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Agencies follow Hispanic market

Advertisers searching for talented people comfortable with language and culture

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By NOBLE SPRAYBERRY / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

Dieste Harmel & Partners, a Dallas-based ad agency, has added about 40 employees in the last two years, and the competition for talent proved heated.

"There are more companies right now needing positions filled than there are people to fill them," said Salma Gottfried, the company's executive director of account management.

Dieste focuses on advertising for the growing Hispanic market, requiring talented designers and account managers comfortable not only with the language of the target audiences, but also the culture.

Dieste's own growth reflects the business world's interest in tapping the Hispanic market. The company was founded in 1995, and its Web site touts it as the third-largest Hispanic ad agency in the United States. A division of Omnicom, Dieste employs 200 people in New York, San Francisco and Irvine, Calif.

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NATHAN HUNSINGER/DMN

In a pitch to potential customers, Dieste's Web site notes that the U.S. Hispanic market grows by 2.7 people each minute. With the growth comes the need to find the right people with the skills to tap a very specific market.

Population shifts in Dallas alone illustrate just how robust the market is for ad agencies. Dallas County gained 175,000 Hispanic residents between 2000 and 2005, now totaling about 838,205, according to the Census Bureau.

International searches

Ms. Gottfried said the company often recruits internationally, particularly seeking creative talent whose visuals and designs will strike a chord. Although it's possible for an outsider to develop a grasp of the Hispanic market, often it's critical to have a personal understanding of a fast-growing community.

"I think the market can also be learned in terms of consumer insights and consumer trends," Ms. Gottfried said. "But living and breathing the culture is your best teacher."

Ad agencies focused on the Hispanic market such as Dieste and Bromley Communications in San Antonio have experienced billing growth as high as 30 percent during the last eight years, said Rod Underhill, president of the Dallas Ad League. Comparatively, companies targeting general markets grew at a 5 percent rate, he said.

Companies such as Dieste and Bromley recruit experienced talent from countries such as Mexico, Spain and Brazil, earning national accounts for general markets while maintaining an emphasis on Hispanic accounts, Mr. Underhill said.

"This will be a high-growth market for the next 20 years," Mr. Underhill said. "People want to join – and not just people of Hispanic origin."

Roger Tremblay is Southwest director of Media Networks Inc., a division of Time Inc. The company places ads targeting local markets in national magazines, including leading publications serving Hispanic readers.

Los Angeles, Dallas and Miami represent opportunities for anyone interested in advertising or marketing careers focused on the Hispanic market, with Denver and Phoenix one tier below, Mr. Tremblay said.

Although many companies might shy from giving a blunt description, he believes most ad agencies targeting the Hispanic market would describe the same ideal employee: at least a second-generation U.S. resident who speaks Spanish and understands the culture of recent immigrants and what it takes to market to that segment.

'There are more companies right now needing positions filled than there are people to fill them,' said Salma Gottfried, executive director of account management for Dieste Harmel & Partners, a Dallas agency specializing in Hispanic advertising.

Disconnect

There's a disconnect, however, between academia and the workforce, said Edward Rincón, president of Rincón & Associates.

Only four business schools – Southern Methodist University, Florida State University, the University of California at Los Angeles and DePaul University – offer a course on Hispanic marketing, Mr. Rincón said.

"It's a shame academia has turned its face on the whole Hispanic industry," he said.

He is an adjunct professor at the SMU Cox School of Business and teaches a class on Hispanic marketing as an elective for MBA students.

Language was the preoccupation for many years, particularly as the need for Hispanic marketing and ad houses emerged, Mr. Rincón said. Translators or others with limited marketing experience tried to fill the gap, starting small companies to serve a niche, he said.

However, for a company to succeed, it's critical to approach the Hispanic market with the same, proven techniques long used throughout the marketing and ad industries, Mr. Rincón said. The knowledge extends well beyond simply converting ads into Spanish.

The seven-week class at SMU, taught twice a year, usually attracts 25 to 30 students.

The course focuses on topics such as the selection of target markets, customer analysis and pricing. It's important to understand various market segments, grasping factors such as whether or not someone is native born or an immigrant. Each can shape the marketing message.

For example, native-born Hispanics are typically more educated, have higher incomes and have different media-viewing habits than recent immigrants, and marketing and advertising campaigns must address the subtle differences, Mr. Rincón said.

Difficult to recruit

With so few schools focusing on such issues, ad agencies find it difficult to recruit employees straight from college, Mr. Rincón said. Few new graduates have the marketing acumen, language skills and marketing experience to fill critical jobs, he said.

"There's a demand, but the industry isn't putting out enough people to meet the demand," he said.

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