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Selling ideas to multicultural markets

by Dan Durazo

Consumer giants like General Motors and McDonald's have been strategically selling products to multicultural markets for years and have developed enviable brand loyalty as a result. But for organizations pushing ideas and issues instead of Chevys and Big Macs, the tracks of such best-practice marketers are tougher to follow.

As director of public relations and multicultural marketing for RightMinds, a Richmond-based integrated marketing agency, I've been approached by a number of clients about the best way to gain "traction" with the exploding U.S. Hispanic market. During the past 18 years, I've developed multicultural outreach strategies for brands such as Coca-Cola, Target, Honda, Verizon and others. I've learned that each client's challenge is slightly different. But for clients promoting ideas instead of products, the challenge can be even more complex.

I've been tapped recently to develop a Hispanic outreach strategy for a leading environmental organization I'll call "Big Green." Big Green has decided to refocus its energy on the complex problem of global warming. In developing its plan of attack, it came to the same conclusion as many other communicators: The U.S. Hispanic market has become too big to ignore. This group is formidable and growing. Its current population of 45 million now hovers around 15 percent of the total U.S. population. That



Photo by Skip Rowland

"I've learned that each client's challenge is slightly different. But for clients promoting ideas instead of products, the challenge can be even more complex."

number is expected to rise to 100 million, 25 percent of the total population by 2050.

For some marketers, there is an urgent need to develop a brand identity within this market before competitors can jump in. Big Green believes that it must engage this critical audience effectively to move its environmental agenda forward.

From my vantage point, the job is made tougher by the fact that environmental issues have not traditionally been top of mind with Hispanic grass-roots organizations. Issues such as education, employment and health care are all at the top of their agendas. Global warming has been seen as too esoteric for audiences grappling with basic needs.

When faced with the task

at hand and these challenges, here's my plan.

Meet the players. Upon getting my marching orders from Big Green, I attended two high-profile Hispanic conferences that featured discussions about global warming. Although one conference was held in Washington, D.C., and the other was in Los Angeles a week later, the same folks could be found at the podium when it came time to talk about global warming. I immediately realized that these were the key players who had feet planted firmly in the Hispanic and environmental movement camps. I quickly scheduled private meetings to pick their brains on developing a strategy for Big Green.

Where the rubber meets the road. The way to get traction is to figure out what messages resonate best with the target audience. In the Hispanic community, the concept of "environmental justice" is well understood. The term refers to the disproportionate environmental risks borne by poor communities and people of color. Environmental justice provides the conceptual bridge to global warming that Big Green needs.

Strategy first. For Big Green, we're putting together a two-pronged strategy. The first includes partnerships with grass-roots organizations that share its interests. These alliances allow Big Green not

only to ride the coattails of their partners' credibility, but also to utilize their contacts, membership lists, newsletters, events and so on. The second prong involves doing some form of direct outreach to the Hispanic population, perhaps such as audio news releases on Spanish-language radio. This effort offers Big Green an opportunity to create brand awareness and identity.

Bring in the big bats. Lastly, we'll be adding some valuable bench strength to our team in the form of the Big Green Hispanic Leadership Council, which will include well-known leaders in the Hispanic community. A leadership council, sometimes known in the industry as "grassstops," has a number of benefits: It provides an entrée to the community that can otherwise be difficult to obtain; it bolsters credibility; and it can provide intelligence about how the organization can best reach the target market. Think of it as the best focus group in the world (and it meets quarterly in your boardroom).

Here are some other tips to remember: It's critical to get buy-in from the top of your organization to mount a sustained effort, resource allocation should be commensurate with your goals, and seek expert advice when you need it.

Dan Durazo is a senior strategist at RightMinds. For more information, log on to www.rightminds.com **VB**