

AdvertisingAge®

Sorry State of Diversity in Advertising Is Also a Culture Problem

Despite Temporary Hike in Minority Creatives After Recruiting Efforts, Agency Environments Seem to Be Turning New Hires Away

By [Michael Bush](#)

Published: January 31, 2011

NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- It's 2011, and while many things have changed in the advertising industry, the sorry state of diversity hiring isn't among them.

Despite some positive trends over the past year -- general-market agencies are hiring more Hispanics (as they try to win more Hispanic business) -- a number of watchdog groups and industry professionals still think the situation is far from good.

Though the most current figures aren't yet available, the New York City Commission on Human Rights doesn't seem to be satisfied with progress made since it intervened in 2006. And while holding companies say they're making progress, the threat of a class-action lawsuit still looms.

Related Stories

[Is Cross-Cultural an Industry Breakthrough or Threat to Ethnic Shops?](#)

While Some Praise Concept of a Unified Message, Others Argue General-Market Agencies Are Using it to Move in on Others' Turf

[Minority Content Helped Seal NBC Universal Deal for Comcast](#)

But Will Commitment Help Marketers Looking to Spend More Advertising Dollars in the Sector?

Hiring, of course, is only part of the problem. The failure to retain minority talent, which many believe is due to the lack of an encouraging environment, is the other issue.

Carol Watson, president, Tangerine Watson, a cross-cultural talent consultancy, said she hasn't seen dramatic differences in minority hiring over the past year but has noticed one positive trend.

"Employee resource groups and affinity groups are a big thing now for general-market agencies that get a lot of multicultural assignments," Ms. Watson said. "There has been more hiring, of Hispanics in particular, for these groups that pitch and consult clients, discuss messaging and help identify all of the opportunities in multicultural marketplace."

Rob Norman, CEO of WPP's Group M North America, said diversity hiring has occupied more of his time than he thought it would since taking the CEO role one year ago. He said the agency has brought on a full-time diversity recruiter. But he said that all of the programs and efforts may never be enough to rectify the problem.

"Not only do you have to recruit people that are diverse, you have to create environments under which those people are comfortable working in," Mr. Norman said. "There's also a wider issue for the industry of making it more attractive and inclusive. The hardest thing is making people aware that our industry exists, that it's open to a broad range of talent and it's a credible profession for people to seek out."

Clifford Mulqueen, deputy commissioner general counsel at the NYC Commission on Human Rights, said the commission will soon be releasing a report on its investigation into the diversity hiring practices of 15 ad agencies including Arnold, Euro RSCG, Saatchi & Saatchi, Grey Direct and Grey Interactive, Y&R, Ogilvy & Mather, Kaplan, DraftFCB, Gotham, BBDO, DDB, Merkle and Partners and PHD.

After finding fault with the diversity-hiring practices at many of the big ad agencies in New York, in 2006 the commission signed a memorandum with them. The sides came to an understanding that the agencies would increase their minority hiring. "We asked them to set goals for three years and from information they provided two years ago most of them actually met or exceeded their goals over that three-year period," he said. The commission went back to the agencies in 2009 looking for more current demographics and hoping that positive hiring trends had continued. It wasn't happy with what it saw.

"The numbers weren't as good as you might have thought they were based on the information they provided for that three-year period," Mr. Mulqueen said. "Now we are in the process of analyzing that information and we are going to issue a report on those findings."

"A court action may not be the way to go," Mr. Mulqueen said. "It seems like they have to do something to change the entire culture."

In an email, Heide Gardner, senior VP-chief diversity and inclusion officer of Interpublic Group of Cos., said the holding companies have improved for women and minorities. "Our workforce data show continued progress across our U.S. operations. Looking at the 2010 numbers, we see year-over-year improvement for women and people of color at both the manager and executive levels. And despite an overall headcount reduction due to the broader economic conditions, our population of people of color at all management levels increased by about 11% last year, and women by over 40%." Interpublic, it should be pointed out, ties diversity-hiring targets to executive incentive compensation.

Cyrus Mehri, an attorney at Mehri & Skalet, who filed charges with the EEOC against the various holding companies and a number of their agencies for discriminatory hiring practices and one of the people behind the Madison Ave. Project, said this is an industry that's behind the times in terms of diversity hiring. "As a result it's missing opportunities in terms of talent and business opportunities," Mr. Mehri said.

Mr. Mehri points to a study centered around Super Bowl 2010, which found that of the 60 or so commercials aired during the game, not one of them was captained by a minority creative director. "That's a shocking revelation," he said.

What's Being Done?

A look at a few of the efforts designed to boost diversity in the ad industry

4A'S MAIP (MULTICULTURAL ADVERTISING INTERN PROGRAM)

Established 1973

Places multicultural students in 10-week paid, full-time summer internships at member agencies nationwide.

AAF MOST-PROMISING MINORITY STUDENT

Established in 1996

Awards and recruiting conference connect the advertising industry with the nation's top minority college seniors.

MARCUS GRAHAM PROJECT

Established in 2007

The project's mission is to identify, expose, mentor and train ethnically diverse men and women between the ages of 16 and 34 in all aspects of the media industry.

ADCOLOR

Established in 2005

AdColor is intended to promote increased diversity in the advertising, marketing and media industries, while inspiring current and future communications professionals of color by celebrating the accomplishments of diverse role models and industry leaders.

AAF MOSAIC AWARDS

Established in 2001

The awards recognize successful multicultural marketing and diversity efforts.

BRANDLAB

Established in 2011

BrandLabs connects Minneapolis marketers and agencies with students at low-income high schools and allows students to take advertising classes and apply for internships at some of the city's ad shops.

4A'S AND HOWARD UNIVERSITY'S JOHN H. JOHNSON SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATIONS

Established in 2008

The partnership is intended to establish a center to address challenges, eliminate barriers and identify opportunities to achieve a more diverse and inclusive advertising industry workforce at middle to senior management levels.

MEDIAVEST DIVERSITY WEEK

Established in 2010

Diversity Week celebrates MediaVest's community and diversity efforts, as well as the establishment of MediaVest's Diversity Council. It includes sessions on understanding the dual responsibilities of

working parents, celebrating individuality in the workplace, and showcasing multicultural communication work produced by MV42 and Liquid Thread.

SMG DIVERSITY EXCHANGE WITH AAF MOSAIC CENTER

Established in 2010

The Exchange is an interactive workshop that showcases emerging minority- and women-owned media suppliers, with the aim to help level the playing field, by providing education, access and networking opportunities to these suppliers.

SMG L.I.N.K.S. (LIFESTYLE AND INTEREST NETWORKS FOR KNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT)

Established in 2006

L.I.N.K.S. was created to bring new and current employees with common interests together by spurring participation between nine affinity groups including African-American, Asian, Latino, GLBTA and more.

GROUP M PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Established in 2010

It is available to students in CCNY's Advertising/Public Relations Program, with an emphasis on undergrads with diverse backgrounds. The project consists of a scholarship program and a separate enrichment fund designed to benefit a wide range of Ad/PR majors by allowing them to participate in professional development opportunities.

Copyright © 1992-2011 [Crain Communications](#) | [Privacy Statement](#) | [Contact Us](#)