print

America's Graphic Design Magazine

$8 Print LV:VI

02>
$8.00US $11.25CAN

¿Habla usted Inglés?

Uno, an astute Hispanic agency headquartered in Minneapolis, helps deliver advertising messages for American companies to a burgeoning Spanish-speaking market.

By Bruce N. Wright

1

"Yes, we speak English."

These are the first words in the promotional brochure for Uno Hispanic Advertising & Design, an upstart agency in south Minneapolis that acts as a messenger between major retail and commercial businesses in the U.S. and the country's growing Hispanic consumer market.

"We have stretched the thinking about traditional Hispanic advertising in the U.S.," claims Luis Fitch, Uno's spirited co-founder and creative director. "In the 1970s and '80s, when the Searses, the J.C. Penneys, and the Procter & Gambles did Hispanic advertising, they used a formula: Put a table in the kitchen, have the family sitting around with a lot of kids, take the picture and have it in Spanish. That was the traditional creative directed at Hispanics."

You still see that formulaic advertising, he says, but it's not always appropriate. "Guess what? Hispanics are dying from AIDS. There are Hispanic gay communities; Hispanics who are black; Hispanics who speak six languages, and Hispanics who do not speak Spanish at all—they're indigenous; Hispanics who are really rich and who are very poor; Hispanics who are single moms, and some with no kids because they're spending a lot of their energy being well-educated at Harvard. We are no different from anybody else. So why should you always show a family?"

Instead, Fitch says the advertisement must be finely tuned to reflect the particular market the corporation seeks. Rather than using a single, all-encompassing campaign directed at a generic Hispanic family, companies need to create segmented and focused campaigns that speak directly to specific demographic groups.

2

3

4

1. Media kit for "Chicano," a touring art exhibit on Chicano culture presented by Target Stores and sponsored by DaimlerChrysler. Creative director: Coco Connolly (Target); art director/designer: Luis Fitch; writer: Carolina Ornelas.
2. Package design for Tabaco Ornelas. Designer/illustrator: Luis Fitch.
3. Restaurant design for Estrada Mexican Food. Art director/illustrator: Luis Fitch.
4. Package design for Mezcal Avila. Designer/illustrator: Luis Fitch.

And if an advertiser must pitch to families, Fitch says the emphasis should take a different slant. "For example, in a general market ad about automobiles, there is usually a white guy who's just finished buying his four-wheeler. The first thing he does is go up to the mountain by himself and say 'Yeah!' That ad would not work in Spanish," Fitch asserts. "If I went up on the mountain by myself in Mexico, my family would kick my ass for being too much of an individual."

In a Mexican family, he explains, it would be a group effort. "First, I have to bring all my family with me to buy the car. Everybody has to be behind me and support this important decision of buying a new car. Second, I cannot just keep my happiness or my sadness to myself. It is a family thing. So I have to bring the whole family and go up that mountain and then everybody can say 'Yeah!' See the difference?"

In the U.S., Fitch observes, it's all about the individual. Society works like a hockey game where you're the star and you've got to win. But in Latin America, it's the opposite—it's a team effort. "If you lose, we all lose. If you win, we all win," he says. "It's a cultural thing that I don't think is going to change."

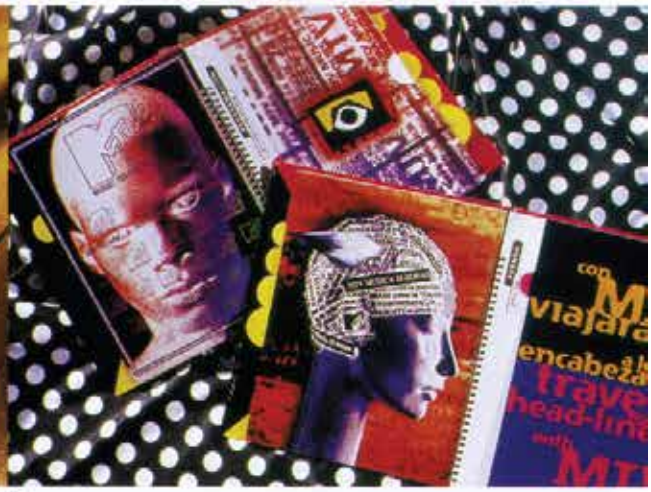
Los Angeles or New York are the most obvious centers of Spanish-speaking populations in this country, so at first, it seems odd that Uno has chosen Minneapolis as its headquarters. Minnesota is most often identified with Scandinavian ethnic groups, thanks to such nationally known personalities as National Public Radio host Garrison Keillor.

In many respects, the Scandinavian image is accurate. Despite significant growth in minority populations, the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul remain the "whitest" of the top 20 U.S. metropolitan areas. Ranked 15th with a population of 2.9 million, the Twin Cities nevertheless saw their Hispanic community soar to 89,498 people, nearly 57 percent of the state's total growth during the '90s, and a whopping 269 percent increase for Minneapolis, according to the 2000 census reports. The Hispanic population in Minneapolis is now nearly equal to the city's black population—almost 12 percent.

New York and Los Angeles still boast the nation's largest concentrations of Hispanics, and in Los Angeles, Hispanics are approaching a majority (44.6 percent). Nevertheless, Minneapolis has risen to become the 11th largest Hispanic market in the country, just after San Diego, California. Smack within this improbable north-country Hispanic market is Uno, a leader in market research and design that bridges the gap between medium- and large-sized corporations and the Spanish-speaking communities they want to reach.

Uno is located on the second floor of a two-story cooperative business enterprise called Mercado Central on bustling Lake Street, a narrow business strip running east and west in south Minneapolis that has witnessed a dramatic turnaround since the Hispanic influx began more than 10 years ago. Mercado Central, ground zero of the Twin Cities' largest Latino community, houses approximately 50 small Hispanic-owned businesses. Its street-level floor contains numerous clothing, luggage, and

5



6

Mexican import stores, a meat market, a bakery, and a restaurant. The second floor is home to the offices of dozens of startup ethnic-based entrepreneurs and nonprofit organizations. Across the street is another cooperative that specializes in imported foods from Mexico and Central and South America.

Uno is strategically placed at the center of this swirl of activity. "What we bring to the business table," says Fitch, "is not only an understanding of our people, culture, and the market research behind that, but an understanding of emerging trends, of what's happening almost every day in the Hispanic world." Because of its involvement with the community, he says, the agency understands the needs of newcomers. Being part of Mercado Central allows Uno to see at close range both the difficulties and beauty of its culture.

"Believe it or not, my office [overlooking a main entrance to Mercado Central] is probably the most important real estate for a marketer to have," Fitch maintains. "Why? Because, in a way, I would consider myself not just a designer, but also an anthropologist. We get more than 2000 people walking in here on Saturdays and Sundays. This is Little Mexico here." Besides Fitch, Uno's team of four includes another graphic designer, a translator, and Carolina Ornelas, Fitch's wife and business partner, who runs the office and does the books. For big jobs, part-time help is recruited as each job requires.

Luis Fitch was born in Tijuana, Mexico, in 1965. Attracted to the visual arts from an early age, by the time he was 18 he had set up his own design studio, producing logos, print work, and interior design for dozens of small businesses in town and across the border in San Diego. His thirst for professional experience led him to enroll at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, where he majored in packaging and graphics—but only after taking a detour into architecture at the New School of Architecture, also in Pasadena.

After studying at the Art Center and earning several scholarships and awards, Fitch got a job with Fitch RS (no relation) in Columbus, Ohio, where his clients included Disney Vacation Club, Haggar Apparel, Supermercados Aurrera, Omaha Steakshops, and Picway Shoes. Restlessness propelled him out of Columbus to join forces with a Mexican-American friend who had connections in Miami Beach. There, the two set up shop as Strategic Hispanic Design, creating advertising and marketing campaigns for the growing Hispanic business community.

5. Eight-page advertising insert for Target Stores. Creative director: Coco Connolly (Target); art director/designer: Luis Fitch; writer: Carolina Ornelas; photographer: Butch Belair.
6. MTV Latino media kit. Art director/designer: Luis Fitch; design/production: Firehouse 101; photographer: Will Shaevly.

While in Florida, Fitch chanced upon a plum assignment designing collateral for the newly formed MTV Latino, based in Miami. Fitch's work started winning awards in several annual national graphic design competitions. Eventually, a headhunter for FAME (a sub-studio of Martin/Williams Advertising in Minneapolis) hired him away from his own company and brought him into contact with the Twin Cities' multinational corporations such as Target, General Mills, and Pillsbury, as well as with its budding Hispanic community. A stint at the giant retail-marketing firm John Ryan Company, Minneapolis, rounded out his experience and paved the way for him to start his own marketing design firm with long-time companion Ornelas in 1999.

The Fitch-Ornelas duo founded Uno with $10,000 in savings, furnishing the office in what Fitch

7

8

calls "garage design," with $2000 worth of shelving, plywood, and light fixtures from a local home supplies store arranged to create simple, functional spaces for production, design, and client conferences.

Greeting the visitor to Uno are images of recent studio work, blown up large, at the entrance; bright, intense color infuses every painted surface throughout the office. Shelves of books on fine art, architecture, music, and design from Mexico, Brazil, Spain, and other Hispanic sources bracket each workspace, while clippings from newspapers, magazines, and posters are tacked up here and there with pushpins, arranged in clusters as inspiration for works in progress. In the conference room, a wall has been dedicated to an eclectic assemblage of Mexican bullfighting posters, ticket stubs, and printed ephemera, as well as newspaper and magazine articles on bullfights. Overall, the place has the feel of a busy workshop whose creative energy never flags.

"Branding for the new majority" is the company's slogan, a message displayed on all its communications: business cards, capabilities brochures, press releases, and Web site (www.unoonline.com). It even is heard on the recorded office phone message. According to Uno's promotional brochure, the agency specializes in visual communications for international clients who want corporate identity programs, product packaging, retail point-of-sale graphics, and television and radio campaigns. Clients, both in the U.S. and Latin America, include MTV Latino, Target Stores, the *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis's newspaper), Quantum Axcess, Centro Cultural Chicano, Museo Crearte, Chivas Regal, Sam Goody, Wilson's Leather, and the Mercado Central.

With an extensive network of available creative talent in the metropolitan area, Uno often finds itself conducting its own talent search and auditions for print or TV ads that require Hispanic actors. For example, for a recent series of eight-page advertising inserts for Target, Uno located attractive teens of both genders to appear in the ads with different household products.

Recently, Target has had great success with so-called "cooperative advertising," defined as advertising shared with brand-name corporations such as Johnson & Johnson, AT&T, and Kimberly-Clark, who pay for a portion of an ad page in order to place their products. Basically, it's the print equivalent of movie product placement. In the Target ads, Uno's teen models are thus shown holding a bottle of Johnson & Johnson Baby Shampoo or a roll of Charmin toilet tissue, set against a brightly colored background of a Target store. Titled "Dale al Blanco" ("Right on Target"), the series suggests that shopping at the discount retailer is right on target on prices, on style, on fun, and on Hispanic culture.

In addition to the glossy inserts, which are placed in *Latina* magazine (the publication with the highest circulation of Hispanic readers in the U.S.) and *People en Español*, Uno has developed a series of "continuity ads" that extend the right-on-target concept. "The continuity ads are simple—black-and-white with spot color," explains Fitch. Target pays for these ads, and each month the corporation selects a product and a specific market to focus on. Each group's demographics are interpreted differently. "We have to be more serious and more sophisticated here," says Fitch. "But again, each carries the same slogan: 'Dale al Blanco.'"

7. Client gift promotion. Art director/designer: Luis Fitch.
8. Eight-page advertising insert for Target Stores. Creative director: Coco Connolly (Target); art director/designer: Luis Fitch; writer: Carolina Ornelas; illustrator: Anthony Russo.

9

10

"One of the critical things that we identified in our routine small focus groups was that it was really important for Hispanics to have the price visible in the advertisement," Fitch relates. "So this series not only has the price, but it's highlighted with bright spot color. We needed to identify the price because Hispanics don't just want style."

Fitch continually emphasizes the need to understand the specific market to whom a client's ads are directed. "It's really important, because when you're doing advertising for the Hispanic market in the U.S., you've got to identify a couple of things. Are you speaking to the newcomers? Are you speaking to people who've been here more than five or 10 years, like me, who are truly bilingual? Or are you talking to first generation or second generation, who have already lost Spanish as a first language?" Each group prefers a slightly different approach, he says, and the problem can be complicated further by age and gender differences.

According to Uno's research, of U.S. Hispanics in the 18- to 24-year-old bracket, 36.6 percent prefer advertisements to be in English, while those in the 50-or-older bracket prefer ads to be in Spanish. Gender differences show that women prefer Spanish, while men prefer ads to be bilingual in English and Spanish.

To help clients understand the market research and the cultural subtleties, Fitch created a "toolbox" of cultural information. "When we go in [to client meetings] and talk about culture, I want to make sure they understand why we pick certain colors, fonts, or textures and symbols," he explains.

In the toolbox, Uno talks about different types of music, food, and words to get clients acculturated to the subtle differences among the many Hispanic groups found in the U.S. today. "There's a lot of music used in radio or television advertising," says Fitch. "We've got to be very careful about what kind of music we use for an ad's background. If the ad is for a general market, then we're going to have a hard time, because [the music choices are] not the same for the Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican Republican, and Mexican." Even more difficult, he says, is that in the U.S., Mexicans make up close to 70 percent of the Hispanic population—an overwhelming majority. "When we do the music, we want to make sure it goes with the culture [of the intended audience]."

Even among Mexicans, Fitch notes, there are differences. "Growing up in Tijuana, across the border from San Diego, I listened to rock 'n' roll all in English," he recalls. "I hated Mexican music. That's because all my friends and I were trying to be hip, and were influenced by the U.S. culture. So, here you have a generation of Mexicans that only listens to that kind of music." Other Mexican groups, he relates, might listen to mariachi music, or might prefer romantic songs. "There are *banda* groups that come to Minneapolis with zero advertising and little promotion, but they sell out their venue," he says.

Then there's the food. "You've got to be really careful about what kind of food you're talking about or showing [in an ad]," says Fitch, "because each country from Latin America is known for a different food." Including one culture's specialty, he implies, might mean excluding another culture's.

Then, too, words can lay a sly trap for the uninformed. Mexicans call a truck or bus *camión*, while Colombians call it *camiónetta*. Cubans' term for a bus is *gua-gua*, and Chileans' is

11

12

13

micro. And there are many more verbal land mines. "Each culture has different words for the same thing," Fitch says. "So when we're doing advertising for a national Hispanic campaign, we've got to be very careful." To minimize the problem, Uno uses universal Spanish, a form of Spanish that transcends local meanings for Hispanics in every community.

Uno's creative energy is constantly recharged by the culture of its world. In its work, the vernacular is blended with national and international graphic trends to produce design of unique character. "A big source of inspiration for us has been artists from the past in Latin America," says Fitch. "Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Architects like Luis Barragan and Ricardo Legorreta. These are the people who have influenced us when we're picking up colors or textures to use on a wall or a point-of-purchase display. I regularly go back to these guys—for me, they are the masters. They connect us to our culture. So we go back to Mexico, visit artists' houses, new museums, old museums, and observe and absorb the richness of the architecture of this culture."

"We are lucky enough to only do projects that we believe in, projects that end up giving back to the Hispanic community," states Fitch. "This way, it becomes more than just advertising. With the direction we're heading now, we try to make things seem more visual and more global—something that is more than Hispanic. I want you and your kids to see one of our ads and say, 'Oh, I get it, too!' It's not just about Hispanic culture; it's about human beings and their needs. Once you understand that, it's a lot easier to advertise to any culture."

Bruce N. Wright is a Minneapolis-based editor, writer, designer, educator, and design historian. He is editor of Fabric Architecture.

9. Poster for an art exhibit at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts on the new Latino immigration. Art director/designer: Luis Fitch; photographer: Xavier Tavera.
10. Poster for "Chicano," a touring art exhibit on Chicano culture presented by Target Stores and sponsored by DaimlerChrysler. Creative director: Coco Connolly (Target); art director/designer: Luis Fitch; writer: Carolina Ornelas.
11-13. Posters for Aurora Charter Elementary, a dual-language school. Designer/illustrator: Luis Fitch.
14. Uno founders Carolina Ornelas and Luis Fitch pose with Paco the donkey in Tijuana, Mexico. Photo: Yanni-Chingas.

14