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**JOHN GAPS III/THE REGISTER**

Nannette Rodriguez, who owns advertising agency VivaMedia in Clive, shares material printed in Spanish that her clients use. Delivering bilingual services is smart because Iowa's Hispanic population is growing, Rodriguez said.

Tips for connecting with a Hispanic audience

Nannette Rodriguez, who owns VivaMedia, offers six Hispanic marketing tips to clients:

- Realize that faces are changing in our neighborhoods. Between 2000 and 2005, the Hispanic population in Iowa grew 32 percent.

"Marketing messages are most effective when consumers can relate to them."

- Understand that "Español is here to stay." Provide content in Spanish but also do more: Create in-culture messaging or campaigns specifically created for the Hispanic market.

- Leave misconceptions behind. Neither "Hispanics only buy used cars" nor "Hispanics don't have money for computers" is true. Their median income might be slightly less than that of the general population, but Hispanics still have significant disposable income.

- Remember that Latinos log on. Hispanics use the Internet to connect to their home countries and get information for purchasing decisions for their families. This is a reason to emphasize a bilingual presence online.

- Latinos like hands-on marketing. Language hurdles make Hispanics eager for information in Spanish.

Hands-on experiences introduce products in a nonthreatening environment and are useful decision-making experiences.

Tailoring pitches to Hispanics pays off, businesses discover

Understanding the culture can be profitable. Content in Spanish makes some Iowans smile and others frown.

By BONNIE HARRIS
 REGISTER BUSINESS WRITER

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STORY CHAT: 2 Comments

Nannette Rodriguez wants companies to look into the future - way into the future - to the year 2030.

That's when Hispanic residents are expected to account for nearly 10 percent of Iowa's total population. With nearly 109,000 living in the state now, Hispanics already make up the largest ethnic minority.

Businesses already are taking notice. The Iowa State Fair, Pella Corp. and Principal Financial Group are among companies that have started to step up their Latino marketing efforts beyond simple translations of brochures. What's most effective in attracting Hispanic customers, marketers say, is material that talks, looks and acts like them.

"Latinos are a brand marketer's dream, because they're incredibly loyal," said Rodriguez, who owns VivaMedia, a Hispanic advertising agency in Des Moines. "They remember who reached out to them first, and who did it right."

This year, the Iowa State Fair, one of Rodriguez's clients, distributed its first bilingual brochure to promote the "Sounds like fun" theme, and Rodriguez worked with marketing officials to make sure the Spanish translations fit the culture. Words like "whee!" and "yum!" became "iyupi!" and "ique rico!" - even the cow on the front of the foldout brochure offers a Spanish-friendly "Mú."

The fair is also running radio advertisements in Spanish. In prior years, it had published a separate brochure in Spanish.

The effort has been well-received by Hispanic would-be fairgoers, marketing director Lori Chappell said.

"When they take them, turn them over and see

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- Perfect a strategy. Know the audience and find a reliable marketing partner; building a brand in the Hispanic market from the ground up will deliver the best results.

it's in Spanish, too ... we always get a smile," said Chappell, who estimated that about 10 percent of the fair's roughly 1 million visitors are Hispanic.

Chappell said the fair's research numbers are gathered in surveys of fairgoers throughout the year. The number of Hispanic residents attending the fair wasn't listed in 2000, she said, but since the fair began publishing promotional materials in Spanish a few years ago, attendance has shot up.

"It certainly is a growing market," Chappell said. "We want to reach them, yes, but we also want to be effective."

Other businesses have been able to measure their marketing strategies more clearly, but they say it takes time and a consistent effort to attract new Hispanic customers.

At GuideOne, one of the nation's leading insurers of churches, spokeswoman Sarah Buckley said the West Des Moines company's Web site has given it helpful feedback.

"The special section on the site that's Spanish is a well-visited area," Buckley said. "We are now getting about 350 unique visitors to that section a month, and those visitors make 600 downloads of materials. It's been a slow, but very steady, increase over the last couple of years."

The entire GuideOne site averages 45,000 unique visitors a month.

Not all companies are as interested in marketing to Hispanics, however, and not everyone is a fan of using foreign languages in ads.

State Rep. Dwayne Alons, a leader in passing Iowa's English-only law, said companies that advertise in Spanish are discouraging Hispanic residents from learning English - which isolates them further.

"I would prefer to do everything possible for better assimilation of all minority groups," said Alons, a Republican from Hull. "In the best interest of how America has been founded, it would be better to help these people assimilate so they can do their business in English and deal with the vast majority of Americans who are here."

Alons said the English-only law does not require the state to offer documents or other materials in any language other than English.

"Businesses just see this type of marketing as a way for more revenue," Alons said. "I wish they would think it through a little more."

Laura Castro de Cortés, a consultant in Omaha who works with banks to better serve Hispanics, said clients are often paralyzed by the notion of



The Iowa State Fair produced its first bilingual brochure, with input from VivaMedia of Clive.

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such marketing.

"I have seen banks in highly-populated Latino neighborhoods absolutely refuse to do anything in Spanish for fear of getting that one angry letter from Crazy Joe," said Castro de Cortés, who has clients in Des Moines and other Iowa cities. "In some places, if you do anything at all for an immigrant, you're a traitor to the country."

The banks that do understand the importance of marketing to Hispanics are "reaping the rewards," she said. At Wells Fargo, for example, at least one Spanish-speaking customer service representative is available at every bank branch.

"They are setting the expectation for the Latino community," Castro de Cortés said. "Latinos know they can go there and someone can help them. What good is it to have all this marketing material in Spanish when you go into the bank and there's no one there to talk to you about it?"

Still, even the best intentions can fail miserably if companies aren't careful, Castro de Cortés said. The Hispanic population comes from 20 countries in Latin America that are as diverse as the regions of the United States, she said. If marketers don't know the audience and "talk right" to it, the effort will flop.

"It's like a male actor trying to do a campaign for feminine products," Castro de Cortés said. "We'd be like, 'No, no, no ... you don't get it!' That's an extreme example, but that's how bad it can be. It's easy to make a lot of little mistakes if you don't know the market."

Rodriguez, whose clients are split between mainstream and Hispanic advertising, said more businesses are starting to realize the potential for attracting Spanish-speaking customers. Although Iowa "still doesn't have a real Latino professional class," Rodriguez said the spending power is worth noting. According to state demographers, the median household income for Latinos in 2000 was about \$33,000, or \$6,000 less than the median for the state.

"This is Iowa's new market, and their money is as good as anyone else's," Rodriguez said. "There's no option but to be ready. In a blink of our eyes, it'll be 2030."

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STORYCHAT 

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