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Tap into the Booming Hispanic Market

Hispanics are now the largest minority in the U.S. and Spanish has become the “unofficial” second language of this country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau the total U.S. Hispanic population is 41.3 million and growing. Is it any wonder that marketers are vying for the attention of this community -- but how do you effectively reach this market?

While many Hispanics speak English fluently, studies show that at least half prefer to read content in their native language. Many industries are addressing these needs. Just call your local financial institution, government office, or utility company, and most likely you will be given the option to listen to their message in Spanish.

But communication does not stop there. Companies that want to reach this market are making their information available in Spanish and are advertising in Hispanic print media and on TV. Relatively few companies, however, are advertising on the Internet. These companies remain on the sidelines of web globalization, missing opportunities for growth and ceding the market to competitors.

In the past it was believed that most Hispanics had neither the technology “know how” nor the means to afford computers, but today studies show that 14 million Hispanics in the US are online, and it is believed that the more Latinos connect online, the less time they will spend with other media like Spanish TV or radio.

So how do companies reach this market? The key is in language “localization,” and this should include learning more about the Hispanic culture and choosing the appropriate medium to deliver the message.

Simply translating material into Spanish is not enough. Half the adult Hispanics in the US today are foreign born and have very little understanding of American systems in general. Companies need to communicate to them the unique benefits of their products and services and how and where they can obtain them. Americans already know these things; they want to hear more about the convenience to them.

Computer-generated translations won't handle this, and not everyone who speaks Spanish makes a good translator – in fact most people don't.

When targeting the US Hispanic market, it is best to use professional translators who are native speakers of the language and live in the United States. You don't want just a

verbatim translation. You need your message to sound natural and be culturally and appropriately portrayed. The professional translator has extensive translation and industry specific experience. Translating a drug brochure for a pharmaceutical company is very different from translating an instruction manual for an electronics company or a mortgage brochure for a bank.

Companies need to understand the cultural variables involved. What magazines and newspapers do Latinos read, which websites do they typically visit, and what search engines do they use? When are their holidays? Many are different than in the U.S. For example, Mother's Day is celebrated on a different date than in the US. While some US Latinos have adapted to the US date, others have not. One alternative would be to extend the length of a marketing campaign to encompass both days. Offering services tailored to local markets by globalizing online and print information creates a personally and culturally relevant experience, thus strengthening the customer relationship and improving customer satisfaction.

Companies can increase the effectiveness of their promotions by using Hispanic people in their art work – by learning what their color preferences are, i.e., orange, red and yellow are popular, and by communicating with them in the medium of their choice. If your company is directing prospective Hispanic clients to your website, be sure that you have detailed information available in Spanish. This may mean creating a Spanish web page, or even better, making the entire website available in Spanish.

Finally, be sure to put some thought into how to handle communications when you get responses to your promotions. The Hispanic community will assume that if you are advertising in Spanish, you will have Spanish speakers on staff. It won't do any good to advertise your product or service if you have no one to explain how to use them or what the terms of service are. There may be some bilingual people in-house who can take these calls, but if not, verify that your translation provider is available to respond to these inquiries when they come up.

Whatever your product or service is – if you want to reach the Hispanic market – the time is now. Chances are your competition is not there yet.

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