

The power of the right voice

By: Veronica Cool 🕒 January 22, 2016



COOL TIPS

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In sci-fi shows, we often explore 3rd dimensions and alternate universes — completely fictional and entertaining. Yet, in reality, these other dimensions do exist. Of course, the inhabitants are not three-headed monsters nor zombies, but people. People not in your sphere, or dimension.

This month has been a story of juxtapositions for me, hopping between the two universes I reside in: mainstream America and the Hispanic community. These worlds co-exist within inches of one another, almost occupying the same space, yet the two worlds are not connected. Or rather the connection, the bridge, is still being built...

Let's begin with the John Ruhrah School in Southeast Baltimore, which is slated to become a community school when it is renovated and to satisfy the needs of the community, which needs to provide input and feedback. The student population at John Ruhrah is predominantly Latino, with Spanish-dominant parents; culturally speaking, these parents are uncomfortable speaking up, let alone providing constructive feedback.

The Southeast Community Development Corporation led the charge and, proudly, my team and I conducted the focus groups and interviews to get the necessary data. But even more, we gave residents a voice.

And that voice was further amplified by leveraging the local media. And this is where effective connection, messaging and engagement comes into play as we continue to build the bridge of connections — we partnered with Mundo Latino and Somos BaltimoreLatino.com.

You are wondering why I need to write about how advertising in a newspaper drives results and attendance. Right?

- 426,770 people reached weekly.
- 15,000 followers.
- Over 43,000 people ENGAGED on FACEBOOK.

Yes. A tiny, boot-strapped media company, Palomino Media LLC, established by Pedro Palomino, a 30-year veteran journalist and reporter from Peru, has become the voice of the

Baltimore Hispanic community. Through two channels, an online magazine and a monthly print newspaper. Just six years ago, Pedro launched SomosBaltimoreLatino.Com, which has now become the most reliable source of information for our local community, reaching thousands of people daily.

We proudly partnered with Pedro Palomino and Somos Baltimore to ensure increased participation and engagement from the Hispanic community around John Ruhrah school. And here's the thing; our community attended AND participated. They used their voices. And the universes did connect.

Let me backtrack and give you more color: The Homeland Security Department announced that it would begin to conduct raids aimed at deporting adults and children who have already been ordered removed by an immigration judge. These raids, conducted by Immigrant and Custom Enforcement (ICE), would likely affect hundreds of immigrants who fled violence in Central America since the start of 2014. Technically, and I am NOT a lawyer, my personal opinion is that these folks are seeking asylum status and should thereby be considered refugees.

The raids began in Georgia and North Carolina and tales of fear and terror have spread quickly and widely. There have been several unconfirmed reports of raids in Baltimore. This situation is terrifying people to such a degree that they are keeping their children from attending school for fear of getting detained.

Imagine not going to school because Mami is afraid.

By the way, do you carry your passport or birth certificate with you at all times? AT ALL TIMES? How do we know you are a citizen?

Obviously, confusion and panic are exacerbating the situation. But (Hispanic engagement lesson) Hispanic journalists are community advocates in our native countries. They educate, inform, opine, advocate for the viewers or readers.

And they are trusted sources of guidance.

Pedro and his team were able to engage the community with video and Spanish messaging. The hysteria has settled a bit. They disseminated data from various organizations explaining the rights of citizens and how to be protected.

And the Hispanic community attended, participated, provided feedback... They engaged. The influence of this journalist help us connect the two worlds by serving as a bridge for the message. We used the right message (Share your feedback.); right channel (SomosBaltimorelatino.com); right influencer (Pedro Palomino, journalist and editor); and the right support (bilingual and bicultural people to communicate and support these Latino families) to achieve our goal.

And that goal was to effectively engage the growing Hispanic community, educating the kids and providing them with the tools that will empower them to be successful and contributing members in society, the mainstream society, not just the other dimensions of alienated neighborhoods just slightly out of frame. This was a great week. Till next time, Amigos.

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