

# Advertisers miss out on minority consumers

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Advertisers are failing to appeal to ethnic audiences and missing out on a market worth up to £32bn, according to a new report unveiled today.

Advertisers and agencies are accused of ignoring consumers from ethnic minorities unless their client gives them a specific "ethnic brief".

And the study, by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, says only 4% ad agencies' employees are of ethnic origin, compared with 8% of the population countrywide and nearly a third of people living in London, where much of the industry is based.

"We need to understand that the UK is now a truly multicultural country," said Anjna Raheja, one of the report's authors and the managing director of Media Moguls.

"In the same way there is a pink pound and a grey pound there is, without a doubt, a brown pound."

The study, which is backed by the culture secretary, Tessa Jowell, coincides with the launch of an online guide to the UK's ethnic diversity as part of the ad industry's ethnic diversity week.

It says advertisers ignore these markets at their peril, with affluent south Asians more likely to have pay-TV, a mobile phone, a DVD player and a personal computer than the rest of the population.

Jonathan Mildenhall, co-chairman of the ethnic diversity project and managing director of TBWA/London, said advertisers had to educate and advise their clients about all target groups.

"The advertising industry must take the lead here," he said. "We need to move out from under the comfort blanket of traditional demographics and become more accurate in our targeting. Otherwise, how will our clients ever realise the full potential return of their marketing investment?"

The report says the industry suffers from a perceived lack of ethnic minority role models and a lack of awareness and understanding of advertising as viable career option in ethnic minority communities, which tend to favour more traditional professional roles.

"It ought to be possible to make it in any creative field in the UK, regardless of creed and colour. People should be limited by nothing other than their ambition and talent," said Ms Jowell.

"I hope that the IPA ethnic diversity project guide will assist marketing organisations in recruiting the best ethnic minority candidates and in producing campaigns that will speak to all communities."

BT was held up as an example of a brand which "consistently gets it right when it comes to reflecting the social mix of its potential customers".

But Ray Barrett, one of the report's authors and creative director of ad agency Barrett Cernis, said the solution for the industry was not simply to put more black and Asian actors in ads.

"BT see themselves as a world brand, so when they advertise, they advertise to the world," he said.

"Marketing to ethnic minority communities does not mean reinventing the wheel. The basic principles still apply, but what is critical to success is the sensitivity of the marketer to the salient issues which influence the commercial decisions of ethnic minorities. It's up to agencies to know what these are so we can advise our clients.

"The most important point to remember is not to stereotype black or Asians or any other ethnic minority group. Whichever sub-segment one goes to, the marketer must present an image that is credible and recognisable to that group itself. Stereotypes tend to occur when people who are not of those backgrounds attempt to create images for those groups."

Other examples of good practice include campaigns by Barclays, Halifax and Budweiser.

Among the key attitudes for ad agencies to consider was the perception among ethnic minorities that they believe they are of equal value but are ignored or undervalued by society at large. They do not believe the images they see of themselves are balanced or truly representative of their diversity or values.

"Take away the football stars, the celebrities, the sportsmen and the amount of black faces you see in British advertising are few and far between," said Mr Mildenhall.

"Yet in London, the area that enjoys the greatest level of advertising communication, 32% of people are of ethnic minority origin. We must embrace this community. Not only as people with cash to spend, but as people interesting enough and appealing enough to appear in the ads themselves.

"There is too much conservatism in the advertising and marketing community regarding the casting agenda - I hope that this initiative will start to break this down."

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