



## SIXTY YEARS OF FIGHTING

In November 1961, at the age of five, **Liz Castells** was presented with a very special birthday cake. She was told to care for it, and wait until they arrived at their destination upon boarding a plane and passing by armed members of the military, to dig in to it. Those servicemen weren't kind, but they were convinced that ruining a five-year-old's birthday by fully inspecting her cake wasn't the kindest gesture one can do in the name of the *revolución*.

Upon arrival in the U.S. from Cuba, the cake was cut into. Inside, safely, were the family jewels.

It's that determination, fight, and spunk that continues to propel Castells as she works with such high-level clients as Charter Communications. As she celebrates 40 years in marketing and advertising, she hasn't lost a beat. In fact, she may be fierier and more energized than ever.

"I was just in New York for 10 days. I'll be back in Los Angeles next week," she says from her current place of residence, in the far northern reaches of Scottsdale, Arizona.

The travel is picking up for Castells, who serves as President/CEO of Infusion by Castells, the eponymous multicultural advertising agency she founded in L.A. in 1998. But, she says, "Even though things are back to a 'new normal,' clients have been getting so used to Zoom meetings."

Today, it's an equitable mix that is manageable. Still, one thing has definitely returned to normal. "I'm working like crazy," she says.

What's keeping Castells busy?



A rebranding from scratch for a new client is one major endeavor, aside from her work for Charter, owner of the Spectrum cable and internet brand. With Charter, Infusion has a team of 45 working on African-American and some Asian creative, in addition to the Hispanic market. While Castells oversees the Charter account and their strategy and marketing, Leticia Juarez returned to the agency for a Partner role, serving as EVP of Strategy & Marketing. Juarez is taking on high-end creative needs; hiring for new positions is actively ongoing. "We're down four people through a combination of things," Castells says .

Welcome to the "new normal." It's welcome for Castells. New business – and inquiries from potential new clients – are coming.

#### EVOLVING, WITH DETERMINATION

With activity buzzing at Castells' agency, there's hardly a concern that a major shift in how consumers view and hear entertainment and informational content could fundamentally disrupt the one thing advertising agencies excel at: commercial advertising.

Thanks to entertainment-focused clients including Charter Communications, Castells and her team are very aware of the rapidly changing habits of multicultural consumers. She says Infusion has been fully integrating social and digital efforts across every department for a decade. "A lot of campaigns lead with digital videos even before the linear TV," she notes.

And, while "Smart TVs" will completely replace traditional TVs, one thing won't change. "The content and the consumption of that content will always endure," she notes. "From a creative standpoint, we apply the same strategy. We just apply them to different formats – shorter ad units, long-form for the bottom of the purchase funnel, and codes for instant response."

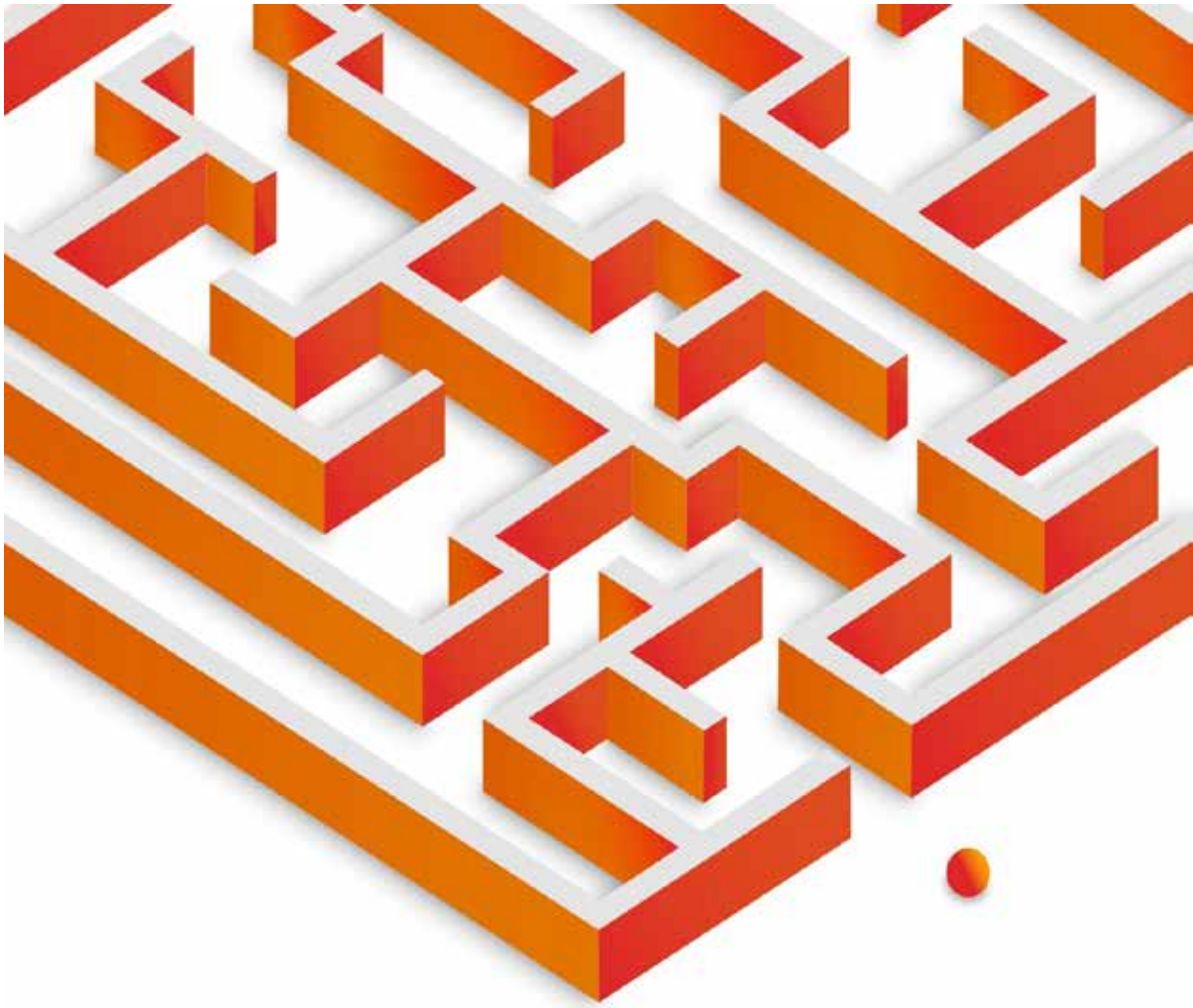
Yes, digital leads. But making sure there is strong cross-platform consumer engagement is paramount.

#### A SMART INVESTMENT

With a "digital first" approach for its clients, Infusion has ensured, at least in one way, that it is "future proof." When asked what her shop has done to secure long-term growth, Castells offers up a bullet-pointed summation, based on her 40 years of experience as a marketing and advertising leader.

First and foremost: Be a strategic business and marketing partner to clients, not just an advertising shop. "Effective marketing goes beyond ads, fails if that's the focus, and the relationship won't last," Castells says.

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She also shares that Infusion has excelled by offering one-stop multicultural and Hispanic marketing needs, assisting first-time clients in building their U.S. Hispanic business in a phased approach, and by being a mainstream agency resource.

From a communications standpoint, Infusion by Castells has strived to become culture and language fluent; viewing digital as a traditional media; creating social plays across all marketing; and recruiting Hispanic celebrities and influencers that are well-matched with the target consumer.

"Multicultural agencies will win more business and rise to agency of record status as more brands understand the importance of aligning themselves to the 'New America,'" Castells adds. "Marketers benefit from Hispanic agencies' unique insights and intelligence. We make it easy, and make them look good to their C-suite."

Castells is happy to report an increased spend among its Hispanic and African-American clients. Even better: the agency since March 2021 received more inquiries from prospective clients than at any point in the past decade. She's hardly surprised.

"I can't fathom that any CEO with a brain can ignore the Hispanic market," Castells says. "They are under pressure to identify profitable growth areas and Hispanics are the 18-49 [year old] sweet spot for marketers. Couple that with the Social Justice environment, and COVID, and the perspective of stale business-as-usual C-Suite mentalities has changed. They are reassessing a lot of stuff, including priority growth areas, channels and formats."

Will fresh U.S. Census data further fuel this activity? Or, are the new figures leading to a level of apprehension among some because of accuracy concerns?

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Castells comments, "Yes, there are many things that will lead to undercounting of Hispanics – undocumented immigrants, the citizenship question ... every tool we use to count Hispanics, including Nielsen, undercounts Hispanics. That said, the American Community Survey and new Census data will revalidate what we know. Even if Texas is undercounted, Hispanic representation will likely be higher."

#### JUSTIFIABLE HYPERFOCUS

Still, some industry observers continue to fret that the African American consumer is disproportionately receiving all of the attention – and ad dollars designed for "multicultural" activity.

Castells acknowledges this. And, she sees nothing wrong with it.

"Yes, I believe that the attention has been overly focused on the Black community, but justifiably so, and the DEI attention and growth will undeniably and positively impact the Hispanic community as well," Castells says.

"I know various companies that are currently assessing their multicultural representation by department, by level, by vendors, and by marketing spend. I've also seen an increased focus and spend among our clients for both the Hispanic and Black segments. Yes, in some cases recent multicultural efforts were merely following the news cycle and political correctness and have morphed into one-offs. But COVID challenges and constant change taught everyone to adapt, be nimbler and understand that the status quo just won't do."

That's why Castells, who feels 16 yet has the knowledge and empowerment of an industry veteran who started at DDB in New York in 1981, believes the "new normal" in the U.S. is not solely post-pandemic.

"It's where people of color will soon be the majority," she says. "We are making progress, and it's a smarter paradigm than before. Now we just need to expand that across more Fortune 500 companies."

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