

Communicate Diversity

By Sharon Danosky

Diversity has been in our nonprofit vernacular for some time now. I see it in discussions in boardrooms all the time. Yet, I feel as if many nonprofits use it as a word without embracing it as a norm.

We think about diversity instead of being inclusive. One place where this is so apparent is in marketing materials. Having a picture depicting diverse populations is not being inclusive. If you are serious about tapping into diverse markets – it takes a lot more than an occasional picture and printing business cards in another language. Here are some suggestions:



- 1) Understand that words and images resonate differently with different cultures. Words like “family”, “food”, “home”, “education” “individuality” and even “music” have different degrees of importance to different cultures. The family unit is not the same for all cultures. For Hispanics, a picture of “family” will include a father, mother, children and grandparents, while Asians often include cousins as well. Don’t assume the meaning of a word or phrase that resonates with your culture, will resonate with all cultures.
- 2) Build rapport. Most of us like to share information about our culture, where we came from and what matters to us. If you are looking to build rapport with a specific diversity, seek out people and inquire what matters to them and their cultures. If you are a healthcare organization, understand the health concerns and practices of a culture. You need to get as much input as possible to see trends and patterns. One person does not represent a culture.
- 3) Know which media attracts which diverse cultures. You will reach more Hispanics by advertising on Spanish speaking radio or TV. Hispanics often receive less direct mail advertising than most groups. Therefore, mail sent to this group can be especially effective. Understanding the nuances of a culture will help you to more effectively reach them with the message you want to share.
- 4) Avoid buzz words and acronyms. And be language sensitive. Don’t use industry-specific words or phrases, or nonprofit-speak. Speak plainly and communicate directly.
- 5) Be cognizant of the pictures you use. Having that token picture or two of an African American couple or family will not communicate diversity; in fact it is often insulting. Diversity is about inclusion of many cultures – in all your graphics, all the time, everywhere.
- 6) Be a continuous learner and understand how diverse cultures learn. Different cultures have preferences for how they receive information. According to Michael Soon Lee, leading expert in selling to people from diverse cultures, Asian learners are more visual, so pictures, charts and graphs appeal. African Americans tend to be aural learners, so listening to stories is more effective. Hispanic learners are more kinesthetic, preferring to touch and assemble things. Utilizing these tools will help you better develop a rapport with a particular culture.

Marketing has always been about understanding your customers and appealing to them in a way they prefer. Building a diverse marketing plan means that you stay true to that principle and extend your understanding to the different cultures you wish to engage in your services or charitable giving.