

San Jose: increasing Hispanic impact on Chicago market

George San Jose is president of San Jose & Associates Inc., an advertising, marketing and promotions agency specializing in Hispanic markets he founded with partner Jesse G. Wilson in December of 1981. The largest independent in the Midwest, SJA's current capitalized billings stand at \$10 million. Its offices on East Jackson are around the corner from that traditional symbol of the Chicago advertising establishment, Michigan Avenue, much the same way the Hispanic section is out of the way in general marketing strategies.

A dark, solid figure, San Jose emanates a generous sense of humor and forthrightness in conversation. With his wife and their five year old, he recently moved from Lincolnwood to a house in the Sauganash neighborhood on the northwest side of Chicago.

Now we'll have to have a real big family to fill up the house.

In his office, one wall is covered with plaques of recognition from his work with not-for-profit groups. Other walls are decorated with firearm replicas and weaponry from Spain.

Starting Out

San Jose moved around quite a bit in his earlier years.

I thought it was a curse at first.

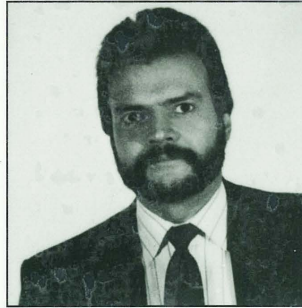
Born in Cuba, he emigrated to Spain as a boy. From there his family moved to New York, where he lived 8 years. He lived in both Texas and Miami for three years and has been in Chicago the last ten.

[Moving around] showed me there are diverse cultures in this country. I used to think the entire United States was like New York. And how disappointed I was. When I moved to Texas I cried for almost six months. Nobody knew what a discotheque was. I had silk pants and silk shirts and people looked at me like I was weird.

I got into advertising strictly by coincidence. In college I would see commercials and think, what a waste of money. They're not talking to me. Well obviously they weren't talking to me — they were selling cleaning products and so forth.

After college, San Jose worked for a manufacturer/distributor of Hispanic products where he ended up heading an in-house agency.

I had the task of writing a commercial for shampoo. Took me three months to convince the boss he should let me do this — because I was a salesman. I remember I had all this shampoo in the warehouse. Soon as I placed the ad, everyday I saw all this inventory leaving. I thought, this stuff really works. Then I knew that's what I wanted to do.



SJA's George San Jose

PROFILE

I never went for what everybody did, which sometimes will get you into trouble. But a lot of times you stand out above the crowd. You have a greater chance of failing or achieving success — all or nothing.

Defining the Market

In our industry, when you define "national" it's not the 50 states. You have the entire southwest area; Florida, which is mainly Miami; the Midwest, which is Chicago and greater Milwaukee; and the New England states. That for us is national.

When I originally came from New York, my ideas of advertising were ahead of their time — as it pertains to Chicago Hispanic. Out of 30 markets it was probably the worst in terms of population and importance — underdeveloped in terms of media. We started here because it had the most potential, not because I like the cold weather.

How much of that potential has the agency realized since it opened?

I certainly wouldn't put us as the ones that carried the torch. I think more importantly what happened was media started noticing the market. We now have four 24-hour radio stations. Each station has 10 to

12 salesmen and you've got those people knocking on doors. When I came to this market, we had one 24-hour radio station and one TV outlet that was part-time. Now there is more TV and a lot more print vehicles, whereas before there were none. We have, overall, a more sophisticated marketplace as a whole. Chicago lacked the retail aspect of advertising.

Is there more recognition of Hispanic buying power in Chicago?

If I had to take a guess, I would say Chicago as a market has accomplished maybe 40 percent of the full potential it has to get on par with a Miami or a Los Angeles or maybe a New York — in terms of how important it is and how many dollars in advertising are spent within the ADI. So we still have a long way to go.

What's the size of the Hispanic market in Chicago — 8 or 9 percent?

Legally it falls within that area. What we have in Chicago is the phenomenon of a tremendous amount of undocumented individuals. I think the only city which comes close is Los Angeles. Here in Chicago we estimate anywhere from five to 700,000 undocumented individuals. It's an industrial center and therefore creates blue collar opportunities not existing in the Southwest markets right now.

It's a must we take these figures into consideration. Clients we serve, like Coke and Budweiser, track their sales directly by account. If you don't take the undocumented section into account, then people would be drinking 5.7 gallons per capita of Coca-Cola, which is unheard of.

Media

What are the principal media buys in Chicago?

TV and radio have always been the primary mediums for Hispanic markets in just about every market. Print is lately becoming much more sophisticated and is yielding results, but circulation numbers are still very small to be attractive to a general market advertiser.

Is San Jose able to combine media effectively?

We figure there is 80 to 85 percent of the Hispanic market that consumes Hispanic media. When you get that range, you are in a sense accomplishing 100 percent of your potential audience in the Hispanic market. Of national markets, people in Chicago respond among the fastest to anything you do.

Hispanics are, as a whole, much more traditional than any other immigrant group we have in this country. In Chicago, it hap-