



Powered by Clickability

The Hunt for Hispanic Executives Heats Up

PR and advertising shops find it increasingly difficult to fill positions at senior levels

October 01, 2005

By Derek Reveron

Jose Lopez Varela, vice president and managing director of Boston-based Hill Holiday's Hispanic advertising practice in Miami Beach, is a wanted man. In his two years on the job, Varela has received 10 to 12 calls from headhunters representing advertising agencies and corporate marketing departments. Varela declines the overtures, he says, but they keep coming.

Varela is not alone. Alex López Negrete, president and CEO of Houston-based López Negrete Communications, says that at least 10 headhunters have courted his employees within the past year, resulting in the loss of one to a corporation.

A president of a Hispanic public relations and marketing firm got so fed up with headhunters hiring away employees that the executive pulled their biographies from the agency's Web site. And Felipe Korzenny, founding director of Florida State University's Center for the Study of Hispanic Marketing Communications in Tallahassee, says he gets at least two calls a week from Hispanic agencies and headhunters asking for referrals.

Competition for Hispanic advertising and marketing professionals is hotter than ever because the demand for them far exceeds the supply. "Agencies and corporations are having a very hard time filling positions, especially at the senior levels," such as creative and directors, vice presidents and partners, says Korzenny.

The Mexico-born professor cites several reasons for the shortage, among them: Companies are spending more money on advertising to the Hispanic market and hiring Hispanics for their own marketing departments.

Agencies are coping with the shortage partly by hiring people from Latin America. "Almost all the large Hispanic firms have either hired people from Latin America or have tried to, mostly for senior creative positions," Korzenny says.

The foreign-hiring strategy fills key slots with talented people, but some of them initially lack knowledge of the U.S. Hispanic market. "That's where the rub is. They have to understand the market because it's different. But that can be learned," says Negrete, who has hired several executives from Latin America. Hispanic advertising executives say it is better to teach the U.S. Hispanic market to talented Latinos from sophisticated agencies in mature Latin American markets than to struggle for a long time to fill key jobs. Agencies would hire even more foreign Latinos if the U.S. did not have so many restrictions on visas, Korzenny says.

Hispanic advertising agencies also try to fill the talent void by hiring from each other. However, many members of the Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies (AHAA) try to adhere to a certain headhunting etiquette. "There's an informal AHAA code that you don't go out and devastate competitors by stealing talent from them because it could happen to you," says Negrete, who is also chairman of AHAA's board. Adds Varela, who is AHAA's treasurer, "I will not go after an employee at an AHAA member agency. That's my personal code. But if that person sends me a résumé, that's different."

Industry experts say the long-term answer to the shortage is to develop more homegrown Hispanic marketing and advertising talent. But that effort is hampered by the lack of college courses and MBA programs in Hispanic advertising and marketing.

Only a handful of such programs exist. Last year, Florida State began a graduate certificate program and undergraduate minor in Hispanic marketing communications. The University of California in Los Angeles has offered an annual extension course in Hispanic marketing for 18 years. And last summer, Southern Methodist University in Dallas started offering a Hispanic marketing course within the school's MBA program.

Edward Rincón, president of Dallas research firm Rincón & Associates, teaches the course at Southern Methodist. He says he proposed the course to four colleges in Texas and three rejected the idea. "Hispanic marketing education has been relegated to the professional seminar circuit," Rincón says, "and not taught in colleges like other marketing subjects."

Links referenced within this article

Find this article at:

http://www.marketingmedios.com/marketingmedios/magazine/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1001218237

Uncheck the box to remove the list of links referenced in the article.

© 2007 VNU eMedia Inc. All rights reserved.