

WHY DIVERSITY REMAINS ELUSIVE

The marketing industry and employee diversity ought to be a fantastic match. Advertising works the cutting edge of societal evolution, after all. And over the past generation, the expansion of ethnic populations has become one of the most powerful social and economic dynamics in America.

But this hasn't been a groundbreaking relationship. Minority members accounted for 13.9% of total creative employment at the large agencies surveyed by the American Association of Advertising Agencies last year, up from 11.3% five years ago. Total minority employment at the agencies improved to only 20% from 18.2% in 2002.

Peter Krivkovich, president-CEO of Cramer-Krasselt, Chicago, says advertising is not a popular career choice for minority college grads.

"The industry doesn't cast a wide enough net looking for talent," says Ronald Owens, former VP-diversity inclusion at TMP Worldwide, a marketing-recruiting agency, and now an independent consultant.

Some marketing executives concede Mr. Owens is right. "As an industry, we've been more reactive rather than proactive about this," says Bill McDonald, exec VP-brand strategy for Capital One.

— Doctors, lawyers

At the same time, "Advertising hasn't been at the forefront of [minorities'] minds as a career point," says Peter Krivkovich, president-CEO of Cramer-Krasselt, Chicago. Moses Foster can explain that. "A huge part of our [African-American] population is the first generation to go to college," says the president-CEO of West Cary Group, a new Richmond, Va.-based agency. "And if you tell your mom and dad, 'I'm going into advertising to be a copywriter,' they might rather you be a doctor or lawyer."

How can the industry close the deal with minorities? The first thing is to realize that the benefits of doing so go far beyond meeting quotas -- and to understand that those advantages don't stop with gleaning the insights a member of a given ethnic group might be able to provide about marketing to his or her family and friends.

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"I want to work with other good designers who take their work seriously," says Cheyney Robinson, an African-American who is a creative director at the Atlanta office of Avenue A/Razorfish. "It's less about me being or specifically wanting to work with a person of color. Inherently, in making diversity important, agencies will have a better product."

Other agency executives agree. "People from different backgrounds and cultures, speaking different languages, tend to have different creative talents," says David Becker, president and co-founder of Phillippe Becker Design in San Francisco.

— Good résumés

Indeed, certain minorities may define one of today's premium candidate pools. "The best resumes I'm seeing now are from foreigners; so during the last couple of years I've hired a lot of Indians, Pakistanis and other Asians who have come here for school and don't want to go home," says Beau Fraser, managing director of Gate Worldwide in New York.

The second priority is to work harder to bring in minorities and keep them. "It has to be a business imperative, and management needs to actively drive it," says Laurence Boschetto, worldwide president-chief operating officer, DraftFCB, Chicago.

To improve its odds, DraftFCB emphasizes internal mentoring of ethnic staffers and external outreach to employees' friends and at minority-dominated colleges. Partially as a result, Mr. Boschetto says, DraftFCB has women and minority members "at almost every level of management," most of them homegrown.

Reaching out to minorities, Mr. McDonald says, is one big reason he makes a lot of speech and seminar appearances. That's also why Mr. McDonald understood when Mr. Foster, the former interactive communications manager and head of Capital One's creative shop, AT Capital One, decided it was time to leave.