



Ethnic Marketing: A Strategy for Marketing Programs to Diverse Audience¹

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This paper is the seventh in a series of articles on planning programs to effectively outreach to diverse audiences. This series will include specialized papers on enhancing cultural competence, recruiting diverse volunteers, planning culturally appropriate marketing strategies, and other topics that are integral to the design and implementation of culturally relevant Extension education programs.

Overview

Once you have planned your culturally relevant program (see EDIS fact sheet FY756, “Planning Programs to Break Down Cultural Barriers” for more details on culturally relevant programs), then you are ready to develop strategies for marketing the program to the ethnic audience you are targeting.

Marketing, in general, means publicizing your name, program, and service to your target audience. Ethnic marketing employs the personal marketing strategies that best reflect the cultural values, beliefs, and norms of the ethnic audience you are targeting.

An understanding of diversity is crucial when developing strategies for ethnic marketing. The

concept of the salad bowl is gradually replacing the concept of the melting pot in describing the social setting of America. In a “melting pot,” all cultures and peoples blend together to become similar: in a “salad bowl,” cultures and peoples are combined in one place, but retain their individuality. Therefore, it is important to tailor your marketing message to appeal to the shared cultural norms, values, traditions, and beliefs of group that you seek to reach.

There are three steps for developing an effective ethnic marketing strategy:

1. Consider ethnic diversity when selecting personal marketing strategies;
2. Determine the level of ethnicity of the audience you are targeting; and
3. Develop and implement your ethnic marketing campaign.

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Step #1: Considering Ethnic Diversity and Personal Marketing

Ethnic marketing is a way by which you can take into account ethnic diversity while conducting personal marketing (See EDIS fact sheet FY757, “Personal Marketing: A Strategy for Marketing Programs to Diverse Audiences”).

Ethnic marketing means adjusting your marketing strategies to the values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices of your target ethnic group(s). First and foremost, ethnic marketing involves breaking free from the conventional marketing styles that we often employ.

There are four common errors of conventional marketing:

1. Lumping all the members of your target audience as an undifferentiated mass of people.
2. Addressing all the members of your target audience with a general marketing approach.
3. Considering diversity as a matter of image building — by adopting symbolic minority representation in your marketing campaigns, or by merely translating your message into different languages.
4. Interpreting diversity as a matter of altruisms (charity).

There are five keys to successful ethnic marketing:

1. Value the cultural uniqueness of your target group.
2. Value cooperation and bridge-building with community leaders and other organizations working within the community.
3. Value the cultural beliefs, symbols, and practices of your target group.
4. Value differences in languages, accents, practices, and social conduct.
5. Value word-of-mouth and interpersonal communication to spread your message.

Step #2: Determining the Level of Ethnicity of your Target Group

When working with ethnic groups, it is vital to understand the level of ethnicity in the target group. The level of ethnic marketing needed will depend on the degree to which your target group members identify themselves with their respective ethnicities.

The Extension professional must tailor marketing strategies to the level of ethnicity in the target group. If you are working with a group with a low level of ethnic identity, your marketing approach will probably be more along the lines of mainstream culture. On the other hand, if the group you are working with has a high level of ethnic identity, you will have to be aware of and in tune with the values and beliefs of the ethnic culture of your audience.

Ethnic marketing is contingent upon your understanding of what is important to the ethnic group you are trying to reach. It is also important to understand that there is variation within each group. A particular group can be very heterogeneous and therefore segmented. Three major factors determine ethnicity and heterogeneity among members of a group:

- **Environmental** - family upbringing, ethnicity of community/neighborhood one resides in, etc.
- **Economic** - education, income and status, etc.
- **Social** - place of birth, length of stay in the United States, social associations and affirmations, etc.

The social science literature sheds some light on ways of verifying the level of ethnicity in your target group. Some factors that can help you determine the level of a groups ethnicity are:

People with a high degree of ethnicity have strong ties with ethnic culture. They are possibly:

- First generation immigrants
- Grew up outside America
- Not fluent in English, speak mostly ethnic language

- Speaking with a heavy accent
- Living in high-density ethnic areas
- Higher level of ethnicity=higher degree of ethnic marketing.

People with a medium degree of ethnicity can be considered as belonging to both worlds. They possibly:

- Are second generation or acculturated first generation
- Have spent one-fourth to one-half of their lives in America
- Are proficient in two languages (native and English)
- Speak with a light accent
- Live in moderate ethnic-dense areas

People with a low degree of ethnicity usually have weak ties with their original culture. They possibly:

- Are second generation and onwards
- Were born and raised in America
- Are bilingual, but prefer English
- Speak with a neutral accent
- Live in low ethnic-dense areas

Step #3: Launching Ethnic Marketing

When assessing your marketing program, the *Three "I" Steps* model of marketing may be used:

1. Identify the communities the target group comprises.
2. Identify the values and beliefs of the community/communities. This will involve researching and compiling some of their values and beliefs. This research gives you the backdrop for the third I.

3. Identify personal marketing strategies that match the values and beliefs of the community/communities you will be addressing.

The following is an example of using the *Three "I" Steps* model to assess ethnic marketing for an African American audience:

1. **Identify Group.** African Americans

2. Identify Values. Researchers have found striking similarities that suggest that the African American culture has its roots in contiguous African cultures. In fact, African culture has played a strong role in shaping contemporary behaviors and attitudes of African Americans. Thus, in some ways, due to the African tradition, the African American community is different from mainstream American culture. The following are a few of the values researchers have found to be prevalent in the African American community that may impact marketing:

- View the world from an Afrocentric standpoint; the basis of Afrocentrism is “authenticity” or “being real” (Early, 1995 in Tharp, 2001).
- Value qualities like “telling it like it is,” “seeing the good as well as the bad,” assertiveness, speaking up, etc. (Tharp, 2001).
- Give importance to orally transmitted information.
- Like to be represented.
- Are receptive to organizations that “give something back to their community” (Tharp, 2001).
- Like to see a positive image of their culture.

3. Identify Personal Marketing Strategies. Strategies, based on the identified values, for developing personal marketing materials for African Americans:

- Do not be pretentious.
- Be sensitive about the authenticity of your message. Have facts ready and be able to back them up.

- Have African American representatives present your message.
- Encourage your African American audiences to ask questions about your programs. Do not mistake their assertiveness for aggression. Let them discuss the doubts they may have about your program. They will tell you whether they like or do not like something. Watch for nonverbal cues as well.

For examples of the *Three "I" Steps* model applied to Asian American, Hispanic/Latino American, and Native American ethnic groups, refer to Unit 3, Attachments 3.9-3.11 in *Strengthening Programs to Reach Diverse Audiences* (Guion et. al, 2003).

Conclusion

Marketing is of vital importance when attempting to create programs for diverse, multi-need audiences. Personal marketing techniques are much more effective in reaching diverse or underserved audiences, but you must take into account the level of ethnic diversity of the audience you are trying to reach. Begin by identifying the communities, values, and beliefs of your target audience and then design your marketing program using the personal marketing techniques that best match those beliefs and values before launching your ethnic marketing strategies.

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