

# A TIME FOR OPPORTUNITY

**“When difficult times happen, opportunities arise, and that opportunity is for multicultural marketing,” says Liz Castells-Heard, the CEO and Chief Strategy Officer at Infusion, a shop based in Los Angeles with a heavy presence in New York. “We just need to get to that conversation.”**

With the “Black Lives Matter” movement and a COVID-19 pandemic that only seems to worsen in key locales where high-density Black or Hispanic communities appear, things are certain challenging for consumers of color. But, is Hispanic advertising losing traction because of events that have magnified the African American community?

Castells-Heard says no. Through early June, Infusion’s two major clients were plenty active: **Toyota** shifted their dollars to digital, while Charter Communications’ **Spectrum** amped up their efforts as a whole. “We’re even pitching new business right now,” she says.

Overall, some of the most compelling spots, in Castells-Heard’s view, since the start of the pandemic have come from Proctor & Gamble Co., Nissan, McDonald’s, Walmart, Google and Home Depot. For P&G, an “Estamos Unidos” campaign showed how the company is helping the Hispanic community a time of need.

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But, there's only short-term visibility ahead of election day and plenty of uncertainty as to what the remainder of 2020 will bring to the U.S.

What should transpire has been said by the likes of the ANA, the Culture Marketing Council and other industry organizations. However, Castells-Heard believes there is one group of individuals who have largely been absent from the conversations of how to best target, and continually market, to the multicultural consumer. That would be the VP, and the CMO.

"What we really need is a consortium of senior agency client and media people, who can really go forward with this message," she believes. "The importance of multicultural and Hispanic really needs their voice. We've asked to speak on this and have been told, no, only clients are allowed to speak, not an agency. We need to unite. Clients have to be involved to take this to the next level."

Ad, for Castells-Heard, there's no better time than now. "Think about the next three to six months," she says. "The Census is coming out. When you put that together with the events of the last few weeks, I am as passionate and as focused as ever and I believe our time is finally here."

She continues, "I am cautiously optimistic, but being optimistic is part of my job and inherent in my nature. Still, there are many reasons why I think by next year Hispanic marketing and media will be stronger than ever. I believe more clients will get it - beyond the core of auto, CPC, retail, wireless and QSR. The quarantine has driven interesting things, like making companies impatient for bureaucracy (If we moved offices in 24 hours we can launch innovations quicker?), and a new willingness to try different things. But, more than that, the surge of 'black and brown lives matter' will cause a primordial shift."



This leads Castells-Heard to go on a rant.

"I've been working in multicultural marketing for over 30 years, and marketing for almost 40 years. I've seen Hispanic marketing go from the 'childlike' '80s of regional efforts; the 'post-pubescent' '90s of homogenization; and 'young adulthood' in 2000 where Hispanic became the smart bottom-line thing to do. Then came the bicultural language wars to the mid-life crisis with the 'Total Market' approach. Many battle wounds later, Total Market has run its course and we are doing effective multicultural marketing. Now, the impact of COVID-19 ethnic stress colliding with the post-George Floyd effect created the perfect storm - and it is pervasive. It has brought diversity matters to the forefront for companies to truly address black and brown inequality and figure out how to deliver multicultural marketing in the New America.

This leads Castells-Heard to suggest that Hispanic agency heads should ask what they can leverage and package the right pitch to the C-Suite.

"The other thing that has been positive coming out of quarantine is that the lens is shifting," she says. "What is superfluous and outdated, and how can we be more innovative? A lot of general market people are now thinking the same way."

## CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

While Infusion's operations are mainly in L.A. and in New York, Castells-Heard has largely worked through the pandemic from her home in the far north of Scottsdale, Ariz. By the time many people read this, in early July, she'll be in New York. The first "normal shoot" since the pandemic concluded in late June in Los Angeles. This followed the first virtual shoot, conducted in early June.

"There are challenges and learnings that come with that," Castells-Heard says. Of course, "Everybody pivoted to the type of messages that were necessary."

With her sights set on a strong rebound and a forceful push into 2021 and beyond for Hispanic marketing and advertising, Castells-Heard says, "We have come a long, long way, and in that time, we have also gotten the other brands and categories to come into the fold. We've made a lot of progress through the years, but a lot of it comes down to ignorance. A lot of executives think 'acculturation,' and it becomes an African-American sell, wholly focused on cultural communication. It is something we need to work on."

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