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Subject: Disability-Inclusive Diversity...Connecting the Puzzle Pieces by Tari Hartman Squire, EIN SOF Communications, Inc.

Disability-Inclusive Diversity...Connecting the Puzzle Pieces
by Tari Hartman Squire, CEO, EIN SOF Communications, Inc.



*EIN SOF Communications, Inc. is the sponsor of the **Disability** section of our 2009/2010 Source Book of Multicultural Experts. The Source Book is now available!*

Successful marketing “with” the disabilities market of 54 million Americans (20% of the population) can be puzzling. This segment comprises over \$1 trillion in aggregate income, and \$220 billion in purchasing power. That’s more than the coveted teen market of \$189.7 billion -- and that doesn’t include brand-loyal family, friends and colleagues.

Building Blocks for Building the Business Case:

A University of Massachusetts, Boston/America’s Strength Foundation survey reported the participants responded positively towards socially responsible companies; 92% felt more favorable toward those that hire individuals with disabilities; and 87% prefer to give their business to such companies.

Open Doors Organization reports adults with disabilities spend \$13.6 billion annually on travel. The General Accounting Office discovered 12% revenue increase in hospitality, by implementing access provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Nielsen National Research Group independent (NRGi)/EIN SOF “Disability Community Market Research Initiative” focus groups with national disability organizations revealed this tight-knit segment expects companies to walk-the-walk/roll-the-roll -- people with disabilities in mainstream and disability print and electronic advertising, accessible products and services, and increased employees with disabilities.

Disability is the only 24/7 “open enrollment” diversity club – anyone can join...anytime, anyplace. The influx of Baby Boomers acquiring age-related disabilities and functional

limitations is expanding this market. Here are some tips to fit the puzzle pieces together with this complex and highly nuanced segment.

- First, contrary to media images and majority culture beliefs, the disability market is vibrant and full of potential – if you approach it correctly.
- Second, inventory accessible products and services, marketing, employment, and Corporate Social Responsibility/philanthropic assets. Have you woven an accessible welcome mat for customers, and employees with disabilities?

Preliminary Checklist:

Are your products and services accessible and usable to people with disabilities? -- Braille and picture menus? Are mobile devices accessible? Do you employ Universal Design principles, including restrooms, dressing rooms, counter heights, lever-door handles, automatic-doors, paths of travel, point-of-purchase machines? Are websites accessible to screen reader and other technologies? Do print and electronic advertising employ actors/models with disabilities? Are TV spots captioned? Do you have a customer advisory group on disability and aging to provide key insights to marketing, CorpComm, PR, HR, diversity, Corporate Social Responsibility? If not, why not? Do marketing/advertising messages use disability-savvy images and language? Not sure? Check out page 74 of the AP Stylebook at www.apstylebook.com.

Employment and Strategic Marketing:

Do you actively recruit interns and college graduates with disabilities for employment, or at least internships? Are your jobs posted on Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities' (COSD) Career Gateway™? Do you build strategic alliances with key disability-related organizations such as the World Institute on Disability, and initiatives like the National Disability Institute's Real Economic Impact Tour? If you are in the hospitality sector, have you checked out the DBTAC: Mid-Atlantic ADA Center's Hospitality Initiative to improve customer service to those with disabilities? Do you have a disability-related affinity or Employee Resource Groups (ERG) -- such as AT&T's IDEAL, PepsiCo's EnAble, and AOL's APLAWD? Do career advancement strategies include participation in UCLA Anderson School of Management's Leadership Institute for Managers with Disabilities?

Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together:

Each year, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) designates October as "National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)." Because it is fashioned after Hispanic Heritage Month, African American History Month, Asian American Awareness Month, and others, it is a wonderful opportunity to raise awareness internally, and build strategic alliances externally. Think about having a company-wide disability awareness event, hosted by your ERG and invite a celebrity with a disability like Robert David Hall of CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, or local disability leaders. This year's NDEAM theme is "Expectation + Opportunity = Full Participation." That rings true for both employment of and marketing with people with disabilities.

The disabilities market is exploding with millions of Baby Boomers acquiring age-related disabilities (AKA functional limitations). Smart marketers track trends of early adopters with disabilities, such as vibrating pagers, text messaging, talking mobile devices, and voice recognition software. People with disabilities are very creative, moving through life in non-conventional ways. Mainstream technology and lifestyle innovations started as disability-related tools to increase productivity at work, school and home, and now have wide spread cross-over market appeal.

Disability-Inclusive Diversity...Connecting the Puzzle Pieces

For 20 years, EIN SOF has been the leading strategic marketing, PR, market research and accessible event production company specializing in disability, diversity and public policy. Let us help you connect the puzzle pieces with the disabilities market to build brand loyalty, fortify your workforce and raise your bottom line.

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