

## Urban Appetite

### *Closing the Sale*

*UMCA Co-founder, Carl Washington, was recently approached to share his expertise in marketing to the urban consumer. The December 2005 issue of Black Enterprise Magazine featured invaluable concepts and strategic philosophies patented by the founders of UMCA. Below is the December article highlighting several quotes, on how companies can go about changing their focus to appeal to the young, urban consumer.*

*As seen in Black Enterprise, December 2005*

They seemed an odd couple at first - one a conservative and established institution, the other a group of energetic disciples of hip-hop culture. But when the U.S. Postal Service joined the 135<sup>th</sup> Street Agency to throw a media reception in New York, it was a match made in heaven. The two businesses came together promote the June campaign of the African-American Heritage Stamp Series Pioneers in Black Music.

“We had MTV there, the New York Post, allhiphop.com, Hot 97,” says Shante Bacon, founder of 135<sup>th</sup> Street Agency, a New York-based marketing firm that specializes in helping companies reach the urban youth consumer. “These are media outlets that wouldn’t have been targeted by the Postal Service.”

Bacon, 28, along with partner Saptosa Foster, 29, invited media guests to a USPS reception at the Harlem Tea Room in New York. The agency cleverly tied in the promotion of Pioneers in Black Music series, which features stamps of legends such as John Coltrane and Marian Anderson, with Black Music Month.

“The marketing campaign was very successful,” says Monica Hand, manager of USPS public affairs and communications. “I was very impressed with the number of young people working in the PR and marketing industry and their genuine interest in the Postal Service.” The Postal Service awarded 135<sup>th</sup> Street Agency with a \$100,000 marketing contract in August.

Foster, a freelancer writer for *Vibe* and *XXL* magazines, understands the influence of the urban consumer: “They’re driving pop culture. They’re coming up with the language, the clothing, everything.” Government agencies, corporate America, non-profits, and businesses small and large are taking note. They recognize that young urbanites are viable, cash-wielding consumers ready to support their business. According to Packaged Facts, a publishing division of MarketResearch.com, 15 to 24-year-olds spend \$485 billion annually. But there’s a way to communicate to them and it isn’t always with a rap lyric.

**“You have to be in their lives,” says Carl Rouchè Washington, president of Los Angeles-based Urban Marketing Corporation of America. “You have to pay attention to the market. Go grassroots, pump up the volume and be aggressive.”**

Try the following tactics to make your business more appealing to the urban consumer:

#1. Go where they are. Think of ways to bring the product to the typical hangout of the urban youth consumer. Are they at the mall? At city parks? Pick the places where you can **“create a momentum of emotion,”** Washington says. **Think of marketing campaigns that might mesh well with All-Star Weekend or the NBA Finals.**

#2. Perfect your presence. Once you’ve determined your message, make sure it’s clear and consistent. For example, if you’ve got a booth set up an event, the people behind the booth should resemble your target market in dress and attitude.

#3. Get attention with cultural icons. **“Know the influences of your target market,”** Washington says. **Could Snoop Dogg also sell your idea? If you can’t afford the latest hip-hop artist or athlete, make sure the face representing your product is one your audience will relate to,** Washington advises.

#4. Make sure your product is relevant. Your product must make sense to the urban youth consumer. **“The product is crucial. If it isn’t relevant, you can sell all day for nothing,”** says Washington, who uses Nike as a good example of a company that knows its product and audience.

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