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*60 Leaders Share Their Secrets of Success*

**CATHARINE**  
**FISHEL**

# UNO HISPANIC ADVERTISING + DESIGN

## The Benefits of a Very Defined Niche

*"Thank you for calling UNO Hispanic Advertising: Branding for the new majority." That's the phone message that greets callers when they dial up Luis Fitch, founder of UNO Hispanic Advertising + Design. Fitch left the larger, corporate world of design to open his own small office and niche, that of design for the Hispanic market in North America.*

*His small company—just Fitch, his wife/partner Carolina, three designers, and an administrator—has landed some enormous clients, Target, Musicland, MTV Latino, and Mervyn's among them. They found themselves at the front edge of a now-evident trend, that the Hispanic population will eventually be the majority population in the United States.*

When Luis Fitch was attending Art Center College, he asked the dean, James Miho, what is it that a designer should be doing today? Go back to your roots, the dean said. Be connected with your culture, whatever it is.

This turned out to be prophetic advice. Fitch, who ended up creating a very ethnic portfolio in college, has gone on to found a firm that is entirely centered on his heritage as a person of Mexican birth and of Hispanic heritage—UNO Hispanic Advertising + Design, of Minneapolis.

"We specialize 100 percent on targeting the Hispanic/Latino markets in the U.S.," Fitch explains. "There are ad agencies who specialize in translation, but no advertising/design firms, at least in this area." Luis



Fitch and his wife Carolina count among their client list Jostens, Musicland, Cub Foods, Mervin's, MTV Latino, and Target. These companies know what an important market this is for them, he adds. Research, strategies, communications, packaging, promotions—all need special handling for this special market.

Fitch took a circuitous route to opening his niche office. After graduating from college with a bachelor's in fine arts, he went to work for the design firm Fitch, Inc. (no relation) in the Midwest. NAFTA was underway at the time, and trade between Canada, Mexico, and the United States was becoming more open. Luis Fitch took a keen interest in the agreement's potential.

Sensing that there might be new business opportunities waiting for his employer in Mexico, he asked for and received the okay to visit Mexico City on a scouting expedition. While there, he met with the manager of the largest retailer in Mexico, and within a week, an entire team from Fitch, Inc., was on its way to the capital city.

"I ended up being in charge of all creative communications, not because I was the most senior person, but because I was the only person who could speak Spanish," he recalls. "I also understood the client's marketing issues better and was passionate about the marketing needs of the client."

He had learned at Fitch that as a designer, he could handle anything. The technical aspects of his work he could learn. In less than three years with Fitch, Inc., he had worked as an environmental designer, branding designer, translator, design manager. The relationship between the Mexican retailer and Fitch, Inc., was a success. Now, twelve years later, Luis Fitch is doing the same work for himself.

### **A Side Street**

Fitch was comfortable leaving mainstream design work behind because he was very well-grounded in his abilities as a designer and in

his roots as a Hispanic person. His niche is not so much a specialty as it is what is true to him.

His advice to other designers who want to explore other cultural avenues of design is to study your roots carefully. If you can go back to where you came from and build from that base, you will develop something much stronger in your work. And roots do not have to be racially based: A male designer raised in a family with six sisters might have special insights into designing for woman. A designer from the inner city could develop a style or methodology that appeals especially to urban kids.

"What clients are looking for today is not just a capable designer, but someone who truly understands their audience—not because of the color of his skin, but because he really understands the customer's subculture," Fitch says.

He cites another example of a friend who is from the Midwest and who uses that for his inspiration. "A lot of people might be embarrassed by their culture, or they are too separate from it. If you can get back to it, you have a specialty you can use," he adds.

Fitch also advises taking one's specialty to where there is not much direct competition. For instance, Los Angeles is saturated with Art Center graduates; Minneapolis has relatively few. UNO Hispanic Advertising + Design is the only firm of its kind in Minneapolis: The Fitch's have talked about moving their office to Los Angeles, New York, or Miami to be closer to centers of Hispanic populations, but in those locales, the agencies are already 20 to 40 percent Hispanic. Instead, they have chosen to stay close to their clients: Ninety-eight percent of the company's clients are within five square miles of his office in Minneapolis; the remaining two percent are out of state.

"If we went to those cities, we would be just another agency. Here, we are the only ones doing this," Fitch explains.



The designer also recommends combining a personal specialty with a professional specialty. In the case of UNO Hispanic Advertising + Design, Luis and Carolina are specialists in the Hispanic market, but they have also become experts in handling retail. Now, they are the recognized experts in Hispanic retail branding design.

That being said, Luis notes, any niche has to fit what the market wants. If no one is asking for packaging in the Hispanic retail market, for instance, it's impossible to wring success from the combination.

### **Getting Noticed**

Ever since he started in business for himself in 1999, Fitch has poured 10 percent of his profits back into self-promotion. It's like paying yourself back, he says. He also does several exhibits of his fine art each year. He believes that as clients get to know him as a person and as an artist, they can relate to his design work better.

Getting media attention hasn't been particularly difficult: When the press needs to speak with someone who is an expert in Hispanic design, its members invariably call Fitch. But he continues to spark media contacts by always making himself available as a speaker who will speak to almost any age of student. All of the children sitting in front of him are potential clients someday.

Finally, find just the right words that cause your business name to pop up first on Web search engines: When Fitch types in "Hispanic design" on Yahoo! now, his firm name is the first one that appears. And he gets plenty of client queries just from this source.

### **Stay True to What You Do**

Just as a designer can see the advantage of a particular niche, so will clients with less than altruistic purposes. Fitch knows that every retailer in the country is after the Hispanic market right now. But his company

will not work for clients who are not planning to address the Hispanic market properly.

He explains: "If a potential client tells Hispanic people, 'shop here,'" I want to know what the people are going to get from it. What exactly is this client going to be giving back to the community." Fitch cites Target as an excellent example of a client who is very generous to its various communities.

"My clients interact directly with me," Fitch explains. "The work is very close to my heart." He has had buy-out offers and knows that he could grow his firm to six times its current size without much trouble. But his goal has always been to do what he is good at, and that's being a Hispanic communicator, not an administrator.

"The hours pass away in this office, and I do not notice them. I love this work. It is in my blood."