

Reaching Asian Americans not a one-dimension task

by Robert J. Morais

Marketers and agencies have long realized the potential of reaching America's ethnic populations with tailored strategic programs. African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans, in particular, have been targeted with copy and media that recognize their cultural heritage.

In recent years, Asian-Americans have become our fastest growing ethnic segment, doubling in size from 1980 to 1990 and now comprising 3% of the U.S. population. Although this number is small compared to African-Americans (12%) and Hispanic-Americans (9%), it represents more than 7 million consumers.

Within the broad Asian-American designation are such rapidly increasing populations as Chinese, Asian Indians, Koreans, Vietnamese and Filipinos. Indeed, Asian-American as a category belies the diversity that exists across these groups, all of which have distinctive cultural histories.

Moreover, according to *American Demographics*, most Asian-Americans are assimilated only to a degree. The new ABC situation comedy, "All-American Girl," depicts the humorous side of this process -- and by its very existence illustrates the greater presence of Asian-Americans.

While a few corporations, notably AT&T, Bank of America and Sears, have targeted Asian-Americans, most marketers lack

knowledge of the target cultures and do not have the expertise on hand to acquire it.

They need a new research agenda, one I've dubbed "Culturalgraphics." Literally a portrait of a culture, Culturalgraphics will go beyond demographics and psychographics to provide marketers with an in-depth understanding of how a target cultural group responds to existing new products, packaging, sales promotion and advertising.

It combines such proven techniques as interviews and focus groups with newer marketing research methods. One is ethnography, the systematic study of behavior in a natural setting. That was the domain of anthropologists until a few years ago when marketing people realized that observation of consumers in their homes, workplaces, stores, etc., yielded insights far beyond traditional marketing research. For cross-cultural marketing research, it is a valuable tool.

To practice Culturalgraphics, researchers must have strong knowledge of the target cultural group, including the language. They must have a sensitivity to the subtleties of human behavior. And they must have expertise in marketing or advertising.

Ultimately, the research must be conducted with a pragmatist's eye. Culturalgraphics is not fielded in the interest of knowledge alone but to build a brand in a new market segment.

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