



"... We are one. Our cause is one. And we must help each other; if we are to succeed..."

-Frederick Douglass, North Star,
December 3, 1847

IN THE KNOW

IN THE KNOW is a weekly publication of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Central Florida

VOLUME 2 - ISSUE 8

APRIL 10, 2009

Marketing to African American Businesses and Consumers

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According to Target Market News, African Americans account for \$601 billion-plus in purchasing power nationwide. African Americans comprise more than 12.9% of the U.S. population, or 36.4 million people, according to the 2000 census. And more than 17 million African Americans were registered to vote in the last presidential election.

These statistics indicate the increasing strength of African Americans as consumers, as voters and as concerned citizens. It is my belief that companies that excel will be the ones that recognize and respect cultural differences and use their resources to attract culturally diverse individuals.

Most companies and organizations that are aware of these trends want to do what is ethnically correct and economically fair, but many are not sure how. While there are no foolproof methods for marketing to any group, the following are two techniques that may lead to a more successful marketing effort to African Americans.

Use the right media mix. Determine the right media strategy for reaching the African-American market. The media mix is highly important. General market media alone cannot be as effective as **black-oriented media** in reaching this market. According to a national survey, **72%** of African Americans listen to radio a total of about one day per week and read black community newspapers. Not only do we

read them, we find them credible. Any business that has any interest in attracting African American consumers and making business to business deals with African American firms will be more successful if African American oriented media is used in conjunction with general market media. One of the strongest media in reaching African Americans is radio. As a primary news and entertainment resource within black communities, radio stations enjoy a strong rapport with black consumers, which makes the stations valuable micromarketing vehicles. In addition to delivering significant listening audiences, many black-oriented radio stations have impressive merchandising capabilities that marketers should not overlook.

The majority of African Americans listen most regularly to a black-formatted core station. According to a study by Interep Radio Store Research, there is little listener crossover between black stations and general-market stations. Based on what I hear on the radio and what I read in our local African American newspapers, major companies in this area are missing marketing opportunities because they don't use black oriented media in reaching the African American market.

Seek to empower as well as to sell. Marketing campaigns alone are not always enough to sell African Americans on a company, product or

service. Since we are more than consumers, African Americans also expect companies to approach us as concerned citizens. We want to see evidence of companies' funneling money back into our community, not just taking it out.

One major way companies can meet this expectation is to demonstrate a commitment to using **black businesses for products and services**. This type of economic inclusion will, in turn, enable African-American entrepreneurs to better develop their businesses, create jobs and enhance the nation's overall economy. Organizations can also help empower the black community by fairly hiring and promoting African Americans, making contributions to black causes, and naming African Americans to company boards of directors. Explore the market with comprehensive research. Much of the advertising and marketing directed at African Americans appears to be based on hunches and superficial assumptions. Research is needed to understand all segments of this market. Start by learning why African Americans buy a product or service, how they use it, and where the competition stands. This type of market research should be done by an African American Marketing and Research firm.