

¿Habla Español?

Understanding and Reaching the Spanish-Speaking Market

A conversation with David P. Henry,
President and CEO of TeleNoticias LLC



Two of the most powerful strategic tools in the marketing arsenal are public relations and market segmentation. Each of these tools can exponentially boost your visibility and attractiveness to your desired customer base. They can also help customers feel more closely connected with you — even when you make mistakes. While effectively leveraging public relations and marketing segmentation is not especially complicated, it does require a certain level of specialty knowledge and planning. We spoke with **David P. Henry**, President and CEO of TeleNoticias, LLC, a public relations firm specializing in the Spanish-speaking market.

1. *What is the most common misunderstanding about PR?*

People generally don't get that it is very strategic. Most of the time people see parties and events or they see publicity and they think that's all there is to it. There's a lot that goes on behind the scenes — and that's more important than what happens in the public eye. Before you get your story out to the media, for example, you need to figure out what the message really is, what you're trying to achieve with it, optimal timing for release and the best vehicles for getting it out. It takes a great deal of strategy to align PR activities with an organization's business, brand or sales goals.

2. *So there's more to PR than meets the eye?*

Definitely. For example, there's crisis communications, which we've seen British Petroleum (BP) botch fairly badly. There are also specialties like financial communications, investor relations, internal communications, public affairs/government relations and social media outreach, among others. Another critical area is community relations — with community defined fairly broadly. Let's say, for example, that a pharmaceutical company wants to interact with a specific group of doctors and nurses or a power utility wants to start a dialog with a neighborhood. In fact, that dialog is at the root of PR. It's not just about the one-way communication of getting the message out; it's about creating a multi-level conversation. Smart companies learn from the conversation, react to it and even use it to shape their business strategies.

3. *Can you give some examples of things we see every day that are probably the result of PR?*

Around holiday time, you might see some footage of a UPS fleet leaving a shipping facility to illustrate a story about the volume of holiday deliveries. That footage is “b-roll” (background video) provided free of charge to the news outlets. In fact, 99% of the time, when you see video of an assembly line, manufacturing, etc., that's PR footage supplied by a company. A bigger example is all the messaging that accompanies the launch of a new Apple product, from the pre-announcement, to the announcement, to the information about when the product will be available and how people can get it. The powerful PR machine behind those launches can drive consumers to wait in line for hours, and sometimes days.

4. *TeleNoticias has a specialty in the “Hispanic” market. Why are the essentials that people should know about that market segment?*

Every company has key communities and audiences — whether these are customers or business partners. When a company has consumers as customers, it has to aim its messages fairly specifically where they will generate the most interest and sales. Even though a product may be equally useful to say, people in their fifties and people in their twenties, you cannot talk to them the same way because their values and expectations are slightly different. The Spanish-speaking market segment is no different; you need to adapt your strategy to be more effective in reaching it. That means keeping in mind that there’s a different language and a different culture. There’s good reason to do this: the Hispanic market is growing at 3x — 4x the rate of any other market segment.

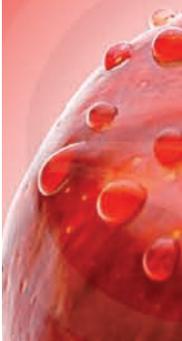
5. *So why don’t businesses try to connect with such a rapidly-growing audience?*

A lot of it has to do with lack of understanding. Many businesses think they reach the Hispanic community through regular communications, but they haven’t taken the time to educate themselves about some of the most basic characteristics of the market segment. For one thing, Hispanics tend to spend more of their disposable income than people in other demographic groups. For another, the average age of the Hispanic market is about ten years younger than that of the market at large — 25 vs. 35. That makes it the largest youth market and also means that a huge number of future consumers are going to be Hispanic. Like everyone else, they want to be acknowledged for who they are. Businesses that overlook them — or deal with them clumsily — are not just ignoring the future of the country; they are leaving money on the table.

6. *How do you “acknowledge” such a broad-based group?*

Well, obviously, it’s a complicated market. Its members come from — or trace their ancestors to — over a dozen countries in various parts of the world. Plenty of members of the Hispanic market speak both English and Spanish. There are various levels of acculturation, too; some are recent immigrants, while others are 3rd generation Americans. Some hang on to old customs, some assimilate, but most tend to like parts of both cultures. Another key to the Hispanic culture, broadly speaking, is that it’s very family-centric. It’s not uncommon for three or four generations to live together, and for kids to live with their parents until they get married. Families do things together, including eating and making decisions — even buying decisions. Any message or story that doesn’t acknowledge this context isn’t going to make sense to the market. A few years ago, there had been some incidents of toddlers getting strangled by the cords that control window blinds, so we had been asked to help tell the story and make people aware of the potential dangers of window cords. The footage that we were brought was completely inappropriate for the Hispanic market. It showed an immaculate, spare living room with white walls. It was very plain and almost sterile. But I’ve never seen a Spanish-speaking home that had a room like that; since home is the center for this market, the colors

“ *The Spanish-speaking market segment is no different from any other; you need to adapt your strategy to be more effective in reaching it.* ”



are nearly always warm and the spaces are inviting. We told the client they couldn't use the footage because the visuals alone would start to negate the message so that it became less effective. Another thing to watch is idiomatic language use. I've seen many companies create Spanish translations of their messages that were technically correct, but not correct in usage. You have to make sure to adapt your language so that it means something to your audience.

7. *What key steps could/should a non-Hispanic business take in order to start establishing a presence in the Spanish-speaking market?*

There's actually a fairly low barrier to entry. Latinos typically enjoy and embrace American culture as much as their culture of origin. Companies like McDonald's, Unilever and Pepsi have been very successful at building relationships in the Spanish-speaking marketplace. There are six pointers I would offer:

1. The fact that you're interested in reaching the Hispanic market is a good first step.
2. You do need to work with a consultant or someone who understands the market and can give you good advice.
3. Just because someone is Latino or speaks Spanish doesn't mean that they understand the Hispanic market in a PR/marketing/communications way
4. It's ok to take baby steps; many companies start by adapting their websites and print marketing collateral to the Spanish language.
5. It's not hard to reach this market, but there are language and cultural differences that you have to acknowledge.
6. The Hispanic community is very welcoming — and very forgiving. If outreach is done in an honest, true way, people will be receptive. If you make a mistake, they will embrace you and help you correct it. Some other multi-cultural groups may not be so open.

8. *Can you think of a time when the work you did had an immediate and evident impact on a client's bottom line?*

PR as a whole — like most marketing efforts — doesn't typically have an immediate financial impact. It's about initiating and maintaining a dialog that may lead to loyal customers and sales over time. The old rule still holds that a message has to be received seven times before a purchase is made or action is taken.

There was one time, though, when our work got almost instantaneous results for a client. The company was launching a new product that kills harmful viruses and bacteria while leaving the "good" germs alone. The product was also completely safe; you could literally spray it in your mouth. We sent swab kits to various newsrooms and had them swab areas — like keyboards and doorknobs — then spray them with the product and re-swab. We then conducted a series of satellite TV and radio interviews with these stations with the company spokesperson who discussed the results and the benefits of the new product. While the spokesperson was on the air, the client's phone and email were going crazy and sales spiked.

David P. Henry is President and founder of TeleNoticias. For nearly 20 years, David has helped a wide range of clients strategically employ public relations as a tool to initiate dialog with their chosen audiences. He has broad expertise in creating and executing broadcast strategies, managing communications for established brands, launching new products, developing special events and directing crisis and issues communications.



David is active in the public relations industry and is an Accredited Public Relations (APR) member of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). He is a past chair of PRSA's national membership committee and its Health Academy. Additionally, for more than 13 years, he has served as a judge for the Silver Anvil Awards and Big Apple Awards. David is also president of the recently-launched New York Chapter of the Hispanic Public Relations Association.

*David is a frequent guest lecturer at New York University and frequently speaks at public relations conferences. He is contributor to the definitive guide to PR for the Spanish-speaking market, **Hispanic Marketing and Public Relations: Understanding and Targeting America's Largest Minority**. Prior to founding TeleNoticias, David worked for well-known PR firms including MediaLink and Orbis Broadcast Group.*

David holds a B.S. in journalism from the University of Maryland. In his free time, he enjoys playing guitar, swimming, cycling and running. He and his wife Leslie divide their time between Manhattan and Southold, NY (Long Island) with their golden retriever, Samanta. David can be reached by email (dhenry@telenoticiasusa.com) or telephone (212.683.6000 x107).



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