

Connecting with the U.S. Hispanic Market

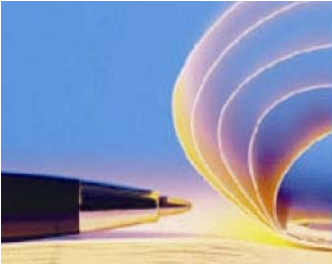
Marketing is all about connecting with our customers and serving them in meaningful ways. With the growing number of Hispanics in the United States, companies are recognizing the increasing buying power of the Hispanic consumer and are seeking new ways to serve this diverse market. This presents both challenges and opportunities for continuing education administrators – leading us to explore how we can best connect with this growing market as part of our customer base.

As with any market analysis, we start by understanding who we wish to serve and analyzing what we are selling. Equally as important in the educational setting is conveying what we stand for. If what we stand for includes diversity and multicultural respect, a commitment to serving these populations of students deserves a strategic marketing approach.

Hispanics are an increasingly important market that will comprise a vital portion of our customer base in the near future. Hispanics now make up around 13 percent of the U.S. population. By 2050 they will comprise nearly a quarter of the U.S. population. This is no small growth trend, and many learning institutions are taking notice. Although many companies are already catching the wave of this market, most are still unclear about the potential this market presents. In the educational setting, administrators are often stymied about how to attract and serve the new Hispanic market and how to prepare all students to be successful in an increasingly multicultural workplace. A good start in understanding and serving these needs is to develop a diverse administration, staff and faculty that include Hispanics. Course development, student support services, recruitment and outreach, promotional materials, the choice of course locations, decisions on pricing and financial assistance are all considerations to lifelong learning professionals who wish to attract this market.

A fundamental reality is there is no one group of Hispanics. Rather, as all people who originate from Spanish speaking countries, there is a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Although Mexican-Americans make up the strong majority of U.S. Hispanics, (66.9%), 14.3% come from Central and South American countries, 8.6% originate from Puerto Rico, 3.7% from Cuba and 6.5% from other Hispanic backgrounds. Levels of education vary widely across the U.S. Hispanic community, just as they do with people of other ethnic backgrounds. Learning organizations must understand the cultural background of their market segments if they wish to achieve meaningful communication with potential customers. The level of acculturation is also of significance. For example, whether the target audience is second- or third-generation Hispanic can make a difference in how products and services are

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designed and delivered and how the marketing message is crafted. If English dominates, this audience will tune into English language media outlets, even though they are still proud of their Hispanic heritage. If Spanish dominates, some select Spanish media outlets would be better suited to outreach. The wording of a promotional campaign should engage the expertise of Spanish marketing professionals. To emphasize this point, we only need to remember the fiasco of the attempt to market the American car Nova in the Spanish speaking community, when the Spanish translation of Nova is “does not go.”

Effective marketing takes into consideration product development, pricing, promotion and appropriate location. With the tremendous buying power of the Hispanic population, the Hispanic community now represents a forceful economic power in this country. Educators need to engage in meaningful dialogue, strategic planning and program delivery to serve these groups well. Ultimately the vision should be to provide quality lifelong learning opportunities for Hispanics, as for all groups in our communities.