



**MOSAIK**™  
STRATEGIES

## DIVERSIFY OR DIE!

*Mikel Smith Koon*

*President, Mosaik Strategies, LLC*

November 2004 --Diversity is not just a common buzzword any more. True, most organizations see it as a “nice to have,” the “right thing to do,” or the new generation of affirmative action. But it is only the businesses and institutions that understand diversity as a profitable initiative and a business imperative that will survive.

Why? Because our population is evolving. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2050, the minority population will represent 47 percent of the total U.S. population, compared to today’s 28 percent. Challenges that have been part of life for minorities, as well as immigrants, will greatly influence not only this country’s economy and businesses, but its colleges, too.

Enrollment in higher educational institutions mimics the trend in the general population: the greatest increase is found among minority students, while the percentage of non-minority (white) students has been declining at an increasing rate. So if educational institutions do not prepare for the continued increase of minorities and market to those students today, they will not meet the needs of half of our citizens, half of our workforce. And those institutions will not reap the benefits of these groups’ significant purchasing power.

History illustrates that when people’s needs are not met, they turn elsewhere. The United States was formed by a group of pioneers whose need for religious freedom led them to create more accepting society. After the Civil War, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were formed to meet the educational needs of the nearly four million freed slaves who were not allowed to attend southern colleges and universities. People find a way.

You can be proactive, plan ahead, and address these needs. Or you can be reactive and scramble to adjust after all is said and done. Minorities will continue to enroll in colleges and universities at an increasing rate. The question is, will they be enrolling in yours?

### Develop a Strategy

With greater diversity come unique challenges: assimilation, social and religious differences, language barriers, and in some cases, poverty and low preparedness. When you decide to market to minority groups, you must address these issues and employ programs to encourage smooth transitions, provide a comfortable community, and ensure success for the groups they target. In short, you need a strategy.

It is critical to first choose specific minority groups to target. Pursuing minorities in general with a “one size fits all” approach is not a strategy, it’s a disaster! You have to segment and prioritize. You may choose to market to a segment locally, for example. If you’re in northeast Wisconsin, you might want to target the large and growing Hmong population. If you’re in northwest Georgia, you might target the Latino community there.

Once you have identified the appropriate segments, research the needs and culture of the population to find the best way to reach them. To determine whether your target is even viable, learn the value the culture puts on education. Is poverty an issue? Many immigrants come from an income status lower than that of average Americans. Could this affect views of education? Is religion central to the culture? Try places of worship. In the recent past, for example, many African American leaders reached the masses of the population through churches. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reached Montgomery, Alabama and ultimately the world by preaching from the pulpit of his Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Many groups can be reached through nontraditional means.

With your target’s needs determined, develop trust and gain understanding by establishing a two-way line of communication between you and your market. Relay the benefits of an education, then listen. Based on the response you get, shape your marketing strategy and develop your plan to reach your market.

## Partner with Businesses

You don't have to plan in a vacuum. There are many other stakeholders in the successful education and preparation of our future labor force. One of the largest is the business community—a natural partner for educational institutions.

Corporate philanthropy has been on the rise lately, and successful businesses understand the value of diversity as a business imperative. It increases profitability through productivity, retention, the recruiting pipeline, the corporate image, and customer loyalty. Through valuable community outreach and charitable support, diversity helps develop the community where both the business and employees live. Educational programs are often a high priority.

But engaging businesses to participate in your educational program requires preparation and skill. Large companies can receive anywhere from 200 to 3,000 philanthropic requests per week. There has to be an obvious benefit to both parties for a company to consider establishing a relationship with an educational institution. So research your prospects. What value will the relationship bring? As part of your overall plan, you must develop a corporate relations strategy.

### *Identify Benefactors*

First identify companies with an interest in both education and your local region. Local companies often support institutions in communities where their employees live and work.

### *Consider Companies Recruiting Your Students*

If a company spends time on your campus interviewing students, they obviously have an interest in the education and success of those students. These companies might value an opportunity to have their brand in front of your students, faculty, staff and families. In some companies you might find senior leaders with a connection to your institution. Add that company to your prospect list.

### *Understand the WIIFM Factor (What's in it for me?)*

Before contacting a potential prospect, be clear on every possible benefit to the supporting company. While part of the value is "because it's the right thing to do," hard, quantifiable value can close the deal. The size and reach of your institution is quantifiable. The industry relationships are valuable. These are of great value to a company that wants to reach this community.

### *Identify Contacts and Champions*

Company leaders are your best contacts. Identify a decision maker who has authority over the right budget. For example, you would not go to a Propecia (hair loss medication) product manager who would be hard pressed to see the value in a relationship with your school. However, if you have a strong public health program and your school is located in close proximity to West Point, Pennsylvania, you might consider Merck's Research Laboratories as a potential alliance. Find the right contact. Better yet, find a champion—an alumni or another company representative who supports your school. This person can introduce you to the decision makers and can steer you around any potential concerns. It takes time to make the right connections, so be persistent, and be realistic.

### *Follow Up*

Don't forget to follow up! Companies expect periodic updates, so don't lose supporters because you forgot to follow up. An annual "thank you" works well and does not have to be expensive. Try a holiday card or a thank you lunch. Remember, companies consist of people who make the decisions. They act on behalf of the company, but they react and respond as individuals. Make sure your corporate relationships stay mutually beneficial.

Diversify or die? You decide. But decide with a full understanding of both the challenges and rewards. By meeting the changing needs of our society, you ensure the success of your educational institution.

---

© Copyright 2004 Mosaik Strategies, LLC.

## REFERENCES:

Giving USA 2004, American Association of Fundraising Council  
 U.S. Census Bureau, 2001  
 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002  
 Howard University, Washington, DC  
 The King Center, Atlanta, Georgia