

Targeting Minority Publics

By Linda P. Morton

As public relations practitioners, we represent our organizations to many publics. We must segment these publics if we are to maintain mutually beneficial relationships with them.

Minority publics are no exception. Yet too often, we fail to distinguish important differences among and within minority publics. A recent *USA Today* article notes that advertisers must overcome five myths to effectively target minority publics. The myths apply as much to public relations practitioners as to the advertisers.

The myths include: 1) Minorities are the same as Caucasians. 2) Minorities are homogeneous. 3) Organizations can reach minorities through the mass media. 4) Language isn't important. 5) Minorities are only interested in certain products.¹

USA Today continued by providing evidence that burst the myths. Thus, minorities are not the same as Caucasians. Yet, neither are they homogeneous. Practitioners shouldn't target them all as though they are the same any more than they would target them as though they are Caucasians.

This article attempts to answer that article's call to determine "minorities' differing preferences," and to keep us from offending minority publics or overlooking "important minority segments altogether."² It provides information on three major minority groups in the United States — African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans. It distinguishes each from Caucasians and provides information about targeting them as groups and as subgroups within each group.

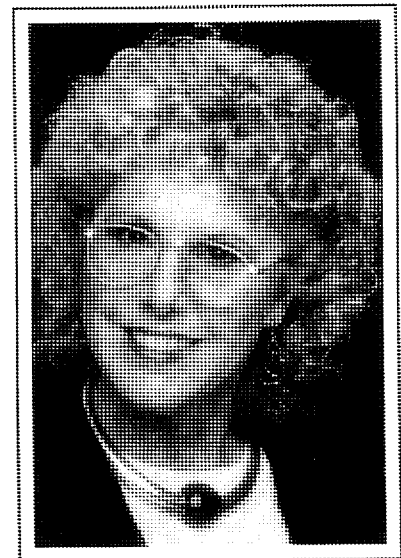
One marketer who specializes in targeting African Americans provides principles to guide communications with African Americans. These principles apply as well to Asian and Hispanic Americans, and I refer to them throughout this article.

- Provide relevant information,
- Recognize them by portraying them in non-stereotypical ways,
- Show respect for their culture and values, and
- Recognize them as loyal consumers.³

African Americans

African Americans number almost 30 million and comprise more than 12% of the U.S. population and 14% of its work force.⁴ Any organization hoping to influence policy must deal with the African American public. The average income for African Americans in 1995 was \$18,600, just 60% of Caucasian income.⁵

We can provide relevant information to them by communicating about causes that involve them. For instance, a chamber of commerce could produce a flyer or folder that lists local businesses sup-



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porting causes such as the United Negro College Fund, the Sickle Cell Disease Foundation and Just Say No to Drugs.⁶ Sponsoring special events for Black History Month and Dr. Martin Luther King's Birthday provide another way to provide relevance to African Americans.

AT&T recently recognized African Americans in a nonstereotypical way. It featured a family viewing a photograph of Egyptian pyramids on an AT&T desktop system.⁷ However, just adding photographs of African Americans will not do the job. Practitioners must also consider African Americans' values, which differ from Caucasians'.

Showing respect for African American values includes recognizing their attitudes about family, religion and self-image. African Americans value families. They average four people per household with almost half of their households headed by women. They also value religion, blending traditional Christianity with their tradition of gospel music. They value self-image, style, and personal elegance more than Caucasians, making them trendsetters especially among the young.⁸

We can increase message effectiveness if we recognize these values when communicating with African Americans. For instance, photographs that portray the African American family as it is should fare better than ones that picture a father, mother, two children and a dog. The latter is a traditional Caucasian family. Assuming that it represents "family" for African Americans and other minorities will prove ineffective or worse offensive. Similarly, photographs of African Americans should portray their sense of style and personal elegance.

Those of us who represent businesses must also recognize African Americans as consumers. As a group, they spend \$350 billion annually.⁹ They like to shop, considering it a social event. They buy name brands, educational equipment and reference books. They are particularly interested in finances and investing.¹⁰ They desire recognition and select brand products, premium liquors, new cars, expensive clothes and jewelry as affordable status symbols.¹¹ We can increase message relevance for African Americans by including these products as props in visual communications and referring to them in verbal communications. Coupons and samples also work effectively with them.¹²

Successfully targeting African Americans also demands that practitioners recognize differences between them. They differ by socio-economic class. Poor African Americans mostly live in the poor inner cities. Wealthier African Americans live in the suburbs, own homes, and are frequently well-educated professionals.¹³ Most (53%) still live in the

South, where they earn low incomes.¹⁴ However, 75% are above the poverty level, and 13% have annual incomes of \$50,000 or more.

Communicating with African Americans in different socio-economic classes requires different verbal and visual messages. Those in lower socio-economic classes are most likely to respond to "images of black unity and Afrocentric identity." Those in the lower and lower-middle classes respond favorably to black slang. However, middle-class African Americans respond less favorably to Afrocentricity and are often offended by black slang. They prefer blending African American culture with middle-class lifestyles. Independent and self-confident, middle class African Americans don't need to impress Caucasians.¹⁵

Even middle-class African Americans are not all alike. More than a third (38%) work in white-collar jobs with slightly less (36%) working in blue collar jobs. A factory worker making \$40,000 a year is quite different from an accountant earning the same income.¹⁶

Including African American practitioners as a part of a public relations staff and piloting messages and designs to subgroups of African Americans can increase practitioners' effectiveness in relating to them.

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Asian Americans

The 1990 census counted more than seven million Asian Americans for 3.5% of the U.S. population.¹⁷ Some researchers claim that the census underrepresented Asian Americans and that ten million more accurately reflects this population.¹⁸ According to one marketer, Asian Americans represent the nation's fastest-growing market.¹⁹

Much of this growth comes from immigration. Of the 30% that moved to the U.S. since 1970, 75% immigrated from 1980 to 1990. Most (69%) live in 25 metropolitan areas, with 39% living in California.²⁰

As consumers, Asian Americans have good purchasing power. They are the wealthiest of all minorities, averaging annual incomes of \$38,500 in 1995 compared to \$31,000 for Caucasians.²¹ They are the only minority to earn more than

Asian American Subgroups

- Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians are below the average annual income.
- Asian Indians are highly educated and more evenly distributed across the nation than other Asian Americans. Many of them are professionals, with 10% anesthesiologists.
- Many Japanese are in the U.S. on assignment. They tend to live around New York, while born-in-the-U.S. Japanese cluster around California. Most Japanese are managers and work for one company for life.
- Koreans also tend to work for one company for life. However, many own their own businesses such as grocery markets and dry cleaners. They cluster in large metropolitan areas.
- Filipinos are the largest and best-assimilated subgroup of Asian Americans. Many of them are professionals.
- Vietnamese compose the fastest growing subgroup, with a third of them living in California.
- Chinese are composed of two groups. Those in the first group were born in the U.S. and tend to be well off and well assimilated. They live primarily in the suburbs and speak English. The second group are recent immigrants who work in blue-collar jobs are conservative and patriarchal. Chinese frequently speak their native language for generations, cluster together in Chinatowns, eat traditional Chinese food and support Chinese and Chinese-American businesses. Chinese white collar workers are usually professionals.⁴⁵

Caucasians.²² According to *Time* more than 32% of Asian Americans have family incomes exceeding \$50,000 compared to only 29% of Caucasian families.²³ In 1992, Asian Americans spent \$120 billion.²⁴ Only 11% of Asian American families live in poverty.

One reason Asian Americans fare so well economically is that most are married, and both husband and wife work.²⁵ Almost three-quarters of Asian Americans are employed with 80% of those employed working in white collar jobs. Another reason they fare well economically is that they value education, with 74% completing college.²⁶

Asian Americans' share many values that provide guidelines to targeting them as a group. Most (80%) are married. They do not believe in divorce so their divorce rate is low. They respect older people. Often several generations live together, making for large families. The average household size is 4.1.²⁷ Relationships are extremely important to Asian Americans, making public relations particularly important in keeping those relations positive

and mutually beneficial.

However, Asian Americans include many different subgroups — Asian Indian, Chinese, Hawaiian, Japanese, Korean, Philippine, Vietnamese and others. Providing relevant information to Asian Americans requires that we recognize subgroups' differences in language, culture and demographics. The sidebar on Asian Americans notes some of these differences. These subgroup differences require that public relations practitioners consider each subgroup separately

As practitioners, we can more effectively reach Asian Americans through news releases than any other minority groups. However, we need to write news releases in the language of subgroups and publish in their newspapers. Most (94%) read newspapers with 82% reading newspapers in their native languages.²⁸

We can also reach Asian Americans through their television programs and sub-carrier radio channels. Japanese and Indians own five television companies that produce programming in New York. *The Pacific Century*, a PBS program, reaches Asian Americans. Sinocast Radio, a national broadcast, reaches Chinese.²⁹

We can also effectively reach Asian Americans through events and community organizations. Asian Pacific Heritage month in May provides an event celebrated by all Asian American subgroups. Local cherry-blossom festivals reach Japanese. Supporting such festivals provide the relevant involvement necessary to reach any minority group.³⁰

Asians fly and make many long-distance telephone calls.³¹ Thus, we can reach them with relevant articles in airline companies' on-board magazines and through inserts in long-distance telephone bills.

Hispanic Americans

The Hispanic American population is predicted to grow to 30 million by the year 2000 and 41.2 million by 2020.³² This population is about 75% (13 million) Mexicans who live mostly in southwestern states, with the remaining 25%: Cubans (1 million) who live primarily in Florida; Puerto Ricans (2.5 million) who live mainly in New York, New Jersey and Chicago; and others (2.2 million) who primarily come from Central and South America.³³ In 1990, Hispanics lived primarily in California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois.³⁴ They live in intergenerational families that include children, adults and grandparents.³⁵

As consumers, Hispanic Americans together spend about \$200 billion annually.³⁶ In 1995, they earned an average income of \$22,000, better than African Americans, but only 72% of Caucasians'

annual income.³⁷ They respond well to samples, which they consider gifts. We can reach them better with door-to-door sampling than in-store or newspaper sampling.³⁸

Employment of Hispanic Americans by Country of Origin

More than half of Mexican American males work in either precision production, craft and repair jobs (20%) or as operators, fabricators and laborers (29%). Only 9% hold managerial or professional positions. Contrary to the stereotypes, more Mexican American females work in technical, sales or administrative support jobs (39%) than work in service occupations (25%). Like the males, many (16%) of females also work as operators, fabricators or laborers. More females (14%) than males work in managerial or professional positions.

Puerto Rican American males divide quite equally among four areas of employment: operators, fabricators and laborers (24%), precision production, craft and repair (18%), service (22%) operators, fabricators and laborers (24%), and technicians, sales and administrative support (23%). Only 11% hold managerial and professional positions. The largest percentage (48%) of Puerto Rican American females work in technical, sales or administrative support. Another 21% hold managerial and professional positions, 18% work in service occupations, and 11% work as operators, fabricators, and laborers.

Cuban American males are almost equally divided among three areas of employment: technicians, sales and administrative support positions (25%), operators, fabricators, and laborers (23%), managerial and professional positions (21%). Of the remaining minority 15% work in precision production, craft and repair and 12% work in service occupations. The largest percentage (49%) of Cuban American females work in technical, sales or administrative support. Another 27% hold managerial and professional positions, 13% work in service occupations, and 10% work as operators, fabricators, and laborers.

The largest percentage (27%) of Central South Americans work as operators, fabricators, and laborers. The remaining majority are divided among four areas of employment: service (22%), precision production, craft and repair (18%), and technicians, sales and administrative support (17%). Only 14% work as managers or professionals. The largest percentage (35%) of Central South American females work in service occupations. Another 30% work in technical, sales or administrative support; 16% work as operators, fabricators, and laborers, and 15% hold managerial and professional positions.

Hispanic Americans as a group share several characteristics. Two of the most important are language and religion. Although many are bilingual, most speak only Spanish. Practitioners will have little success communicating with Hispanic Americans through the mass media. Less than 10% use mass media, and only 50% read English. Minority newspapers such as *La Opinion*, and radio and television stations such as Telemundo reach many,³⁹ but direct mail in Spanish reaches them better.

Although Protestantism is the fastest growing religion among Hispanics, most are Catholics. They value family, children, traditional middle-class values, aesthetics, emotions and appearance. Communications that emphasize these values provide relevance and increase effectiveness of public relations messages.

They want to keep their ethnicity, including holidays, rituals, and festivals. Sponsoring or participating in these events demonstrates support for and builds relationships with Hispanic Americans. Major events occur annually in Miami, New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Miami, Houston, San Francisco and Brownsville, Texas. The top three — Calle Ocho in Miami, Puerto Rican Day and Hispanic Day Parades in New York — each reach more than a million Hispanic Americans annually.⁴⁰

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Hispanic Americans look at work differently than Caucasian Americans, mixing in pleasure throughout their workday rather than working all day before allowing time for pleasure. This has contributed to an incorrect stereotype of Hispanics as unmotivated.⁴¹ Avoiding this stereotype and all stereotypes of minority groups is fundamental to building positive relationships with them.

Rossmann, author of *Multicultural Marketing*, contends that each segment of the Hispanic American population deserves individual attention, saying that "It would be a mistake to pitch ... to a racially mixed Puerto Rican market by using only white Cuban models in a South Florida setting."⁴²

Another marketing study notes differences between Uruguayans, Cubans and Panamanians. It notes that each are enthusiastic shoppers with largest percentage preferring small, personalized stores to convenience and department stores.

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<http://www.acprog.ifas.ufl.edu/~lacasita/> Internet access through the University of Florida to the "Institute of Hispanic-Latino Cultures," which focuses on achievements, needs, and trends in the Hispanic-Latino community.

However, their differences provide insights into reaching them.

- Uruguayans are the most innovative and self-confident shoppers and the most comfortable with English of the three subgroups.
- Cubans are more likely than the others to shop in large department stores and prefer English mass media. They also believe that knowing English is important to succeed in the U.S.
- Panamanians prefer neighborhood stores, are the least likely to use credit cards, and most prefer communications in Spanish.⁴³

Practitioners can successfully reach many Uruguayans and Cubans through English mass media. However, direct mail publications will be more successful in Spanish.

Practitioners should assume that this applies to public relations as well as marketing, and target specific segments of the Hispanic-American population. Each differs by country of origin, culture, beliefs, opinions and purchasing decisions. The sidebar provides differences in employment.

Conclusions

The many groups and subgroups of American minorities require that public relations practitioners use techniques that marketers and advertisers have already begun to use:

- Cater different messages to the tastes of each group or subgroup.
- Communicate in each group's native tongue. (This is especially important for Hispanic and Asian Americans.)
- Use ZIP-codes to target groups with direct mail.⁴⁴ One source for targeting minorities with direct mail is *Book of Demographics and Buying Power for Every Zip Code in the USA* (Arlington, VA: CAC).
- Make design decisions based on psychographic and sociographic information inferred from demographic information. I provide examples of this process in my textbook, *Public Relations Publications*, to be released by Wadsworth Inc. in spring 1998. My examples include Native Americans, women, influentials, investors and psychiatric workers.

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Footnotes

¹ "Minority Consumers Grow in Importances" *USA Today*, April 1992, 10-11.

² Ibid.

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 6 Loro, "Minority Promotions Pick up the Pace," *Advertising Age* 66 (March 20, 1995), S4 & S6.
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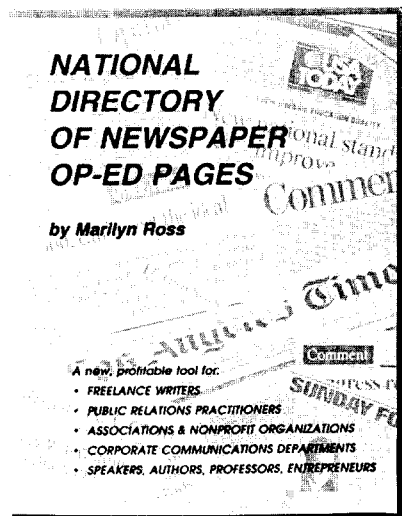
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 36 Loro, "Minority Promotions Pick up the Pace," S4.
 37 Bodovitz and Edmondson, "Asian America," 10- 11.
 38 Ibid.
 39 McCarroll, "It's a Mass Market No More," 81.
 40 "It's Carnival Time," *Adweek's Marketing Week*, Oct. 30, 1989, 14-15, cited in Kern-Foxworth, 29.
 41 Rossman, *Multicultural Marketing*, 46.
 42 Ibid.
 43 E. Lincoln James and Louisa Ha, "Media Language Choice and Shopping Orientation Among Hispanics," in *Business Research Yearbook: Global Business Perspectives*, III, International Academy of Business Disciplines, 1996, 33-37.
 44 McCarroll, "It's a Mass Market No More," 80-81.
 45 Rossman, *Multicultural Marketing*, 86-87; Sladkus, *Unaffluent Asian Consumers*," 11.

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