

Marketing to Latinos

By Rebecca Guevara

"MARKETING TO LATINOS" became a local advertising buzz phrase about the time the census revealed persons of Latino descent make up nine percent of Utah's population. Since then, public relations firms have been hired to "open the Latino market" for clients.

In this, as in any campaign, marketing firms must begin with knowing their target audience's gender, age, education and income. Ethnicity is important to consider whether you are appealing to people new to the U.S. or to later generations. The use of Spanish is important to a new immigrant who recognizes "Se habla Espanol" as an immediate invitation.

Numerous companies are springing up to serve the needs of new immigrants with language and cultural sensitivities. Patrick Salazar, a Salt Lake City-based independent consultant for businesses and charities, has observed a growing number of entrepreneurs in the immigrant community who fill niches for day-to-day products such as television, newspapers and food.

Gladys Gonzalez, the publisher and editor of the *Mundo Hispano* newspaper, founded Willow Creek Mort-

gage after she discovered many minorities were not being helped by established mortgage companies. "It was either a lack of knowledge, because they had not worked with minorities, or a certain caution," she recounts.

Don Francom, Bank One community investment manager for Utah, believes involvement in the local community begins in the office. "We feel it's important to mirror the community with the makeup of our employee base," he explains. Francom has marketed to the local Latino community since the 1980s by mixing sponsorship with traditional media in radio, television and print.

The following traits are common to the best marketing efforts:

A straightforward message that communicates to individuals. Like members of most cultures, Latinos are defined by high family interest and loyalty. Compelling life vignettes capture the attention of any audience.

Infrequent use of cultural icons. Study the culture and what is acceptable or universal. Piñatas are not universal to Latinos, just as the Scottish kilt is not universal to Europe.

Participation in the community. Bank One's Francom emphasizes the importance of direct interaction. "The advertising, sponsoring, attendance at events, and naturally showing up at the events to have a presence has helped us a great deal."

Daniel Flores, business development manager for Bank of Utah, has been making employer site visits and giving presentations on how to use banks and their services. "There is less suspicion if the person going speaks Spanish and is sensitive to cultural differences," he explains.

Respect for intelligence. First and second generations are often at a disadvantage with cultural norms and language. It's important to recognize the difference between talking down to a person versus saying something in a simple, straightforward manner.

Endorsement by trusted people. Business consultant Salazar believes this is critical to doing business with the Latino community. "Word of mouth is critical to the new immigrant," he says. "They are much more of a fixed community, because they play soccer on Saturday and go to church together on Sunday. The population is more concentrated in a few areas of the valley, so word of mouth is rapid." This close social network functions to the benefit or detriment of a company.

Marketing to Latino populations is similar to other marketing campaigns. Successful businesses don't trivialize their message or condescend to their audience. Persons of Latino descent have been here for generations, quietly going about their business, raising families, sending their children to school, and contributing to the local and national economy. Now that their numbers have reached an important landmark, "opening the Latino market" will encourage greater marketplace diversity and benefit business as well as a growing population. ■

Rebecca Guevara is a Salt Lake City-based freelance writer.



Gladys Gonzales (above) founded Willow Creek Mortgage after she discovered many minorities were not being helped by established mortgage companies.