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Embracing the Hispanic market

Companies should re-think their marketing strategies aimed at Latino consumers



FRONT LINES

Chris Luna

Multi-cultural customer service. Since Hispanics have different countries of origin, and their cultures vary accordingly, the Spanish language is often the unifying factor. Therefore, having multi-cultural and bilingual customer service makes good business sense. Dallas-based Telvista Inc. is a firm that provides outsourcing solutions for sales, customer care and technical support, all with bilingual capabilities and an under-

Today, 987 Dallas city employees get paid an extra \$75, \$85, or \$100 per month depending on their verbal

standing of both U.S. and Latino cultures. Telvista, in addition to its call centers in the United States, operates several in Mexico. Language salary incentives. Many businesses are recruiting bilingual employees in professions where these skills are key but are in short supply. The City of Dallas' Language Skills Pay program pays an extra stipend to those employees who are bilingual. Today, 987 city employees get paid an extra \$75, \$85, or \$100 per month depending on their verbal proficiency. To ensure consistency and competency, an outside party does the testing and certification. Having bilingual employees can

overcome the language barrier often present in selling and servicing Latino customers.

Bilingual Web site. As the Hispanic population is increasingly Web savvy, an easy and effective way to market to this underserved community is via the Internet. Wireless phone service provider MetroPCS (www.metropcs.com) and financial institution Laredo National Bank (www.LNB.com) are examples of companies that have Web sites where one click will take you to *en español* from their home page. The Spanish version should be checked for translation differences and can be customized for culture-specific marketing.

Ethnically inclusive photos. If easy for a company to put Latino faces in its advertising in the Spanish media. But the photos used in a company's general advertising and promotional marketing should be as diverse as its customers. And in Hispanic outreach, the old adage that "a picture is worth a thousand words" is especially true. People want to know whether a company identifies with and includes them, and the answer is often visual. And of course, Hispanic-targeted advertising is an important component of an overall strategic advertising plan.

As a result of differences in average household income, demographics, language and culture, the spending habits of Hispanic consumers vary from the average U.S. consumer. Businesses must continue to develop new ways to embrace and reach the growing Hispanic market. If done right, companies can create Hispanic brand loyalty and increase their overall Hispanic market share.

LUNA, managing director of the Luna Group L.L.C., has worked with and for several Dallas companies that have a large percentage of Latino customers.

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