

# TEN WAYS TO MARKET TO PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE CULTURES

By Michael “Soon” Lee, MBA

Multicultural Americans buy nearly \$2 trillion in goods and services every year. Are you getting your share of business from the fastest-growing consumer group in the country?

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that minorities will comprise over one-third of the country's population by 2020. The Bureau says that the number of foreign-born residents has reached an all-time high of 56 million. In addition, there are 78 million multicultural Americans already here.

Developing a diverse client base takes more than simply printing brochures in different languages or hiring bilingual salespeople. It takes commitment and a willingness to adjust business practices to meet the unique needs of Hispanics, African Americans, Asians and people from the Middle East. While some Americans would prefer that people from diverse cultures simply adjust to us, their cultures are far older and ingrained than ours so if we want part of the \$2 trillion they spend here each year it is we who must change.

## 1. Learn The Language

You must learn the language of your customers. It's not enough to know, for example, that your customers are “Asian”. There are thousands of Asian languages all of which are incomprehensible to one another.

If you want to market to people from diverse cultures you must speak their language. Be aware that Korean is not the same as Japanese, which is totally different from Filipino, which is different from Vietnamese and all are impossible to understand for the Chinese. Even within Chinese there are hundreds of different dialects. For instance, the two most common Chinese dialects are Mandarin and Cantonese which are totally different. While the writing is the same the spoken word is different.

Also, don't assume that just because a customer comes from Latin America, for instance, that everyone there speaks Spanish. People from Brazil are more likely to speak Portuguese. Also, there are many variations of Italian and other languages.

## 2. Print Your Business Card In Other Languages

If you have a substantial number of customers from a specific culture you may want to consider printing your contact information on the reverse side of your business card. Again, be sure you know what language your customers speak and have someone familiar with your business translate the information.

If you are going to go to this trouble be sure not to do it wrong. Probably the most common mistake when printing business cards in another language is not to use the same size type or colors as the English language side. This implies that the American culture and our language are superior to the others'. The rule is: whatever appears on the English side should be duplicated on the other side including pictures and logos.

## 3. Know The Words And Images That Attract Different Cultures

For some groups like Asians and Middle Easterners the words "family", "food" and "education" can be extremely important. In the Hispanic culture "family", "home" and "food" are often attractive. In the African American culture "uniqueness", "individuality" and "music" can be important.

For Hispanics, "family" can mean a picture of a father, mother, children, and grandparents. For Asians, "family" often means an image of father, mother, children, cousins, and grandparents. For African Americans, "family" may mean a single mother and several children. You should be aware that 54% of African American households are headed by women.

## 4. Build Rapport By Asking About Culture

People who are ethnically diverse usually welcome questions about their culture. They know they look different and want to share their background rather than have Americans rely on media stereotypes, many of which are rather negative.

The best way to ask about culture is to disclose something about your own cultural background first. People from diverse cultures are generally happy to educate you about their heritage once you show an interest and openness to learning about culture..

Try learning a few words in your customer's language. As you struggle with their words you begin to understand how they struggle with English. This will build a bond with you that your competitors cannot duplicate.

## 5. Know Which Media Attracts Diverse Cultures

Regular television tends to attract African American viewers while Hispanics prefer Spanish-speaking radio and television programs. Asians tend to read newspapers more than most other groups.

Interestingly, Hispanics often receive less direct mail advertising than most groups. Therefore, mail sent to this group can be especially effective.

## 6. Ask For Referrals

In most countries outside the United States there is much less advertising so people there tend to rely on word-of-mouth to find trusted vendors of products and services. Therefore, people from diverse cultures are more likely to make referrals and rely on them.

If you develop relationships with travel agents and restaurant owners in the community you are trying to reach this can bring you many referrals. These people are often the center of social life and have a strong influence on which companies other buy from.

## 7. Know How Cultural Beliefs Affect Marketing

Cultural beliefs can have a large impact on marketing effectiveness. For instance, Asians consider the number four to be unlucky and so this number should not be used in phone numbers, pricing schemes, or in packaging. For example, Chinese tea sets always come with five cups rather than four for this reason.

Middle Easterners consider the color green to be sacred so this color should not be used in packaging products for this group. White is the color of death for most Asians and this color should be avoided for packaging.

African Americans prefer that products and ads be customized specifically for them. These are a proud people who want to be treated as a unique culture.

## 8. Avoid Buzz Words And Acronyms

Speak plain English to people from other cultures. Buzz words and acronyms confuse many Americans so can you imagine how people from outside this culture react to such items?

Don't use industry-specific words or phrases. Speak slowly but not more loudly to new immigrants. Remember, they are unfamiliar with English – not deaf.

Go to great lengths to educate customers from diverse cultures. Buzz words and acronyms are designed to confuse outsiders to avoid them at all costs.

## 9. Show How Much You Care

Before people from diverse cultures do business with you they need to know that they mean more to you than just a paycheck. People from outside the European American culture want to know that you care about them as people. They are not so concerned with how many transactions you have done or years of experience you possess. They know that these things can be obtained over time while the fact that you are either a good person or not will not change.

Help them to understand how to get the most out of your product or service. Again, this means educating them.

Also, provide a complete solution. If the product you are selling has optional accessories don't assume that your customers already is aware of this fact. Sometimes it is difficult for people who are unfamiliar with American transportation and highways to get around and they don't want to have to return to you store over and over for something they should have known about in the first place.

## 10. Educate Yourself About Cultural Learning Styles

Asians tend to be visual learners so pictures, charts and graphs should be used when appealing to this group. The Asian languages are visual. For instance, Chinese and Japanese words are pictures rather than individual letters.

African Americans tend to be aural learners so they prefer to learn by listening to stories. For many decades they were forbidden by law to learn how to read and write.

Native Americans and Hispanics tend to be kinesthetic learners who learn best by touching and assembling things. Let them handle your products and learn to operate them for themselves.

Learning about culture can give you a tremendous advantage in marketing and selling to people from diverse cultures. The best way to learn about the cultures that most likely bring you business is to ask them. Take a sincere interest in your customers and you'll find that they will be happy to teach you about their language and culture.

CAVEAT: Marketing is the only the beginning of your relationship with customers from diverse cultures. If you are serious about tapping this market it takes more than just printing brochures in different languages. You must hire people to answer the phones in those languages and hire multilingual salespeople. You will need to customize your sales presentations and even your products to meet the unique needs of minority customers. So you can see that selling to a diverse market-place requires an all-out commitment, not just a token effort.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Michael "Soon" Lee, MBA, is an expert in diversity. He speaks internationally on overcoming cultural differences and is the author of a series of books on marketing to people from diverse cultures including Asians, Hispanics, African Americans, Middle Easterners and Europeans. Michael is the first Asian American to earn the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation in the history of the National Speakers Association. He consults with companies on multicultural marketing, diversity, EEOC compliance, and coaches executives on avoiding harassment complaints. Mr. Lee can be reached at (800) 41-SPEAK (77325) by e-mail at: [Michael@EthnoConnect.com](mailto:Michael@EthnoConnect.com).