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**Multicultural
Marketing Strategies**

1. The Lowdown

As you solidify your 2010 plans and budgets, you've been offered many diverse and divergent targets to attract and engage. You have also been offered many online and off-line engagement channels. Out of all the market numbers one set cannot be ignored—the growing multicultural market. This market is on the fast track to becoming the U.S. population majority as well as the driving force in buying power.

A February 2008 survey, commissioned by executive search firm Heidrick & Struggles, revealed that “while 84 percent of the marketers surveyed believe multicultural marketing is ‘critical to my business,’ almost 40 percent said they don’t know the financial value of multicultural groups to their companies.” In response to this uncertainty, Carla Palazio, a partner at Heidrick & Struggles, drove home the point of the multicultural market impact on the corporate bottom line. She referenced the 10 to 12 percent of revenue coming from this segment as seen by companies such as The Home Depot, Verizon, Bank of America and ING DIRECT.

Late last year the nation elected President Barack Obama, the candidate that offered clear insight into multicultural marketing in his presidential campaign and continues to do so in his administration. Additionally, both he and his wife represent the power of a little-known and under-targeted multicultural silo—the African-American and multicultural alumni of the country’s Ivy League and top national colleges and universities.

2. Why do I need to know about it?

The Obama Prism on the Multicultural Market: They sit in board rooms, C-suites, and now heavily in the White House upper ranks. They are global entrepreneurs and community leaders. The demographic trends of the 2010 Census will confirm what we already know: marketers can no longer operate in the business-as-usual, monolithic marketing practices of the past.

Just as pop figures such as Jennifer Lopez, Beyonce, George Lopez, Jay-Z and Bill Maher highlight influence across cultures, President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama have brought to light the power and influence of the Ivy League educated multicultural group that has long been a foundation of the affluent in their respective cultures. Many brands have seen the benefits of this group’s ability to reach across demographic and psychographic definitions with a fresh perspective that breaks old notions. This same influence cannot be underestimated with regard to the power and influence this group wields on the buying decisions of their baby boomer parents and colleagues, their Generation X, and Millennial peers, mentees, mentors, children and family members. Brands that get it right will be heavily rewarded with brand loyalty and market share.

3. The thing to remember is...

- **Connection Is Key:** While there may be debate on what it takes to reach this important group, the time is NOW for marketers to invest in the brand strategies and budgets that will connect with cultural and contextual relevance. This is the only way to engage a multicultural audience that is savvy and in control of its media choices. It is also important that multicultural audiences feel connected to a brand message—that



means more than an ad on a big, small or mobile screen. They want the connection to be relevant in the many areas of their lives—at home, at work, on the playground and at the dinner table. This is especially important since this market’s spending is becoming more conscious and calculated.

- **Multicultural Is Mainstream:** The recent insight of research such as “Beyond Demographics” done by MediaVest last year has shown marketers that multicultural certainly does not mean monolithic. On the other hand, marketers need to realize that multicultural is mainstream. Marketers must get past the old school notions and ideas that lead to executions that only put African-American faces and culture details in ads slated for the African-American market. Furthermore, it is time for creative directors to think beyond the casting description “ethnically ambiguous.” Look at the success of McDonald’s “I’m Lovin’ It” campaign—what started out as an African-American marketing campaign—ended up a success in both the general market and the African-American market.
- **Cultural Capital and Content Credibility:** It is important to understand that a successful integrated campaign in the multicultural market includes some understanding of community engagement basics. You can’t just put an ad online, on a blog or in a certain radio slot. It’s critical to develop content that connects in the details. That means you need the right images and messaging. It also means creating meaningful content is just the beginning of your work. Understanding how the “who, when, where, why and how” of the content, and how this is shared in-culture and across culture, will be the key to success. The marketers’ home run lies in identifying specific cultural cues that also touch a universal brand understanding.
- **Bringing Different Cultures to the Same Table Makes for a Stronger Multicultural Strategy:** While there is definitely relevance to having conversations to define relevance for a specific culture, one of the biggest opportunities marketers miss is to bring the specific cultural conversation contributors to the same table at some point. Marketers have to do more than hand the overall brand strategy to their Hispanic or African-American agencies. Challenge multicultural partners to interpret that strategy for their specific silo then bring all of the silos together to discuss the overall strategy, the interpretations, and the tactics associated with it. You might find that there is something new and fresh that comes from the inclusive discussion that could reinvent your brand in an unexpected way.
- **The Emerging Media Choices of the Multicultural Market:** In this age of information or Web 2.0 and looking forward to Web 3.0, the multicultural channels of engagement are constantly developing and ever changing. Emerging media is the base for this group despite the myth of the digital divide. Media effectiveness is being measured less in terms of the “bigger is better” mentality of the last decade to the “less with meaning is more” niche focus of current times. Multicultural members of the Barack and Michelle market are looking for meaningful engagement regarding what matters to them. It’s a marketer’s responsibility to know the channels that effectively reach the market precisely. Who are the audience builders in this new age of bloggers, online magazines and community events? How are they building and connecting audiences online and off? These are the questions to ask.

While there are plenty of new media options, beware of strategies that rely only



on new media. Traditional media channels are still valid in reaching the multicultural market. The Barack and Michelle market love the convenience of accessing information on their personal electronic devices, however, they also still enjoy the experience of the magazine they can read on the beach or the television show that they make time for in their schedules.

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