



The Untapped Goldmine: Marketing to Diverse Consumers

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Wake Up to the Global Consumer

When we think of international business, we often think of CEO's sitting around a table negotiating a deal in China or a Japanese bowing to an American executive who instead is holding out his hand, expecting to shake hands. What gets less attention is the other side of the coin: the global consumer. For example, India holds 1.3 billion potential cell phone users within its borders, but will the cell phone companies reach all of the Indians able to afford cell phones? Probably not. Why? Consider what happened when cereal giant Kellogg tried to market its cold cereal products in India. Sales were disappointing because Indians like a hot, homemade breakfast, such as rice patties (called *idlis*), tea and other items cooked by family. No dry, cold cereal could compete with a hot meal lovingly prepared.

One of the core rules of marketing any product or service is to know your target consumers, your audience, of sorts, but studying demographics is not enough. We must consider what people value. We must understand their culture and their worldview. People buy products from marketers that understand them as consumers, care about their rich experiences and want to make a human connection. This gut-level connection motivates consumers.

To understand how to connect with consumers from the inside out, think about yourself. What have you bought in the last two weeks, and why? For example, I recently acquired a new bicycle, the first one I've owned in ten years. My husband helped me choose a bike and gave it to me as a birthday present. I chose the Cannondale Adventure 1000. Why? Because I am not a super cyclist. I do not race up hills at forty miles an hour trailing dust behind me. I do not belong to cycling clubs or have legs of steel. Some of the other

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bicycle companies cater to folks like that, and when I read their brochures, I felt excluded, even ashamed of my lack of being in shape. The literature for the bike I chose showed riders who were not necessarily in perfect physical condition; they were out riding their bikes for fun, for family time and for mild exercise. Those images spoke to me, and as a result, I chose the bike that spoke to me.

Core Values of Consumers

How many groups or individuals feel excluded or even saddened by the marketing offered by our companies? Worse yet, how many people simply feel indifferent to our products or services? How many potential customers are we not reaching? We must consider how our oversight affects not only these consumers but also our own ability to grow in our businesses. Let's look at some examples of how marketing can be limited by viewing consumers' needs only through our own lenses. Think about advertisements for business products and services in the United States. Words commonly used include "future," "winning," "progress," and the like. These words represent themes that appeal to American businesspeople. But think about how broad the term "American" has become. When you market in the United States nowadays, you are marketing to a global population. What's more, American companies are marketing aggressively overseas. Will all of these cultural groups be as excited about "the future" and "winning" as you are, or will they be more concerned about relationships? The answer depends on the general orientation of each group's culture and each group's personality. These days, many Indian professionals, for example, are heavily focused on innovation and continuing their economic growth.

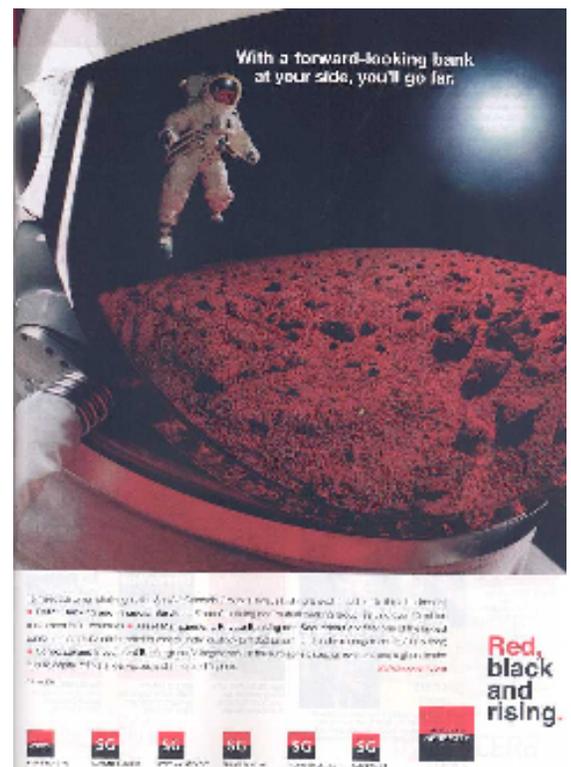
To understand this concept more fully, look at how countries view time and how the culture and the individuals within it orient themselves in time. For example, some cultures take the long view, looking far into the future and creating 250-year business plans. Other cultures, look to past precedents to make decisions, looking at what has previously worked, to form a plan for the present or future. Use extreme caution when looking at these

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patterns and do not use them as a way to solidify stereotypes, but do not ignore the patterns, either. Many marketers these days are using not only these patterns, but also phone, door-to-door and Internet contact to find out the needs of their diverse consumer groups. What might your marketing materials look like if you were addressing people from a past-oriented culture? What about if your literature addressed a culture like Japan?

Case Study: France and the U.S. Compete for a Contract

To further illustrate these cultural values, let's look at a case study taken from *Riding the Waves of Culture* (McGraw Hill) by Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner. (For the full book online, go to <http://tinyurl.com/3alvgb>.) The book tells of a situation wherein France and the U.S. were competing for increased sales in Latin America. The American team came to Mexico with a slick video presentation about medium- to long-term growth. A tight schedule and agenda as well as a separate after-sales contract also came with the American package. The French, on the other hand, prepared a long presentation on the historical background of its company's relationship with Mexico, which dated back to the 1930s. The after-sales support was integrated into the contract, and the agenda was loosely structured. Who won the contract? The French did, in spite of having a technologically less-sophisticated product. Why? Because the French company took into account Mexican values of time and relationships. The French focused on the history of the two countries and left time to build trust. The American campaign was well done and artistically presented, but it did not speak to the Mexicans, so the contract was lost. Consider the U.S.-



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based ad shown here. How would it be viewed by various cultural groups?

The Platinum Rule of Marketing

In marketing, we must play by the Platinum Rule, which is one step above the Golden Rule, "Treat others as you would want to be treated." The Platinum Rule states "Treat others the way *they* want to be treated," and this rule is never more valid than when selling to diverse consumers. If you do not show your customers you understand where they are coming from, no matter how wonderful or essential your product or service, it will not reach the untapped goldmine.

Consider another example in British culture, in itself very diverse. Some Britons make decisions about which products to buy based on how likely these products are to upset the status quo. Imagine that a salesman comes in with a new computer to sell to a group of more traditional British consumers. As he describes all the improvements in the new model and the upgrades over the old system, he notices his potential customers getting uncomfortable, being noncommittal about the product and saying "the old one works just fine." The sales pitch might have been more successful if it had focused on how the new computer could keep things running smoothly and prevent system breakdowns while it worked in complete harmony with the old systems in place elsewhere. To market successfully to diverse consumers, you must consider their comfort levels. When you make your potential consumer comfortable, you keep the door open to future sales.

To reach as many consumers as possible, you might also look at how differing cultural groups prioritize their own individual goals versus the good of their whole family, community or group. For example, a recent article by the editors of CRM magazine cited that 87% of Hispanics surveyed get a "real sense of belonging from their family," while 61% agree that their main responsibility is to their family, not the world at large. If Hispanics are your target market, do your marketing materials reflect this value?

Find Out What Your Customers Need

In marketing to diverse groups, other cultural orientations you might consider are how those cultures view hierarchy, rules and work vs. life balance. You can find out about these orientations in several ways. Speak to people from your target groups directly. Ask them what is most important to them in life or provide them a list of priorities in the form of a survey and ask them to rank those in order of importance. Enlist the help of cultural mentors through local organizations like chambers of commerce, international organizations and the global chapter of the Society of Human Resource Management. For those who live in Atlanta, GA, try www.globalatlanta.com or www.gciv.org. For more information, go to www.highroaders.com.

Inclusion in Diverse Marketing around the Globe

The desire to appeal to diverse consumers to build sales, profit and relationships is not unique to any one country. The U.S., with its vast immigrant population and diverse communities, has a special challenge in marketing, but countries like China are facing this delicate balance as well. On February 18, 2007, the Chinese Year of the Pig began. This year is an auspicious one for many Chinese; the pig is a symbol of fortune and wealth. According to National Public Radio's Louisa Lim, you won't be seeing ads for pork snacks or cute little cartoon pigs running around creating excitement about the New Year. Why? Because pigs have been banned from appearing on CCTV, the Chinese state-run broadcaster. The state has ordered ad agencies not to use pigs in their images or slogans, in an attempt to avoid alienating its 20 million Muslim residents who have a taboo on eating pork. The Chinese government is seeking to minimize the discomfort for these Muslims from being bombarded by pig images on TV. The ban is not just about avoiding offense, but also about avoiding economic losses from those who would be turned off by the ads. Is the ban extreme? Some believe it is another way for the Chinese government to seek control over its citizenry. I

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believe the country is coming to terms with its multiculturalism and wishes to preserve harmony, a core value in China. The ban is also about profit, an important goal in the new entrepreneurial China. Multinational companies in China are now shooting alternate ads to show in Muslim-majority areas. They know their pocketbooks will lose weight if they don't.

Such inclusion and consideration in the advertising world just makes good sense. As the New York Times recently reported, many companies are interviewing Muslims to find out more about their needs. The article quoted Almas Abbasi, a radiologist in Long Island, who was interviewed by JWT, a large advertising agency.

"If Ramadan starts and you see an ad in the newspaper saying, 'Happy Ramadan, here's a special in our store,' everyone will run to that store," she said.

Diverse Marketing Techniques: What You Can Do

Diversity runs deep when it comes to marketing. Diversity is a concept we must think about, not only globally, but locally. For example, if you live in the United States, have you considered the African-American community in your marketing? What products and services are you offering them to meet their goals? What images do you use in your advertising that appeals to them? Have you considered the makeup of the Hispanic community in your area? All Hispanics are not alike; deep and complex value differences exist between Latin American cultures.

Considering the vast diversity and cultural landscape, you might feel overwhelmed and not know what to do next. Do not fear; a wealth of options awaits you for marketing to diverse consumers, and they range from the simple and inexpensive to the widespread and costly. Even if you take two baby steps toward diverse marketing in the next year, you're on your way and should celebrate.

Consider these ideas and techniques:

1. Know Your Own Culture

All culturally competent marketing must begin with an examination of your own culture and values. Such an examination is not as easy as it sounds. Human beings are much more likely to look at “the other,” study their ways, pronounce them differently and view ourselves as normal. In any successful marketing study you must have a point of origin for comparison and understanding, and that point of origin should be you.

Think about your own core values and the behaviors displayed from those values. For U.S.-based Americans, those values might include freedom, independence, self-reliance, a level playing field and private property. Behaviors might include direct communication, looking people in the eye, informality at work or a child leaving home at 18 years of age.

Look at your behaviors and ask yourself which ones might make people from other cultures feel uncomfortable, which ones might sound abrasive or cause people to feel disconnected. The better you understand your own lens through which you view the world, the better you can design marketing campaigns that appeal to people with differing values. For example, to market to minority groups, you would first need to understand through what lenses majority groups view advertisements, products and services. This understanding is not just about being sensitive or avoiding offense; those reasons alone should not be a reason to consider marketing to diverse consumers. Looking through our own lenses helps us connect and gives us a starting point for comparing and contrasting marketing techniques.

In addition, think about how much creativity is generated by looking at your product or service from multiple points of view. Not offending potential customers is important, but added innovation in your marketing strategy should be the main motivation.

2. Inclusive Marketing

Once you have identified your own values and preferences, consider how your current marketing strategies and campaigns could be tweaked to be more inclusive without investing a lot of time and money. The object is not to please everyone or to abandon your own cultural model, but to take some of the same concepts and reframe them. On a panel discussion with a global team from Intel, a Sikh employee spoke about all the things Intel did to make him feel welcome, including ensuring he lived near stores that met his dietary needs, providing driving lessons and acknowledging his holidays. What struck me the most was how he said that all these gestures made him feel valued, and therefore, he was far more productive. In the workplace, employees of all cultures want to be valued, tapped for their strengths and talent and seen as equals, contributors to the company. The same is true of consumers.

Recommended Idea: Time to Do = Two Hours

- a. Think about two groups to whom you would like to expand your marketing reach. Think about the cultural patterns discussed in this report, talk to people in those groups and/or check out a book from <http://www.interculturalpress.com>.
- b. Print out copies of all of your Web pages and make copies of all your other marketing materials, such as sell sheets, ads or brochures.
- c. Take a yellow highlighter and go through each page, highlighting words or phrases that might be slanted toward only your own cultural values. This exercise does not mean you need to change anything or that there is something wrong with your materials, just see what jumps out at you instinctively.
- d. Next look for areas where you could adjust the content to appeal to the two groups you chose. These changes do not need to take place in the areas you highlighted. You may decide to leave those areas alone and add something new. Start small. Change a few areas and test the changes on your two groups. Ask

their opinion and get feedback from those in your own culture over two or three months. Continue tweaking for the rest of your life!

3. A million small ways to go global in your marketing await you.

- a. Do simple things, like send your current customers greeting cards for their cultural holidays. Run an ad wishing them a happy Ramadan or Chinese New Year. Post a message on the home page of your Web site about a particular festive cultural occasion.
- b. Add the country code to your telephone number in your e-mail signature. People in other countries will appreciate not having to look it up. Include your time zone, as well.
- c. Have your business cards printed in multiple languages (the cost of printing cards has plummeted). If you want to market to Hispanics, put a Spanish translation on the back of your business card. To hire a Spanish translator in Atlanta, see the Association of Interpreters and Translators at www.aait.org.
- d. Look at your mission statement and company core values. Do they truly reflect a global customer base?
- e. Build relationships as part of your marketing campaign. Send handwritten notes and pay personal visits to people from cultures that prioritize relationships over tasks or E-mail. Learn "hello," "good-bye," "thank you" and other basic phrases in your target group's native language, and include the phrases in your handwritten notes.
- f. Buy a multicultural calendar or download one free on the Internet. Make a list of major holidays for your target cultural groups. Have them printed with a message and your company name on a greeting card and send them every year. Can you imagine how your potential customers or clients would feel when they received your card? You would certainly win a customer or several for life.

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These techniques are all about creating relevance for your potential consumers. Going global in your marketing also increases your chances of building longer lasting relationships and increasing your profits. Get creative, and you'll be excited and keep up with rapidly changing trends. The rewards on both sides are plentiful, and if nothing else, diverse marketing sends a clear signal of respect to your consumers and clients. That respect may be the best advertising investment you ever made.

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About the Author



Vicki Flier Hudson, President of Highroad Global Services, helps global organizations turn cultural time and money-wasters into productive teamwork. She specializes in India and China, and takes the cultural fluency of her clients from good to great. She is a recent recipient of Kennesaw State University's Instructor of the Year award for International Programs. Previously, in Atlanta, Georgia, Vicki supervised and conducted training for international and domestic Distribution and Manufacturing for Immucor, Inc., a worldwide blood bank automation company with affiliates throughout the globe. In the past, Vicki has lived in Nepal and worked in China,

Germany, India and Thailand. She has survived a fifty-five hour train ride across India and ridden a rickshaw, a camel, a cement truck and broken down buses all over the globe. She has traveled in several countries including Austria, Belgium, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, England, Greece, Israel, Jordan, Mexico and Panama. Her experience includes training for United Parcel Service (UPS), The Home Depot, Intercontinental Hotels Group, Prudential Financial, Emory University School of Medicine, Philips Electronics, Cobb County Public Schools and The Carter Center.

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