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Targeting PSAs to a multicultural audience

Craig McGuire - 13 Jun 2005 00:00

Producing and distributing a PSA that has to span language and demographic divides offers many challenges. Craig McGuire finds some ways of tackling them

With television and radio stations more aggressively courting multicultural audiences, broadcasters are more receptive than ever to airing PSAs that target them. And in terms of PSAs, no audience is growing as quickly or as diversely as Latinos.

Both for radio and television, Hispanic listeners and viewers tend to outpace the general populace. Hispanics are the largest group listening to radio, at an average of 24 hours a week, and one out of every three radio stations in the top 10 media markets are Hispanic. As far as TV goes, Hispanics and African Americans report viewing on average more than an hour more of television each day than non-Hispanic whites. More than 70% watch in both English and Spanish, 16% watch Spanish exclusively, and only 13% watch English TV exclusively.

But what might be picked up by a Cuban station in Miami might not be as popular with a Mexican-American audience in Los Angeles or Puerto Rican listeners in New York.

When your target audience is an aggregate spread across multiple ethnicities, speaking many languages or dialects, you invariably need to shoot multiple versions of your PSA.

For instance, Strauss Radio Strategies in Washington, DC, had to produce 18 PSAs for a campaign for the Hispanic Heritage Awards Foundation's (HHAF) annual awards program and other related activities. The HHAF is a nonprofit that celebrates the outstanding achievements of Hispanic-American leaders.

Jennifer Lucio, Strauss' account executive for Spanish radio, advises, "Keep in mind that you are not only targeting audiences that may speak different languages, but are across different age groups. You need to select voice talents that appeal to both age groups, which can be difficult."

To overcome such challenges, Lucio advises using recording artists or entertainment personalities both parents and children are familiar with.

For example, the HHAF PSAs included Gloria Estefan, Carlos Ponce, Jon Secada, and Shalim, as well as TV personalities Judy Reyes from the NBC hit show *Scrubs*, sports announcer Andres Cantor, and *New York Times* bestselling author Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez.

The PSAs were then pitched and distributed to more than 389 English- and Spanish-language radio stations in targeted markets throughout the country. But there again, Strauss faced

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challenges.

"Unlike at major television and radio stations that have the very latest technology for receiving spots, smaller stations might not have yet made such investments," says CEO Richard Strauss. "So you have to work that much harder to not only pitch, but distribute in a format and a delivery method they can accept."

Therefore, Strauss delivered the HHAF PSAs both by mail in CD format and also through e-mail as an MP3 file.

Because you have to produce multiple versions, with content additions, developing a PSA for a multicultural, multilingual audience is going to be more expensive.

"[But] the fewer versions you have available, your pickups will decrease," Strauss says. "With multicultural PSAs, we have found clients generally are sensitive of pickup versus costs. If they are not, you need to emphasize the importance."

And keep in mind that each iteration subsequent to the original, while containing new elements, is less expensive to produce because you are reusing elements.

Costs were also an issue for West Glen Communications when it produced and distributed a PSA for a multicultural audience on behalf of the American Bakers Association and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This was a television and radio PSA campaign targeting mainstream audiences, but the Hispanic community in particular, to help increase awareness about the role that the vitamin folic acid plays in the prevention of birth defects.

The goal of the PSA was to encourage pregnant women to eat foods rich in folic acid, such as enriched breads, cereals, pasta, and rice.

"In order to maintain cost efficiencies, the Hispanic PSA was created using the same general concept and production elements from the mainstream PSAs," says Ivette Achong, West Glen's director of PSA services.

"Because the same production elements were being used for both versions of the PSA, the concept that was chosen for the PSA was of a family picnic showing mothers and their children enjoying foods rich in folic acid to demonstrate benefits in terms of prevention of birth defects and other problems," Achong says. "The choice of theme was unique. It appeals to both audiences and, in particular, to the Hispanic community, since West Glen's experience with this market is that they respond well to the concept of family and children."

As for distribution, Achong advises creating targeted lists of both mainstream and Hispanic stations, developing cover letters for PSA directors in both English and Spanish, disseminating the PSAs to stations, targeting follow-up by using a bilingual publicist, and online tracking/reporting, which includes day/part airing information (i.e., the time frame in which the PSAs aired) and data on the various demographic groups that were reached (e.g., women age 18 to 34, etc.)

Achong also advises developing distribution materials for PSA directors in English, and then having them professionally translated into Spanish. Targeted pitching and follow-up should be conducted using a bilingual publicist in order to maximize placement opportunities with Hispanic stations, she adds.

Lastly, to reach your audiences, you must invest the time to research the demographic and its trends and geographies.

"The single most effective tool in organizing the distribution of PSAs is an online media database," says Christopher Sweet, media relations manager for VNR-1 Communications. "These websites come at a high price, but they're effective in looking up and piecing together large amounts of information. Cycling that information into distribution lists is priceless."

Technique tips

Do create multiple versions of a PSA to cover the segments of your target audiences

Do hire a multilingual publicist

Do take advantage of a media database

Don't prepare your radio PSA only in an MP3 e-mail. Prepare to send CDs through the mail

Don't just focus on cultural differences, but address age differences, as well

Don't overlook the importance of researching your target audience thoroughly

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