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The Power Of The Urban Youth Demographic - And How To Target It

by Shawn Prez, Dec 31, 2013, 8:00 AM

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The holiday season marks the time when companies begin reevaluating marketing budgets for the new year. For all brand marketers, it is important to note that the urban community was recently found to have \$1 trillion in buying power in the United States. However, this market -- specifically the youth market -- is largely ignored by marketers for major brands. For example, only three percent of 2012 marketing budgets -- including those for television, radio, magazine and digital ads -- targeted the African-American demographic.

Again and again, we see budgets allocated for reaching the young white community. This is especially obvious in various teen clothing stores, which continuously display beaming hordes of white youth with maybe one or two minority youth included in television advertisements or store displays. But marketers are missing the point with the addition of one or two African-American teens. An audience wants to feel included as part of your brand experience -- not like a second thought that is less important than another demographic. By not fully targeting the urban youth community, marketers may be ignoring an incredibly viable market.

As marketers reevaluate fund allocation for 2014, it is time for them to consider a new, seemingly untapped market to target. There are three tactics brands can use to achieve marketing success to the young urban population that won't break the bank: social media, product placement and guerrilla marketing.

1. Social media marketing: A recent Pew Research Center study found that two social media platforms are dominated by the young urban community. Both Twitter and Instagram's majority user base is comprised of young African-Americans. Targeting both platforms is an affordable and effective way to reach this community, which is constantly plugged into these networks for the latest news, gossip and products.

Take advantage of these cost-effective platforms and post a cool visual of your product on Instagram and Twitter -- inviting your audience to share their thoughts and engage with your brand. You can even film short videos showing a celebrity or a sports figure, popular within this demographic, interacting with your product. As long as you strive for engagement and relevancy with your audience, a little can achieve a lot on social media.

2. Product placement: A major tool used by marketers is product placement. Just as for any other demographic, it can easily be used to specifically target the urban community. There is a slew of movies, television shows and books consumed by the urban community on a daily basis. Placing your product within these media is not only great for exposure -- it positions your brand in a truly unique way and puts you in a conversation with your core demographic in a much more subtle and accessible way.

Contact networks, production assistants and editors. Let them know why your product is appealing to the young urban crowd. Product placement has proven to be effective with young audiences, which spend a significant amount of time consuming media. Take advantage of this method, as it allows marketers to spend the money and effort displaying their products in time slots or locations that are shown to reach very important and influential demographics.

3. Guerrilla marketing: One tactic that may prove to be the most effective with the young urban community is guerrilla marketing. It has a strong impact on driving sales and brand awareness while utilizing minimal resources. Guerrilla marketing focuses on non-traditional tactics, using various brand ambassadors to interact one on one in a very intimate way (being on the ground and actually touching consumers where they eat, sleep, and play such as campuses, concerts, sporting events, nightclubs, etc.)

By using brand ambassadors to interact directly with your audience, you are guaranteed that your brand's products or messaging are distributed to the correct demographic. And the interactive nature of guerrilla marketing aids in building a brand experience by helping a community create a more lasting relationship with your product.

While reevaluating your budget this year, consider the spending power of the urban youth community, which is virtually ignored by marketers today. Marketing to this demographic does not require a major redesign of your 2014 budget. By utilizing tactics that specifically target the lifestyle and location of your audience -- whether it be online, on television or in person -- you can reach this powerful market without bursting your budget.

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