

eBOOK

CHAPTER 3

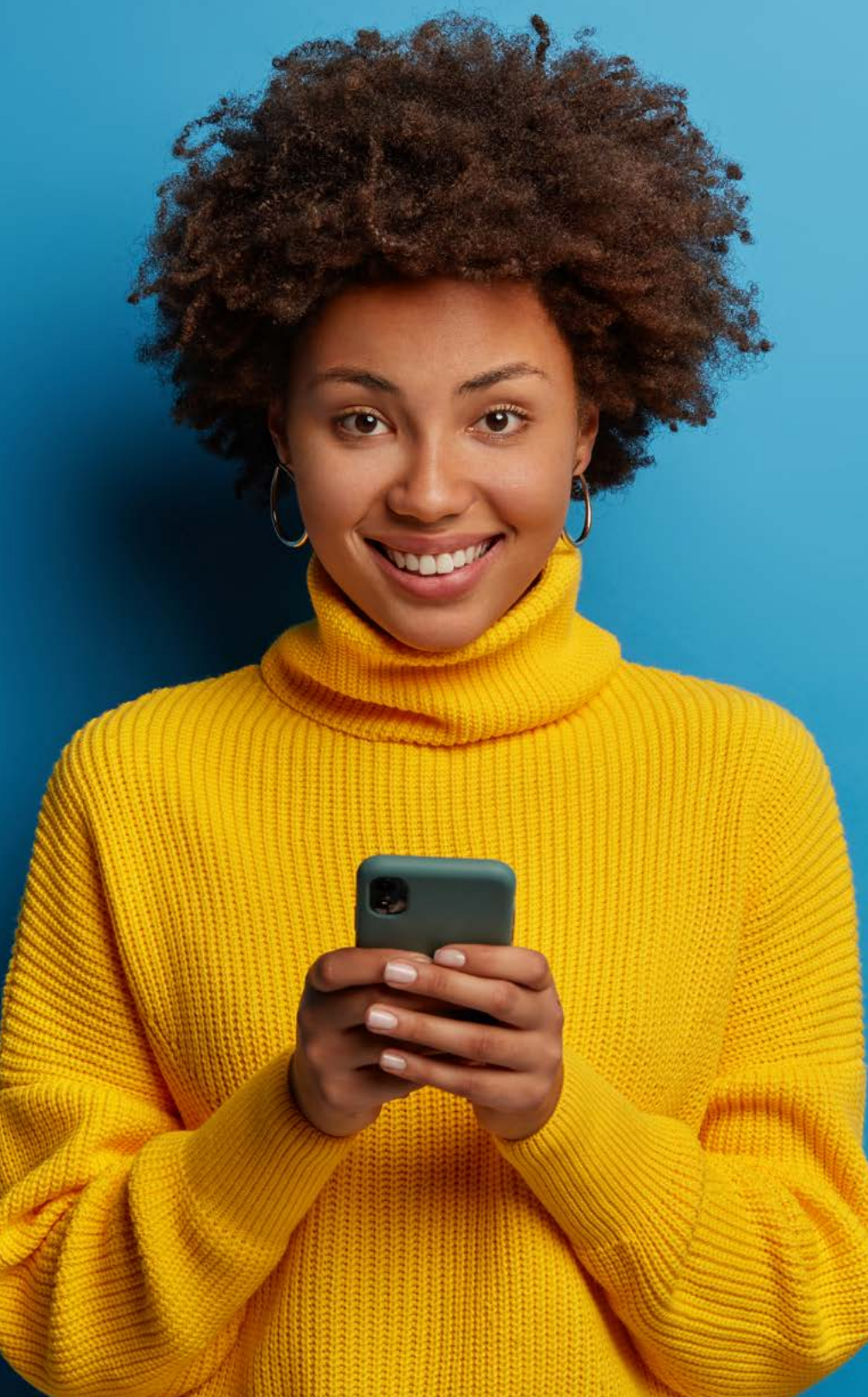


THE BEAUTY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SALON & BARBERSHOP MARKETING

How brands can capture the attention of Black consumers by stepping out of the frame

By Wil Shelton





CHAPTER 3: Black Salon and Barbershop Owners as Social Influencers



All marketers understand the importance of sharing images and messages with their online communities. But what if your online community doesn't reflect enough diversity for African Americans to engage?

African American salon and barbershop marketing can breathe life into a campaign and enable brands to piggyback on the connection Black barbers and hairstylists already have within their communities—including those that are online. These cultural catalysts are considered to be taste-makers within the African American community because they are always the first to know about new trends, products, and sports or news information that matters to their customers. When they share an in-store promotion, their customers take it as a recommendation from a trusted source. And that's when the word-of-mouth really starts to take effect.

African American customers who happen to be in the shops are thrilled to be a part of this seemingly spontaneous, infused in-store experience, which turns another day at the salon into a behind-the-scenes sneak peek at the next big craze that's about to blow up. In-store marketing means that not only do these customers get to be in the know before everyone else, they score some dope merch to prove it. You can be sure they leave that salon or barbershop ready to get everyone they know excited, too.

But in-store marketing activations don't end there. Because African-American-owned salons and barbershops tend to have huge online followings on social media sites such as Instagram. In fact, almost all Black salon and barbershop owners are savvy social media influencers and often have hundreds of thousands of social media followers. You can see why smart brands are competing for their recommendations.

Even better, most African American barbers and salon owners are more sophisticated in non-traditional marketing than a lot of senior media planners and buyers. But this hasn't happened by chance! They are entrepreneurs who have had to teach themselves how to promote their stores and being seen as on-trend is part of the allure. Shop owners have a history of doing more with less. In short, out of a lack of resources, urban barbershop owners have had to be nimble and develop the skills to become their own Black marketing creatives, media planners, and strategists. Barbers and stylists are engagement experts, and what they have accomplished can't be devalued, because they have the power to monetize the culture and narratives in their shops and elevate the marketing strategies of the brands with which they choose to work. Even after Covid-19 hit, they have found ways to pivot and thrive.

“For the African-American community, hair is more than just a matter of grooming, it’s our identity,” says Melissa Hibbert, a makeup artist and beauty & lifestyle expert from Los Angeles, California. “The business of beauty is always evolving and now, having clients electronically sign a protocol and service agreement and waiver when arriving for their appointments is a standard. To make up for any lost business due to limiting customers in the salon space, we have to get creative with our marketing and promotions: run service packages to guarantee clients will return; add on services like scalp massage or specialty haircare treatments; or expand salon hours and days and give extra incentives for Sunday salon services. Staying innovative will keep the beauty industry thriving as it reopens after COVID-19.”



African American men and women gather weekly to spend money on self-improvement and discuss what's new. This culture predisposes them to the idea of receiving brand messaging from the chair. Even as social media has expanded the realm of influencers, barbers and hairstylists have maintained and, in most cases, built on their role as taste-makers to become micro-influencer stars. They've done it by leveraging their strong social-media engagement skills to develop an ever-widening circle of influence. This phenomenon is nothing new, but, interestingly, COVID-19 has put salon and barbershop owners in the spotlight, as people realize the critical role they play in their lives. This makes it more relevant than ever to leverage their influence to reach African American consumers.

Marketing is all about driving awareness and leveraging strong levels of engagement, which is why general consumers face a barrage of messages everywhere they go from on their televisions to the branded toys in their kid's happy meals to ads on the side of a bus. Yet for all of their ubiquity, those general campaigns often don't succeed in getting African American consumers to make a purchase or tune in because they lack one thing—cultural authenticity.

Unlike the general market consumer, African American consumers engage more with advertising that is relevant to their lived experience, but what makes this segment a bit different is that **where** they are being marketed to can be a game-changer too. Location, location, location. It matters, because historically African Americans have had to create their own safe spaces where their likeness is reflected. The effect of the African American salon experience creates a unique opportunity to connect with this coveted audience in exactly that kind of space, ensuring that your marketing efforts connect on a more personal, surgical, and emotional level.

While traditional entertainment marketing tactics like billboards, radio, and commercials can reinforce awareness, sparking an organic conversation among the people your target audience knows and trusts is vastly more effective. There has always been a vacancy for transparency, honesty, and credibility with African American consumers. Brands that commit to taking occupancy have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Ready to have personal conversations with 100 million African Americans, next week?

Wil Power Integrated Marketing (WPIM) has an action plan. WPIM is a global salon, stylist and barbershop marketing agency offering a full range of traditional and digital marketing services to the multi-cultural masses in the beauty and grooming industries. Visit us at www.wilpowermarketing.com or contact us directly by calling 562.396.2165.



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About **Wil Shelton**

Before he was the President & CEO of Wil Power Integrated Marketing, Wil was a salon owner and hairstylist who saw an untapped opportunity in a space where word-of-mouth is a daily occurrence and consumers are both captive and receptive to input. Over the past 20 plus years, Wil has grown his company into a global marketing agency that taps into the unique culture of salons and barbershops to build a bridge between today's brands and hard-to-reach, multicultural customers.

Today, Wil boasts a vast network of over 100,000 African American salons and barbershops nationwide, giving his clients the ability to reach over 100 million consumers annually. Since its inception, WPIM has proven to over-deliver on value and responsiveness. As more and more brands set up multicultural departments, Wil is able to provide them with a proven roadmap for success.





www.wilpowermarketing.com

| 562-396-2165

| wil@wilpowermarketing.com