



RSPCA guard dog care and ownership campaign: Lion's promotion targeted Asian shopkeepers and included a series of multi-lingual leaflets

Minority marketing

Mainstream marketing makes little effort to target ethnic minorities. But, as [Melanie May](#) reports, this diverse audience should not be ignored

Treating any one group as a homogeneous mass is a risky marketing strategy but particularly if the target audience are ethnic minorities. They make up approximately 5.5 per cent of the UK population, with about 30 different ethnic groups in London alone. And, according to a report by multi-discipline agency Interfocus, 'Marketing to Ethnic Minorities; Why Bother?', two of the largest groups, the Asian and the African-Caribbean communities, have disposable yearly incomes of about £7 billion and £5 billion respectively.

Ethnic minorities are clearly a market worth targeting, but with such a broad mix of cultures and attitudes represented within this group, how can marketers successfully crack such a diverse audience?

Louise Ellerton, strategic planner at Interfocus, believes companies tend to ignore the possibilities: "Many brands are closing their eyes to the fact that they have a very lucrative market on

their hands. They're not realising there are ways of tapping into that market above and beyond simply talking to them like everyone else."

One of the challenges facing marketers is the lack of lists available. The 1998 Data Protection Act has cracked down on the use of personal data, especially that considered sensitive, such as the ethnic or racial origin of a data subject. This means that for data supply firms, this is one area they can no longer cover, as Caroline Kimber, director of direct marketing at CACI, explains: "You have to have explicit consent to use sensitive personal data. Therefore, we've had to say, unfortunately, we can't do it, much as we'd like to. We have to adhere to the Act."

But there are still ways of collecting data, within various stiff constraints. "You have to have two clear provisos," says Roger Williams, UK marketing manager at Claritas. "The first is that the person has given explicit consent to allow data to be

collected and used, and secondly, the way the question is worded must imply clearly and precisely how the data will be used. You have to be very clear on who's going to use the data."

And when your product or brand appeals to the majority, as many do, it can seem pointless targeting individual groups. As Williams explains: "Lots of products are universal, so the ethnic dimension doesn't come into it."

Lost opportunities

Marc Nohr, managing director for agency Lion, which has worked with a number of organisations targeting ethnic minorities, believes any company approaching its campaigns with this thinking is missing out. "Mainstream

marketing is colour-blind," he says. "It assumes ethnic differences aren't drivers, saying 'we want everyone to buy our product, black, white or blue'. Yet ethnicity is an important driver."

Nohr doesn't see targeting ethnic minorities as being quite as



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Marc Nohr,
managing
director, Lion

Cluster 1: least culturally integrated

- 1 More at ease with items closely related to their own culture
- 1 Tend to live in close-knit family groups and ethnic dwelling areas
- 1 Low income and blue collar workers
- 1 Very limited knowledge of English language

Cluster 3: highly integrated

- 1 Fluent in both English and their native tongue
- 1 At ease in a predominately Caucasian environment
- 1 Live in areas not predominately ethnic oriented
- 1 Behavioural patterns are largely driven by dominant culture

Cluster 2: moderately integrated

- 1 Have working knowledge of English language
- 1 Prefer to speak their native language
- 1 Behavioural patterns are influenced by their subculture's values
- 1 Combine some characteristics of groups one and three

Cluster 4: totally integrated

- 1 Fluent only in English
- 1 Have little knowledge of their ethnic culture
- 1 Likely to be born in the UK
- 1 View themselves as English and have patriotic feelings towards England

difficult as some would make out. "The marketing community has the skills, it just has to use them. It's not as if we're not used to understanding segments."

He suggests moving away from the standard DM campaign trail. "Why not use field marketing, face-to-face marketing, or try advertising in their press, or on their TV channels?" he asks. "Some communities are geographically concentrated, so look at a map."

Get to know your market

Another method is to use community leaders to reach an audience. If someone the community respects advocates a particular brand or product, those in the community are more likely to give it a try. Claire Davidson, Lion's strategic communications director, says: "Spend time getting to know the community you're talking to, and get to know who the community leaders are – people who culturally influence the community – like the hairdresser or grocer."

To get it right requires effort. Nohr believes the provision of a complete service is the only way to do it. There's little point sending out an effective mailer if, when a non-English speaking customer contacts you, whether by phone or letter, there are no facilities in place to translate for them.

Another mistake is assuming everyone under the ethnic minority banner is the same, and approaching them all in the same way. Paul Seligman, MD of agency 141, believes this mistake is a common one: "Marketers assume all Bangladeshis, for example, have the same purchase patterns. We have to tread carefully. There's a tendency to make generalisations."

It would be easy to think that without any of the data usually available from lists, segmenting the ethnic community audience is near impossible. Ellerton believes otherwise, but acknowledges that it's easier once you actually have some data to work with.

She says: "We're seeing a lot of interest from companies that know they have an ethnic customer base, but don't know the proportion. It's a matter of data analysis to work out the numbers, research into the customer base and look at the clusters to see how relevant a marketing campaign would be."

One method of segmenting the ethnic market, according to the Interfocus report, is basing clusters upon levels of cultural integration. Although fairly crude, it provides a starting point for marketers to build a picture that can be overlaid with other indicators of consumer behaviour. (See boxes, above).

Targeting ethnic communities isn't impossible then, but the majority of multi-discipline agencies are simply not experiencing demand for this kind of work. Seligman doesn't believe the Data Protection Act is entirely responsible: "It probably made it harder and discouraged people further from undertaking campaigns, but it's not as if there was a flood of work before."

The reason, he says, is that much of the work goes to people the group in question is already familiar with, or to specialist agencies, such as the government's agency for publicity procurement, COI Communications. It recently worked with the DTi to raise awareness of the national minimum wage among ethnic minorities.

Lion, too, works with a number of agencies targeting ethnic minorities. For the RSPCA recently, it produced a campaign targeting Asian shopkeepers, encouraging responsible care of guard dogs. It included a leaflet produced in a range of languages.

Clearly certain companies and brands are seeking out ethnic minorities as a target audience, and there are agencies ready and willing to do the work. It just needs everyone to open their eyes a little wider and see the possibilities that exist.

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