted outlets or those designed to address the nuances of these cultures.

- The use of culturally-relevant images, language and other concepts is well-received among minorities as they are perceived as being “personable”, realistic or easily relatable.
- Appealing to cultural nuances, social norms and lifestyle situations is essential in penetrating the inner thoughts and emotions of minority consumers.
- Advertising recall is often higher among minorities than their non-minority counterparts when skewed to their cultural nuances.
- As it pertains to African Americans, they are more responsive to messages delivered by models and spokesperson that look like them.

So what exactly is the term “market segmentation”? Although it may not be defined in commonly-utilized reference tools, the concept is simple. Market segmentation is first **recognizing** the multiple segments within the marketplace and then **tailoring** messages to fit identified needs.

Make no mistake about it... There are several companies and businesses that do understand the need for targeted marketing and many of their efforts have proven successful. Such large restaurant chains as McDonald’s and Burger King have demonstrated their capabilities to tailor messages to target audiences while also appealing to the general market. According to a November 2009 article in *Advertising Age* entitled, “Ethnic Insights Form Foundations of McDonald’s Marketing,” McDonald’s marketing strategy is framed by its knowledge of ethnic markets. Neil Golden, CMO of McDonald’s USA, states, “Ethnic segments are leading lifestyle trends.” The article goes on to explain that not only is the ethnic segment a trendsetter, but also largely comprises of McDonald’s total customer base. Approximately 40% of McDonald’s customers are of Hispanic, Asian and African American descent.

Other large corporations, such as The Coca-Cola Company, the company wherein I worked more than 15 years as a marketing executive, has also embraced the idea of market segmentation. With its commitment to providing quality beverage services to *all* consumers, The Coca-Cola Company understands that in order to encourage consumption of its products, it must spark interest within the consumer. This interest is sparked through the

message delivery – hence the need to tailor the message specifically to the audience in which it will be received.

I believe the key to market segmentation is understanding your target audience. We live in a world where trends are here today and gone tomorrow. It is essential to understand the demographics and psychographics of those whom we seek to target. It's almost impossible to address a need if we do not first know what it is. To this end, I continually encourage my associates of Advantage Communications, Inc. to conduct extensive research on industry trends, competitive advantages, population data, etc. Additionally, we are no strangers to referring to targeted publications such as Diversity, Inc., Target Market News, Multicultural Marketing News and Black Enterprise Magazine for the latest news and trends within our multi-faced marketplace.

In pressing forward to the new era of marketing i.e., "The Brown Age", I encourage my fellow communications professionals to adapt to their environments. Although efficiently and effectively tapping into diverse markets may seem tedious at surface view, it is a step in the direction toward innovation. And as smart marketers, isn't this a step we're ready to take?