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Obama's Example Can Inspire Change in Ad Industry

Don't Focus on His Race, Focus on His Winning Strategies

By Steve Climons

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Steve Climons

On Nov. 4 Americans of all ages and backgrounds spoke out in their selection for the next president of the U.S. On Jan. 20, the results become reality. Barack Obama won by symbolizing change and calling on people to help him. His bipartisan positions were backed up not only by his recognition of the problems and struggles all people face but the inspirational notion that that we have the power to do better. That inspiration, of course, was reinforced with the eloquent chant of "Yes we can." That inspiration transcended race and gave him the power to connect -- and to win.

In today's advertising industry, marketers concerned about accountability and ROI could utilize something from this when they target an increasingly diverse mass market. One of the things specifically pointed out at the ANA's recent Masters of Marketing was the ability to be "inspirational." But that really can't happen until marketers recognize the perspectives of their targets. This seems simple enough with insight research, but is it really?

In the case of Barack Obama, he drew from his background and family struggles to make a compelling argument to other voters who could relate to his experience. Undoubtedly, his biracial background helped. Theoretically, marketers should have resources that represent the target audience and can therefore understand its "perspective" when it comes to crafting advertising campaigns.

But how many major advertising campaigns today are really developed and conceived by resources that represent and have a true understanding of today's diverse marketplace perspective? And, whatever the case of the lower ranks, it's probably safe to say that in many instances the leadership -- the executives -- on the bulk of campaigns isn't really that inclusive.

So how does the ad industry recognize its opportunity to connect with today's diverse general market and become more inspirational in motivating people?

- 1. Represent the people.** Get the best and brightest people to develop marketing campaigns that are clearly part of the demographics of the marketplace you are targeting. This would include not just the one consumer group that has traditionally been the primary representation, but today's multicultural America, which includes African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and others. Leverage their experiences and draw from their life stories, needs and issues.
- 2. Be inclusive in leadership.** Make sure you are not only representing the people but their perspectives and opinions are involved from start to finish and from top to bottom in the development of the strategy and execution of marketing campaigns. Barack Obama is a clear example of that kind of leadership.
- 3. Make a point that resonates and inspire.** So much of today's advertising is about entertaining and not enough about making a point that matters. Today we are bombarded daily with an overload of information, and the hardest thing to get is people's attention. Barack Obama did just that in his campaign and there were obviously plenty of people that could truly relate to it. When it comes to developing a message, the best way to inspire is to make a point about something that matters to

people and that they can relate to. You will be getting that by having resources that represent and understand the people.

All things considered, especially in lieu of accountability, the recent New York Human Rights Commission hearings on the disparity of diversity in the ad industry and the now subsequent "Madison Ave. Project" report from Cyrus Mehri, it is time for agencies and clients to recognize a change the marketplace can believe in.

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Steve Climons is founder, president and creative director of Crossover Creative Group, Richmond, Calif.