Forcing the Link: Hispanic community's impact on U.S. businesses

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With a fast growing population, the opportunity to connect is time-sensitive; connections need to be made now. The consistent increase in population offers a growth opportunity for businesses willing to work with the Hispanic community. Three concepts can successfully build a connection between businesses and Hispanics:

1. Cultural identity and values
2. Education and language
3. Effective communication

Cultural Identity and Values

Establishing a cultural understanding of Hispanic background and origin will reinforce a stronger and deeper connection between businesses and this community. First of all, the term “Hispanic” is not the same as the term “Latino.” Hispanics are individuals who originate from a Spanish speaking country. The U.S. Census Bureau defines “Hispanics” as the following:
[People] who classify themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 questionnaire – ‘Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano,’ ‘Puerto Rican,’ or ‘Cuban’ – as well as those who identify as the ‘other’ category – originating from Spain.4

The term “Latino” refers to anyone from Central or South America, not necessarily Spanish speaking.5 Hispanics value their national identity, and we should not assume that they are from one country or another. Businesses should be mindful of these differences and demonstrate proper respect for their individuality. Understanding cultural differences will help businesses to see more clearly not only Hispanic identity but also Hispanics’ perceptions and values.

Hispanics have a “committed-until-death” attitude, insinuating a long-term connection based on loyalty and trust. Glenn Llopis, contributor of Forbes Magazine, says, “earn the trust of Hispanic consumers and your brand will dominate.”6 Hispanic values of trust and commitment could be the difference between a business growing and folding. If trust is lost, trust may never be regained. Become an integral part of the Hispanic voice by communicating with them, not at them. Fostering loyalty and trust with the Hispanic community is the foundational building block businesses need to thrive.

Education and Language

Over the years, Hispanics have seen educational advancements and an increase in the percentage of proficient English speakers. The number of postsecondary-educated members of the Hispanic population has doubled between 2003 and 2013.7 English proficiency rates among Hispanics have also increased. Pew Research shares a study based on English proficiency among Hispanic youth. Figure 2 illustrates the rise in English proficiency since 2000. (See Figure 2 at right.) Many of the youth mentioned in the study are now degree-holding English-speaking adults. These adults grew up speaking Spanish in the home and are more likely to speak both languages in their homes today.8

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Figure 2: English Proficiency up among young Hispanics since 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages 5 to 17</th>
<th>% who Speaks English very well</th>
<th>% who Speaks only English</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 33</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 to 49</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
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<td>18</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>53</td>
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<tr>
<td>50 to 68</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69 and older</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: Pew Research Center8
A study performed in conjunction with the most recent U.S. Census found that the number of U.S. residents age five and older who speak Spanish at home “has increased 131.2 percent (from 17.3 million to 40 million) since 1990.” Hispanic college graduates who speak both English and Spanish bring more to the table than just language; they bring cultural understanding. These college-educated adults are the key to bridging the cultural gap and overcoming the language barrier.

As Hispanics become more proficient in English and advance in their education, businesses should work alongside these individuals to begin bridging the gap. A parallel exists between Hispanic students and future workers. Hispanic students understand both the Hispanic identity and the traditional idea of American identity; they will be an asset to any business researching for ways to better connect with this community.

**Effective Communication**

Communicate with Hispanics, but do not communicate at them. Language barriers create confusion and hesitation for Hispanics to trust businesses. First, businesses must create opportunities for Hispanics to advance both inside and outside the workplace. Create opportunities to overcome personal challenges, build family relationships, and excel in the workplace. Providing these opportunities will develop trust, support, and loyalty – characteristics that businesses always need.

Second, businesses must empower the Hispanic community by leveraging their heritage. Genuinely caring about individuals outweighs buying them out. Listen to the people’s needs, build trust in areas where the people need it, and learn about the people’s family and heritage. If businesses apply these three principles, they will soon be on track to dominate their industry.

**Conclusion**

To capture sustainable business growth, American corporations need to act now to earn the powerful relationship with the Hispanic community by implementing the following:

1. **Empower Hispanics and their identity.**
2. **Work with the upcoming Hispanic generation to bridge the cultural gap and overcome the language barrier.**
3. **Focus on becoming an integral part of the Hispanic voice by communicating with them, not at them.**

Applying these concepts will allow businesses to successfully connect with and build the momentum needed to keep up with the growing Hispanic population.

**Notes**

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Llopis, Earn the Trust of Hispanic Consumers and Your Brand Will Dominate.
12. Ibid.