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How Public Relations Efforts Can Attract Latino Consumers

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For many a CMO, getting the most out of their multicultural marketing budget is an essential task - especially in these shaky economic times.

But how can a company continue its Hispanic market outreach when both its budget and resources are limited?

Selecting a public relations agency of record may be a beneficial option, argues **Jennifer Woods**, executive vice president of the Chicago-based **San José Group**.

The multicultural agency recently conducted initiatives for two clients - wireless communications firm **U.S. Cellular** and the **Illinois Bureau of Tourism** - that it believes best demonstrate how companies with conservative resources can make the biggest impact by leveraging consumer insights and non-traditional media.

But the story of U.S. Cellular and its work with San José Group is unique. Unlike the Illinois tourism bureau, the wireless company already has a Hispanic creative agency of record - Austin-based LatinWorks.

Traditional Spanish-language media buys see U.S. Cellular directly pitching consumers in a diverse mix of markets - including Chicago, Milwaukee, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Omaha, Des Moines, Central Washington, Southern Oregon and California's remote North Coast.

But Woods believes her firm's PR efforts assist U.S. Cellular in getting a highly localized customer response and activation.

"U.S. Cellular has a regional footprint and is known for being a hometown carrier," Woods says. "Thus, our job is to position it as the company that knows all of its customers on the community level."

In the latter days of summer 2008, the team at the San José Group thought about a Hispanic Heritage Month promotion involving the wireless company. The idea involved a download campaign, in which U.S. Cellular phones could obtain themed content such as flags of Latin American nations and ringtones - content designed to let cell phone users express their Latino pride.

"The idea was how to do something meaningful and relevant when practically every brand is out there telling the Hispanic population how much they care about them," Woods says, noting how many companies use Hispanic Heritage Month to boast about their efforts and outreach in the Latino community.

For the U.S. Cellular effort, San José Group promoted the availability of Hispanic Heritage Month-themed downloads - free to all subscribers - exclusively through media mentions.

Woods believes the smart CMO and those in the company's C-Suite appreciate the value of "mentions" - such as when a radio or television host talks about the brand and the promotional effort.

"Anytime you can get a good, meaningful measure of success, it is embraced," she says. "And companies and brands that can pitch public relations as a highly valued part of brand communications can benefit in the long run."

Word of mouth and third-party credibility - other benefits of a Hispanic PR effort - helped U.S. Cellular experience a "very healthy" surge in downloads during Hispanic Heritage Month. According to Woods, more than 6,000 ringtones and flag-themed wallpapers were obtained by U.S. Cellular's Latino subscribers.

Print, online and television hits totaled more than 600,000 actual impressions, Woods adds.

Obtaining as many media mentions as possible was the primary method San José Group used to get the word out about the Illinois Bureau of Tourism's new interactive website targeting Latinos - *DisfrutaIllinois.com*.

San José Group arranged for coordinated reporter visits to various sites across the Land of Lincoln, inviting Hispanic media in Chicago to unveil the "best hidden secrets" of Illinois.

The approach resulted from a key insight Woods and her team discovered about Latinos in Illinois - the vast majority knew no more than four travel destinations in the state.

Therefore, Spanish-language radio hosts were encouraged to go on organized tours of such locales as Hardy's Reindeer Ranch, in the central Illinois town of Rantoul.

Excursions to Rockford, where water parks are the main attractions; nature-filled Utica; historical Springfield; and the quaint prairie town of Galena were also promoted.

San José Group took the promotion of Disfrutalllinois.com a step further by having Spanish-language radio hosts engage listeners in a mobile campaign. A host would ask a trivia question, and the caller with the correct answer qualified for a three-day trip to a particular Illinois destination.

How successful was the effort? Metrics are limited, Woods admits. But she notes that Disfrutalllinois.com has seen an 80 percent increase in traffic within the last year.
"Not only are we seeing increases in page views, but we are getting repeat visitors to the website," Woods says. "There are also increases in the number of minutes people are staying on a webpage."

That spells success for Woods and her client. "We maximized the impact of a new website with very conservative resources on hand."

With the slogan "¡Vive la Emoción!," the Illinois Bureau of Tourism's Spanish-language website offers an interactive platform for visitors who wish to learn more about travel to the Land of Lincoln. Among the offerings are tips on the top travel sites by region, three-day vacation guides, and transportation information for trains, planes and buses. There's also a link to an online hotel reservation platform hosted by Hoteles.com and a children's section offering tips on family-friendly destinations.

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When it comes to a destination for partaking in some fun and excitement, Wisconsin has set its sights on Hispanic travelers. It makes perfect sense, says **Sarah Klavas**, director of marketing and communications services for the Wisconsin Department of Tourism. "Our border is about an hour away from Chicago, and there are many people in Chicago that look to us as a vacation destination."

Chicago is home to many Hispanics - many of whom are eager to take a short family vacation by car to a place enjoyable to the young and old. According to Hispanic Market Weekly's Enhanced Market Profile for Chicago, 1.93 million Latinos reside in the Chicago DMA.

To attract these potential visitors, the Wisconsin department of tourism in summer 2008 developed a campaign using Spanish-language print advertisements and uniquely bilingual radio advertisements. The initiative was a collaborative effort between the state and its Hispanic agency of record, Milwaukee-based Abrazo Multicultural Marketing & Communications.