

ETHNIC STRATEGY IS A BIT OF A MISNOMER

On May 28, 2013, I attended the Ethnic Insights Conference, hosted by Canadian Grocer, at the International Centre in Mississauga. There were some great insights about the increasingly important ethnic consumer that will assist marketers in understanding some of their high level motivations and needs. Ethnic consumers were primarily defined as the two largest groups of immigrants in Canada, the Chinese and the South Asians and the fastest growing group from the Philippines. According to Statistics Canada 21% of Canada's population are foreign born.

There is no question that the ethnic population in Canada cannot be ignored but to suggest that it is necessary to treat ethnic consumers differently from the mainstream, completely acculturated Canadians is misleading. Realistically there are very few companies who can afford to have separate set of sales and marketing strategies just for the ethnic consumer, because the 80% of Canadian born consumers continues to represent the lion's share of the market.

As with any marketing strategy the key is to understand the consumer you are trying to attract and market to their needs and behaviours and emotions. Looking for the similarities will help stretch that marketing dollar much further, than trying to re-invent the wheel. A mother of a newborn still wants and needs diapers whether they came from China last year, or whether they have lived in Canada all their lives. The key will be to identify the common theme or behaviour that links all mothers, or any specific target group, regardless of ethnic background. In fact, there is a need for product to move beyond the cultural borders no matter whether they are ethnic foods and beverages moving into the mainstream or the mainstream foods and beverages moving into the ethnic market. This point was reinforced by the panel discussion made up of individuals from ethnic grocery stores and food manufacturers. The best growth potential is in the blended strategy, where products are targeted at both ethnic and mainstream consumers as opposed to having two separate approaches. In large metropolitan centres such as Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal, there are ethnically focused television programs and stations but the mainstream media continues to be used fairly widely. As I highlighted in a previous blog post regarding the media habits of Chinese and South Asians:

- 50%+ have read English/French newspapers in the past 7 days
- 45-50% have listened to English/French radio stations in the past 7 days
- 65-75% have watched English/French television in the past 7 days

The best way to sum it up is "the ethnic consumer is not an alien", said Partha Guha, of Unilever's International Division. There is likely more commonalities between a mother from China who has lived in Canada for 5-10 years and a Canadian born mother, than there is between a Canadian Baby Boomer and Canadian born Millennial. Think about ethnic

consumers as another consumer segment who has the same basic needs just different influences and not a completely different species.

