

## UNDERSTANDING BILINGUAL AND MONOLINGUAL LATINO CONSUMERS

The U.S. Latino population is very heterogeneous. It consists of first generation, monolingual immigrant groups representing different national origins and includes U.S. born bilingual populations representing 2<sup>nd</sup> and higher generations. Understanding their communication needs requires research into consumer beliefs and habits.

### Socio-economic Status

Socio-economic status should not be confused with cultural. For example, feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and frustration related to economic deprivation may cause a Latino consumer to appear indecisive or uncooperative. The disadvantages of such an economic position lead to the expectation of negative outcomes. Such a response is not cultural, but simply reflective of poor socio-economic status.

### Poison Prevention and Poison Center Utilization

Poison Center utilization is lower for Hispanics. One study has found that Hispanic children are more than twice as likely as non-Hispanic Caucasian children to be hospitalized as a result of poisoning (Agran et al. 1996). Mull et al. (1999) also concluded that children of low-income mothers born in Mexico are at an increased risk of unintentional poisoning. The latter ethnographic study revealed that children were frequently exposed to poisons via unsafe storage of medicines and household chemicals. Other factors contributing to poison exposure included favorable attitudes toward iron, extensive use of products without child-resistant packaging (such as medicines from Mexico, rubbing alcohol, liquid bleach, and cleansing powder), and a high prevalence of shared housing.

### Monolingual Latino Consumers

- Preferred language is Spanish for all communications
- Strong identity ties to country of origin
- Core Hispanic cultural characteristics (please see below) play a more significant role in daily life
- Issues related to the transition and migration process are at the forefront of priorities

### Bilingual Latino Consumers - U.S. born, 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> generation Latinos

#### Language characteristics

- Speak English to their children, spouses, and siblings,
- Some are bilingual and speak Spanish to parents

#### Attitudes

- Strong belief in living geographically close to family members
- Perceive family as personal resource rather than as hindrance to individual development
- While 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> generation are further acculturated, they respond more to advertising that is attuned to Hispanic culture, even if the message is delivered in English
- Dominant cultural value is on the family and children; however, traditional family roles can vary with bilingual/bicultural consumers

#### Lifestyle/Behaviors

- Various degrees of acculturation exist in this population, depending on language use, income level, and education
- Media habits: while some 2<sup>nd</sup> gen. Latinos speak Spanish at home, the vast majority prefer English language TV/radio media; smaller percentage use both
- Doctors and established sources of authority are respected/trusted, and rarely questioned
- Personalized service is valued, and this consumer appreciates the time to interact with service providers
- Marketing products to English-dominant and bilingual households appear to succeed when they reflect Hispanic cultural identity

## Core Cultural Characteristics of American Latinos

The terms Hispanic and Latino are umbrella terms that cover over 35 million individuals from approximately 18 different countries with unique histories in the U.S. The following cultural characteristics apply largely to the monolingual Latino population, and with varying degrees to bilingual consumers depending upon many socio-demographic factors including generational status and level of acculturation.

### Familism and Interdependence

Among Latinos the family often assumes a position of ascendance over the individual. Traditional households include extended families and both problems and solutions are owned and shared by all members.

### Simpatía and Respeto

In Spanish *simpatía* refers to a “general tendency toward avoiding personal conflict, emphasizing positive behaviors in agreeable situations, and de-emphasizing negative behaviors in conflictive circumstances” (Triandis et al., 1984).

*Respeto* (respect) is related to the concept of *simpatía* and values automatic deference to authority. These values affect communications with specialists, professionals and other such figures seemingly entitled to obedience or acceptance, frequently disempowering the consumer.

## LATINO MEDIA HABITS

**Hispanic Business** reports that television accounts for a majority of Spanish language ad volume, with 58.3 percent of the total, followed by radio (25.7 percent), newspapers (10.2 percent), out-of-home (3.3 percent) and magazines (2.5 percent).

### Television

Today **Univision** reaches 92 percent of all Hispanic households in the United States through 21 owned and operated stations, 28 affiliates, and 900-plus cable systems. Univision has grown to 2.8 million primetime viewers, more than doubling its audience from 1993 and has more viewers than any ad-supported cable network.

Another full-time Spanish-language broadcast network is **Telemundo**, partially owned by Sony, Corp., Liberty Media and others. Telemundo is available to 85 percent of all Hispanic TV households via broadcast stations and cable systems. Telemundo began operations in 1986 and has a fraction of Univision's ratings.

### Radio

One of the fastest growing radio formats in recent years has been Spanish-language radio. Radio station ownership is consolidated among five companies that own 80 percent of the market, Hispanic Broadcasting Corp. (formerly Heftel), Spanish Broadcasting System, EXCL Communications, "Z" Spanish Radio and Mega Communications.

### Hispanic magazines

There are now well over 200 magazines that target Hispanics. Roughly three-quarters of them publish editorial content entirely in Spanish or are bilingual. One of the more successful magazines has been *People en Español*, a Spanish language quarterly, (now issued ten times a year) launched in October 1996. Today the publication has a circulation of 250,000.