

GENIAL

Marketing, Communication, and Media

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the GENIAL Summit, the Marketing, Communication, and Media strand examined the role of marketing and communications in connecting Latino audiences with STEAM in informal science learning (ISL) environments. ISL organizations do not generally think to include a marketing perspective early on in the process of developing audience experiences. When ISL practitioners seek to connect with key audiences, specifically, Latino audiences, marketing efforts are often considered when an exhibit or program is fully developed, in production, or already launched. This causes an immediate and inherent disconnect with ISL content and those for whom it is intended (i.e., culturally diverse audiences). To eliminate this disconnect, marketing and communications teams must be integrated into the core functions, or DNA, of ISL organizations. This begins by developing and building relationships of mutual trust and respect with key stakeholders and by understanding basic marketing and communications functions and principles at a fundamental level.

Panelists and GENIAL participants discussed a series of strategies to enable a more seamless integration of marketing and communications throughout ISL organizations. It involves embracing the value of marketing and communications within ISL environments, stepping into the shoes of the intended audiences by understanding current

research and market trends, and recognizing and leveraging resources inside and outside the organization. This article offers insights and ideas emerging from the Summit discussions to inform the ISL field in moving forward toward new and more effective ways of collaborating with marketing professionals to best engage Latino audiences.

INTRODUCTION AND STATE OF THE FIELD

Traditional organizations that focus on ISL content and experiences do not generally think to include a marketing perspective in their development processes. When ISL developers seek to connect with key audiences, specifically, Latino audiences, marketing efforts are often considered when an exhibit or program is fully developed, in production, or already launched. This causes an immediate and inherent disconnect with ISL content and those for whom it's intended (i.e., culturally diverse audiences). To eliminate this disconnect, marketing and communications teams within ISL organizations must be integrated into the core functions of the organization. This begins by developing, and building on, relationships of mutual trust and respect with key stakeholders, including marketing and communications. In order for this to occur, basic marketing and communications principles need to be understood at a fundamental level.

Although marketing functions (visual and written expressions, media planning, and market research) are often a specific team's responsibility, marketing an ISL experience is most successful when the institution recognizes that "marketing" can be found in every aspect and department of the organization. Fundamentally, marketing is about connecting *shared* experiences and using storytelling in a manner that the recipient is *comfortable* and open to learning something *new*. This process is a team effort and requires everyone's commitment to embracing the idea that all areas of the organization can add value to how exhibits, programs, and stories are told. When programs are created collaboratively (from concept to roll out), the marketing team is able to translate a focused message into an external campaign—which will include an appropriate call to action, such as visit/join—in a manner that is welcoming and understood by the intended audience. Generally, the ISL field has not fully embraced the opportunity to include marketing in the DNA of their organizations. Therefore, the diverse Latino audiences often do not have any connection with the material because their viewpoints have not been considered. One successful example is WATCH (Watsonville Area Teens Conserving Habitats), a program of the Monterey Bay Aquarium located in Monterey, California. Entering its second decade and serving in an area that is predominantly Hispanic, [the program](#) successfully illustrates collaboration between Latino audiences and an ISL environment.

THE BIG IDEA: THE ROLE OF MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IN CONNECTING LATINO AUDIENCES WITH STEM IN INFORMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

When successful, marketing's role in ISL organizations is of strategic collaborator from the beginning of a project/initiative. The fundamental functions of marketing in an ISL organization are two-fold: be the external

communicator once a project/initiative has been developed (and marketing has had a voice at the table) and be an audience listener. Much overlooked, this secondary function of “marketing as the ears” can be of value as marketing can be a critical guide, monitoring the constantly changing pulse of Latino audiences. Key audience insights can be applied early in the process of exhibit/program development. Furthermore, the listening function can also serve as a testing tool (in real time) to address what is or is not resonating with an audience, It can also uncover the nuances across the dynamic, complex, and diverse Latino audiences the organization is trying to serve. With a listening strategy, effective communication emerges that has diversity built into the program/content or activity. Jesus Chavez, Senior VP of Operations, mitú Inc. states, “We don’t build Latino content. We build content with a Latino perspective.” And marketing serves as the facilitator for understanding these perspectives.

“*We don’t build Latino content. We build content with a Latino perspective.*”

—Jesus Chavez

Marketing strategy adjustments become part of the development process as well as part of the real-time monitoring of an initiative that has been rolled out to the intended audience. Without this process in place, marketing efforts become an afterthought, which can be costly, time-consuming, and often unproductive. This practice can lessen the one way dynamic where ISL content developers decide (from the point of view of an internal stakeholder) what their intended audiences wants or needs. The “active listening” function can take shape in various forms such as quantitative and qualitative surveys, focus groups, community leader interviews, and audience trend reporting to name only a few examples.

EMBRACE THE VALUE OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS WITHIN ISL ENVIRONMENTS

Marketing professionals within ISL organizations have two equally important communication objectives; the first is to communicate the value the organization offers to the many Latino audiences it is striving to serve, and second is to communicate the value the Latino audiences brings to the internal stakeholders. Traditionally, marketing has been viewed as a service-only unit that mainly *reacts* to the needs of an ISL institution’s market needs (i.e., more attendance, donations, members, program participants).

A critical shift needs to take place to view marketing as an active participant in the development process of programs and/or exhibits. Marketing can be part art and part science. A solid marketing plan involves translating ideas into visual and written communication (art) that targets an intended audience and identifying what will resonate with the audience (science/research). If a campaign is executed well, target audiences respond to the call to action and engage with the organization (i.e., visit, join, donate, volunteer, experience, work for, etc.) This is not an accident; it occurs at the intersection of the familiar (audience research, analysis, visual and written communication) and the inspirational (ISL experience program development). When trust is at the core of diverse internal stakeholder’s understanding of what marketing can add to the

development process, collaboration comes naturally and produces an authentic result. Latino audiences have strong roots in many cultures and affinity to the ISL message will be stronger if the content looks, feels, and resonates as authentic. Otherwise, the best ISL efforts to connect with this audience become futile.

STEP INTO THE SHOES OF YOUR AUDIENCE BY UNDERSTANDING CURRENT RESEARCH AND MARKET TRENDS

Formal and informal audience research is critical to an ISL's success. Latino audiences are a part of a complex cultural system that experiences ever-changing generational and multicultural influences. This can be overwhelming to even the most seasoned marketer. Latino audiences have what is referred to as, "fluid identities," or "200%: 100% Latino and 100% American." In fact, mitú, Inc., published a research paper that described a new and proprietary scale for measuring multigroup ethnic and American identity in the United States. This study, using the bidimensional identity measure (BIM), showed that Anglos scored high on the American index and low on the multicultural index. Latinos were the only group that scored high on both the American and multicultural indexes. mitu, Inc. uses these metrics and other data to better communicate with its audience and understand how its content engages different ethnic groups. When new thinking challenges old norms, marketers can create strategies that do not follow the one size fits all approach.

Understanding current research and using the data to build an appropriate Latino audience strategy can help internal stakeholders shift their thinking from an inside-out approach (we decide what you should know) to an outside-in approach (we understand your needs and values and want to add a new learning component).

On a deeper level, understanding the nuances within and across Latino communities takes patience and the ability to build flexible and multilayered strategies. Marketers may be confident that they are serving one audience segment only to be potentially alienating another. Multiple, iterative, and simultaneous marketing strategies to engage different Latino audiences can yield the most optimal learning for a marketing team. Most important, real-time metrics need to be in place for each strategy layer so optimization methods can be applied as the strategy plays out in the market. Luckily, digital ads and paid social media can provide quick, real-time results. Using innovative digital tools that can adjust a strategy quickly saves money and directs your messaging to those it is intended for. The ideal marketing strategy execution occurs when *data* helps define the nuances within and across each identified Latino audience—start slowly, use data wisely, and act with authentic intention to help your organization not only build a solid, multilayered, flexible, and reactive marketing plan, but also build invaluable trust within Latino audiences.

RECOGNIZE RESOURCES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION

A good marketing team is an insatiably curious one. The ISL environment is fertile ground for discovering and communicating amazing stories and insights through the core work of these dynamic organizations. All staff

should be considered stewards of the organization’s core work and should contribute to the communication of its overall driving message. In addition, every person or group the organization comes into contact with (visitors, collaborators, donors, partners, etc.) should be considered a *potential resource* that can carry the message (story) for the organization. Segmenting the organization into those that “program” and those that “administer” inhibits, confuses, and limits the message communication potential in the market. Traditional marketing outlets (paid print, transit, radio and TV, etc.) will only get your ISL organization’s message so far (and it is often cost prohibitive and not necessarily well targeted). Nontraditional messaging options such as leveraging community-based groups, public affairs departments (including those of media networks), social media and digital marketing can become effective extensions of your marketing strategy and are less expensive, measurable, and often more meaningful in terms of direct engagement with your intended Latino audiences.

LOOK FORWARD

Following are insights and ideas synthesized from the Marketing, Communication, and Media panel discussions and breakout sessions conducted at the GENIAL Summit. These are constructed in the spirit of taking productive and positive action toward a new way of working with marketing professionals in ISL environments to best engage Latino audiences. They also require a commitment to having ongoing conversations with various Latino communities that the organization seeks to serve in meaningful ways. Research data can come in many forms. Carolina Echeverría, Development Director, Innovate Public Schools states, “Numbers are strong, but don’t forget to talk to people. Not a bunch of questions, have a conversation.” The proposed actions are not subtle or trivial; they require a new openness in organizations that have operated under the traditional idea that “they themselves know what will resonate with their target audiences” without allowing space for the complex, ever-changing Latino audiences to speak and to be deeply heard. Marketing can be a conduit to these conversations and listening opportunities *and*, at the same time, to the organization’s creative program development processes.

“Numbers are strong, but don’t forget to talk to people. Not a bunch of questions, have a conversation.”

—Carolina Echeverría

INSIGHTS

Here we suggest areas that organizations can consider when embracing change in relation to marketing and communication functions. They require an organizational commitment to learning *about* and engaging *with* Latino audiences as part of their overall work practices. Listening to and adjusting to multiple points of view that informs the work is critical *and* developing systems to respond in real time to emerging and/or changing points of view will keep the work fresh and relevant.

In partnership with marketing, make the internal and external argument for the value of engaging Latino communities.

- Invest in research data on shifting demographics and Latino influence.
- Develop a business case that addresses and supports the growing Latino market demographics.
- Build a team structure that mirrors an internal *and* external integrated approach to addressing the needs of Latino markets.
- Advocate for multiple perspectives in selecting research partners (including cross-cultural Latino populations) when collecting and analyzing data in order to have diverse representation around what conclusions are drawn and strategies are derived from the data.

Cross-organizationally invert the relationship between the ISL and Latino audiences.

- Educate stakeholders on the outside-in approach vs. the traditional inside-out approach.
- Move toward a visitor- or participant-centric culture and align priorities to this idea.
- Allow for audience nuances to organically emerge and embrace community/cultural complexity by developing multiple marketing and communication strategies.

Recognize, acknowledge, and incorporate the values of the community in ways that *authentically* involve them in the development of activities and initiatives (in support of the outside-in approach)

- Move from simplification (everyone is the same) to amplification (we hear you and are addressing your cultural needs, values, and interests).
 - One message does not fit all Latino communities.
 - Embrace and respond to data-supported audience segmentation.
- Connect visitor's life experience with the visit whenever possible.
 - Use qualitative research to inform program and marketing strategy.
 - Incorporate relevant stories that resonate.
 - Once engaged, introduce new ideas.
- Offer staff training on how to be culturally responsive.
 - Give diversity training.
 - Provide unconscious bias training.
 - Hire and train those in the community who you want to engage.
- Co-develop a model to encourage the co-creation of ISL experiences with varied Latino communities.
 - Design collaborative environments (space planning).
 - Meet audiences "where they are" and make no assumptions on where you "think" they are or "want" them to be.
 - Involve marketing staff in experience design early.

- Get the field up to known best practices regarding community engagement, marketing, and research approaches.
 - Explain marketing/communication basics (i.e., media planning).
 - Provide case studies on effective tactics for optimal market reach.
 - Gather resources and relay basic planning.

ORGANIZATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Before organizations can develop meaningful relationships with Latino communities, they need to design and build internal structures that value and prioritize the integration of marketing and content development. Following are general organizational recommendations that emerged from the GENIAL Summit that could aid in starting the dialogue between key internal stakeholders.

Develop a deep listening process among internal institutional partners and external Latino audiences to create flexible, relevant, and collaborative strategies.

Consider language accessibility/interpretation when designing experiences for Latino audiences.

- English language words could be loaded with inherent meaning and experience (e.g., “tinkering”).

Diversify staff who do programming, research, and marketing.

- Make diversity and inclusion a priority throughout the ISL.
- Develop a hiring philosophy *and* diversity strategy.
- Invest in additional training in order to include those from other cultures and educational backgrounds.

Keep GENIAL participants connected. Keep *adding* diversity to GENIAL.

- Establish a networking space to continue the GENIAL conversations and share experiences (what works and doesn’t work), common challenges, and opportunities.

EMERGING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to move forward with any sustainable integration project, it is important to understand the causes surrounding why there are divergent internal structures currently in place. In addition, understanding methods of communication that Latino communities are familiar and comfortable with is one of the first critical steps in opening up dialogue that can result in informing content development in ISL environments. Following are potential ideas for research questions that can be honed and developed in the next phase of the GENIAL work.

- What are the systemic root causes that create barriers to collaboration with marketing, both internally in ISL environments and externally with community groups?
 - What assumptions are held by ISL environments and marketing that may hinder an integrated approach?
 - What needs to be addressed in order to move forward with an integrated approach?

- What are the methods (and mediums) of communication that resonate most within segments of the Latino communities?
 - How do these communities like to receive information?
 - Are there nuances in the manner in which information is received and messaged?
 - What are traditional (familiar) ways that these communities congregate in order to exchange information?

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