

Ethnic Groups Don't See Themselves In Advertising, Digital Content

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Creative that appeals to race, background is key to engagement

Brands that want to reach ethnic minorities online are not doing a very good job, according to some research. An April 2011 survey by Yahoo!, Mindshare and Added Value found that according to Hispanics, blacks and Asian-Americans, digital advertising does not engage them. When asked for three brands doing a good job reaching them, most said they couldn't name even one.

One big reason was that respondents felt their ethnic groups were poorly represented in messaging. Some 78% of blacks, 74% of Hispanics and 72% of Asians surveyed agreed that diversity in ads is the best reflection of the real world. And nearly as many in each group said ads should show more of that diversity.

Diversity in appearance in ads is important, but it's not enough. "One thing we heard is not to just take an ad that has white people in it and replace them with an Asian family," said Lauren Weinberg, vice president of strategic insights and research at Yahoo!, whose group conducted the study.

"They said brands are picking people who may look like me, but they are not speaking to concepts that are relatable to me," Weinberg explained in an interview with eMarketer. Respondents said they would prefer to see "someone who is not famous but who is authentic" as a spokesperson for a brand, not just "white-washed celebrities."

One way to be authentic is to reflect consumers' core values and interests. The study found particular cultural "drivers" important to ethnic groups. For about half of blacks surveyed, music and beauty were significant. For Hispanics, a big driver was food and recipes, and for Asian-Americans, restaurants that reflect their tastes were key.

Hispanic respondents, for example, pointed out that an ad with a Hispanic family sitting down and enjoying a meal together shows that the brand knows what is important to that group, Weinberg explained.

Black respondents indicated that they would like an ad for a beauty product directed specifically to them, showing actors that look like them, listening to music that would appeal to them.

Why have marketers been slow to understand the importance of ethnic authenticity? Weinberg said that brands do understand the importance of multicultural advertising, but "one of the fears is that if you make a misstep in this area, the backlash is really negative."

But, she added, "I think we will see a lot more multicultural marketing in the coming years. Brands want to get it right."

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