

Marketing across cultures to reach new customers



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YOU ONLY HAVE TO turn on the TV and watch a political debate or an evening of sitcoms to know we're living in a country with a rich blend of cultures and races. This fact of life presents opportunities and challenges for your company and its retail marketing efforts.

The audience you were reaching 10 or 20 years ago may look very different today. Are you marketing to all potential demographics, or only certain types of people? When fresh eyes see you, what impression are you making?

The article "When Does Culture Matter in Marketing?"¹ discussed a study in which white and Asian students experienced different messaging in a grape juice ad.

Researchers found that white students were generally more receptive to promotional messages about the benefits of drinking grape juice. Asian students, on the other hand, were more receptive to preventive messages about the health problems that can be avoided by drinking grape juice.

In other words, the study demonstrated that not everyone experiences ads in the same way.

How can you reach new demographics with your marketing? Here are four tips to keep in mind ...

1. Know your demographics.

The first step in reaching new demographics is knowing who is out there. Is your knowledge of your potential retail customer base complete? Do you know for sure who lives in your area, or are you guessing?

There is helpful data to be found online — like on the U.S. Census website (www.census.gov) — to help you learn more about the demographics you serve.

If your company is national, you might consider demographic targeting based on certain geographical areas.

2. Speak the language (at least a little).

It's not necessary to put out marketing materials in every language. English is still the most commonly spoken language in the United States and will usually suffice. If you live in an area with a high population of a certain group that speaks a particular language, though, advertising in that language is a good idea.

That said, a little bit of translation goes a long way. Imagine the person who visits your Farwest Show booth and sees signage that says "Hello!" or "Welcome!" in their native language. Immediately, you



have made a connection with that person. Your company will be more attractive and more welcoming than those who haven't made the effort to do this.

3. Take a look at who is in your ads.

Are the people pictured in your ads representative of all demographic groups among your potential customers? This doesn't mean you have to find the perfect picture — that mythical group of people,

one of each race, gardening together! If you're only showing one type of person, though — especially one race or one sex — it's likely you are excluding some customers. When you do that, it's harder for them to be receptive to your marketing. Review your ads and make changes as needed.

4. Celebrate other cultures.

If you know of certain demographic clusters in your area, take the time to learn what is important to them. Are there holidays or festivals that might be a natural tie-in to the nursery industry, or simply the practice of growing and planting? For instance, almost every culture has some kind of ritual that honors the natural world. Can you join in a community celebration in a meaningful way?

If your marketing is limited to messages written in your language with pictures of people who look like you focusing on

your own culture's events, you're leaving out part of the population. When that happens, you'll miss out on a subset of potential customers who are waiting to hear from you.

Whether you are planning your next ad or posting on your Facebook page, the tips listed here can help you start reaching new demographics. ☺

¹LaPlante, Alice. (2005). When Does Culture Matter in Marketing? Retrieved from <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/when-does-culture-matter-marketing>.