

Spanish-language papers face hurdles in finding right niche

by Kelly Shermach
Staff Writer

Spanish-language print is keeping its head above *agua*, but some newspapers have bid *adios*.

The recent deaths of giants such as *El Daily News* published by *The Daily News*, New York, and *La Raza Domingo*, the *Chicago Sun-Times* supplement, among others, have given the Spanish-language print industry the reputation of being unreliable in a “here one day, gone the next” sort of way.

“I think everybody wants to jump on the bandwagon, and that’s giving print a bad name,” said Norma Gonzalez, vice president-director of media at Montemayor & Asociados, San Antonio, Texas. “Everyone who wants to expand wants to put out a Spanish-language publication.”

And the challengers aren’t confined to overcoming a bad rep. Without following a formula for success, others will die, too.

Success, she said, requires determining the necessary frequency for the readership, distribution, news content—with competition from broadcast media, “it’s

Some have died, graves await others

Despite some recent deaths in the industry, experts on the Hispanic market predict growth among Spanish-language newspapers in the future.



Graphic by John Foster Jr./Marketing News

very difficult to maintain readers where you don’t have the news that they want”—and marketing the publication to the community as well as to advertisers.

Because some papers have closed, Gonzalez said, “advertisers and mar-

keters have been turned off because [the papers] are fly-by-night.”

“Growth is going to come with publications defining their niche,” she said and predicted opportunity in “targeting affluent professional women and housewives as well.” She suggested publishers start small, identifying their consumers and not trying to capture all Spanish speakers, to set a firm foundation that the community and advertisers can rec-

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ognize and respect.

Right now "They try to start off too big and want advertiser support, but the advertisers don't want to commit because they want some credibility to fall back on," Gonzalez said.

"The Hispanic market as a whole is still in the infancy stage," said George San Jose, president of San Jose and Associates, Chicago. And though "small community newspapers have learned the language of Corporate America," supplements in the general market have the tough challenge of understanding what will succeed in the segment.

"Regardless of the people you bring in to manage the supplement, you're never going to have the entrepreneur spirit or the know-how of the entrepreneur that's necessary," said San Jose, when the manager's whole life depends on the publication, when marketing isn't just a matter of money but a matter of heart and soul.

San Jose said the issue of survival for Spanish-language newspapers goes much deeper than big operation, big budget vs. small. Those involved have to know the systems, procedures, and culture of the Hispanic community they target. The top editors and marketers at general market publications tend to stick to the rules established for the general market, he said, and ignore signs of what works within the Hispanic culture and what doesn't. Marketing to a specific cultural group requires flexibility and changing the rules, he said.

The *Miami Herald* is an example of these lessons taken to heart. It has published a daily Spanish-language

supplement since 1976. Now known as *El Nuevo Herald*, the 40-page paper has a daily subscription base of 103,000 and a Sunday subscription base of 128,000. Sam Verdeja, vice president of community relations, said the publication has grown in readership every year, and advertising has grown to five times what it started out at 20 years ago. He claims the paper is a success because it meets the needs of the market, changing content as the market changes and keeping in close touch with its advertisers.

Communication with the market and advertisers helps foster equity in such publications. Loretta Adams, president of Market Development Inc., Chula Vista, Calif., said publishers of Spanish-language newspapers need to nurture brand image, which includes frequency, and news and advertising content. For instance, Hispanics like the coupon supplements that run in Thursday and Sunday editions of general market dailies, she said, and the sports coverage in the Spanish-language papers provides the visuals the audience is accustomed to watching on Spanish-language broadcasts. That type of marketing aims for crossover from TV to print.

Newspaper marketers must learn to put marketing principles in place and accommodate the marketing function completely, Adams said, because advertisers, who have learned marketing principles, expect no less from newspapers.

"I think there's a big future in the industry because I see advertising becoming more mature," she said. It used to be "a no-brainer" to advertise to the Spanish-speaking market, in part because there wasn't much competition in marketing to Hispanics.

As advertising to this market continues to evolve, Adams predicts ad-

vertisers will place more in print, especially to reinforce their broadcast campaigns. "Print may survive more than any other media," she said. However, she said publications must look to "a nontraditional future," not only in the big markets but in the emerging secondary markets, such as the "sizable pockets" in Oregon and Oklahoma. Because these smaller markets are isolated, chances are they will be catered to not by their own local radio and TV stations but by cable and community-based newspapers, said Adams.

"I think there's an explosion going on," said Octavio Nuiry, PR manager at Ad Rendon & Asociados, Newport Beach, Calif. He and Kirk Whisler just compiled *The 1996 Complete Hispanic Media Directory* for ADR Publishing, Newport Beach. The book identifies about 1,100 publications in the U.S. that target Hispanics in English, Spanish, or a combination of the languages.

"Not only is it a boom in terms of numbers of papers," Nuiry said, "but ad budgets are growing at double-digit rates." But, he cautioned, those who don't write for and advertise to the Spanish-speaking market the right way will find themselves out of jobs. A foothold in the community is necessary to know what it wants and needs and to produce a popular product.

"Hispanics are hungry for information, and while they are the heaviest users of broadcast media, print of all types fills a void," said Gary L. Berman, president of Market Segment Research, Coral Gables, Fla. "That void is often community-based." The small publications will expand as the Hispanic population expands, he predicted, yet he said, "I don't think anybody knows the truth about Spanish-language print." ■

George L. San Jose President & Chief Creative Officer of The San Jose Group a Multicultural Advertising Agency