WOMEN | INDUSTRY | PERSONAL GROWTH

Hispanics: a prime market for Direct Sales

One key is for your message to remain culturally relevant, regardless of what language is used to deliver it.

by **Elianne Ramos**

1096 words | 4 pages

Close to a trillion dollars in spending power. 4 times faster growth than any other ethnic group. And according to experts, they'll comprise 25 percent of the nation's population within 30 to 40 years. By now, facts and figures about the Hispanic market and the amazing opportunity it represents should be enticing enough for your company to consider developing a strategy that includes this demographic.

Simply put, Latino customers should be THE MOST IMPORTANT marketing campaign component for any direct selling company.

And if numbers alone don't convince you, here is one cultural insight that proves why this is a prime audience for direct selling: *We are natural networkers and active participants in word-of mouth.*

Word of mouth is how we share knowledge, how we transmit our culture and the wisdom of our grandmothers to our youth. This is how we find out about that excellent product that is going to deliver the results we are looking for. In fact, the first source we ask before we make a decision about a particular product or service is often a relative or friend, or someone we perceive to be an expert, be it the corner bodega owner, the local pharmacist or a neighbor, etc.

Among Latinos, information is passed mostly by word of mouth.

Grocery stores, churches and community centers are the main places where we meet and exchange ideas, gossip and yes, product recommendations. Culturally speaking, when we learn about a program or service from a member of our own community, we are much more likely to believe that person and more likely to act on their advice by opening our doors and wallets.

This is a very significant insight for many reasons. As we know, word of mouth is at the heart of direct selling. The person-to-person contact inherent in direct sales transactions is right in line in the way Latinos communicate as it makes it easy for individuals in a group to exchange information about why a product is valuable or important. The few direct-selling companies that understand this dynamic –like Avon, Jafra and Tupperware –have reached unprecedented growth in this market.

So how can your company capitalize on this insight as well?

A key piece of information to remember is that, for Latinos, culture plays a more important role than language.

Many companies attempt to blanket the Hispanic market as if it's a monolithic market made up of foreign-born, Spanish-speaking consumers. What they fail to understand is that Bilingual or English-speaking Hispanics represent almost half of the U.S. population and they consume media in both languages, including –gasp– social media. These bilingual Latinos are usually the key influencers in their circle, the ones that others look to when trying to find out about the latest and greatest products around.

And this is just the language-driven tip of the iceberg. The complexity of the market is actually determined by a myriad of factors that include country of origin, age, geographical concentration and acculturation levels, among others.

This underlines the importance of learning about the specific segment of the Latino market you are trying to reach first, then implementing a strategy that effectively addresses the needs and consumer habits of that segment. Take the time to understand needs, preferences, desires and values of the market.

The key is for your message to remain culturally relevant, regardless of what language is used to deliver it. For example, your company's online presence doesn't necessarily need to be built in Spanish, unless your product or service seeks to target the Spanish dominant segment. It should, however, demonstrate your understanding of the cultural triggers to which Latinos relate and respond. And respond, they will. Hispanics love to be courted by companies, and they return the attention you pay them by patronizing your product.

Another important point when it comes to developing a true relationship with this market is to establish a corporate culture that *emphasizes interpersonal relationships* with your Latino customers. Hiring bilingual staff that not only speak the language but also understand the culture, is key. Latinos appreciate it when the person at the other line of the telephone understands where they are coming from. And again, as word of the excellent service you provide to your Latino customers gets around, it will draw the community in.

Getting involved locally, on a grassroots level, will also help position your company as culturally sensitive and having a sincere interest in their way of life. Having members of your team attend local Hispanic job fairs, local swap meets or church events and getting involved with local community-based organizations and/or Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, will often lead to partnerships with reputable associations and new business opportunities At the same time, it will strengthen your credibility within the community.

Like most consumers, Hispanics are looking for something that is both personally engaging and culturally relevant.

When you show them the ways in which your product or service can enhance their everyday lives and engage them through inspiring and relevant experiences, they become loyal brand ambassadors who will root for your company for life.

Elianne Ramos has over 13 years of Copywriting, Editing, Public Speaking and TV Commercial Production experience. She has developed communications campaigns for Procter and Gamble, Panasonic, SlimFast, HSBC Bank and Princess House, among others. She's also a frequent speaker at international marketing conferences, an emerging expert in targeting Latinos through Social Media and a member of the Direct Selling Women's Alliance Diversity Center. As a Hispanic Communications Consultant, she partners with companies interested in targeting Hispanics. Elianne is also the Hispanic Business Columnist for Examiner.com. For her views on the Hispanic market, visit her blog: www.speakhispanic.com. Her website is at www.elianneramos.com and you may reach her at: eramos@elianneramos.com.