

Latino Passion Points: Trite or True?

By Yvonne “Bonnie” García



Even if you don't understand Spanish, you probably won't have much difficulty picking up on recurring themes in the spots you see on Spanish-language TV. There's the family, with *abuelita* (grandma), the soccer ball rolling into the street, the mom tenderly serving the evening meal to her children.

Do these repetitive visual themes signal that Hispanic ad agencies lack creativity? Are Spanish-language audiences not deemed sophisticated enough for creative expression?

No y no.

Hispanic marketing agencies face a double challenge: to be creative and culturally relevant. Just because a Spanish-language commercial has a familiar premise doesn't mean the spot has to be boring. Hispanic agencies are injecting more humor in their ads, for example, and constantly strive for innovation, just as do general-market marketers. But sacrificing cultural integrity would translate to lost sales for advertisers.

Latinos are not all alike—that's a given. How long we've lived in the U.S., education and income levels, why and how we came to this—those factors preclude lumping us all together. Still, certain Latino pulse points are wired into Latinos' "cultural DNA": family, food, language, sports (especially soccer), music, friends, cultural pride, and faith. Marketers who reference those pulse points with an innovative twist will earn trust and loyalty.

Family is the cornerstone of Latino culture; social occasions tend to revolve around the family. Latino families, larger than those of non-Latinos, tend to be close-knit. When Latinos fly home from an out-of-town trip, chances are the entire family will go to the airport to welcome them back.

Latino family size and unity have implications for marketers. Latinos spend more at the grocery store, and they tend to shop in groups. If Latinos could invite anyone to their barbecues, first on the list would be family, followed by friends, according to the third annual [Weber Hispanic GrillWatch survey](#).

Food for Latinos tends to be more than just "eating to live." Meals are for being together as a family, sharing the day's events, and honoring traditions. Latinos don't all eat the same food. Rice is a staple of Latino cuisine, but the type of rice and cooking methods vary considerably from country to country. Food names also change. But whatever the recipe or what its name, chances are a mother or a grandmother has prepared the food from scratch as an expression of her love, and her family will savor not just the meal but also the time together.

"*Se habla español*"—at least to some degree. Not all Hispanics speak **Spanish**, fluently and Latin Americans may use different words for the same item. (For instance, peanuts are *cacahuates* in Mexico and *maní* in Puerto Rico.) Still, the number of Spanish-dominant and bilingual Latinos will increase by 45% during the next two decades, according to a [recent study](#) by the [Roslow Research Group](#) for [Hispanic USA](#). Spanish remains a strong cultural

bond among Latinos. For many, English is the language of business, and Spanish is the language of love.

You see a lot of **soccer** balls on Spanish-language TV ads for one reason: passion! The [Univision](#) network's June 24 telecast of the Mexico-Argentina World Cup match drew an audience of 6.7 million, making it the single largest sports telecast among Hispanic viewers ever, including Super Bowl broadcasts, and the top-watched sports telecast in Spanish-language TV history.

Latin **music** preferences also vary by cultural subgroup. Mexican *rancheras*, *meringues* from the Dominican Republic, the *sones* of Cuba, the *festejo* of Peru, Latin jazz, and the newer reggaetón and rock *en español* all contribute to the rich rhythms of Latino culture, often heard now in mainstream USA.

Hispanics tend to be social creatures. **Friends** of both sexes greet each other with kisses or *abrazos* (hugs). *Padrinos* are friends so close that you trust them with the upbringing of your children.

Cultural **pride** is a link to self-identity, even as Latinos assimilate and adapt to U.S. life. Savvy marketers are aware of and respectful of Hispanic traditions, and also understand subculture differences. For example, Cinco de Mayo is a Mexican holiday, celebrating Mexico's defeat of the French at Puebla on May 5, 1862—obviously not an appropriate sponsorship if your goal is outreach to a Cuban-origin community.

Faith anchors the Hispanic culture. Most Hispanics are Catholics, but Hispanics worship in all faiths, including the Jewish religion. A strong Pentecostal movement exists in Latin America. Still, no matter what our religion, an element of spirituality flows through our culture and how we celebrate our holidays.

Culturally relevant Hispanic advertising and below-the-line marketing are more conducive to success than is charging in with the identical concepts and executions that work in general-market advertising. Whether you use *ballet folklórico* dancers or soccer balls in your campaigns, whether your spot is humorous or sentimental, be sure you market to Hispanics with passion and respect for cultural cues.

And remember, if you want to win the hearts of Hispanic customers, ask about their children!

The president of [Market Vision](#), a full-service marketing agency based in San Antonio, TX, Yvonne García pens a bimonthly column on Hispanic marketing for CHIEF MARKETER.