

eBOOK

CHAPTER 1



THE BEAUTY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SALON & BARBERSHOP MARKETING

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

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CHAPTER 1:

Fixing the Lens on Black Consumers

African Americans make up 13.4 percent of the U.S. population, yet they boast \$1.4 trillion in buying power, making this a consumer demographic that marketers can't afford to overlook.¹ Nevertheless, this segment is one of the most underserved by corporate America. Even global brands struggle to connect with African American consumers in authentic ways and, worse, sometimes communicate in ways that offend and alienate the very people they are trying to reach.

African American salon and barbershop marketing can help bridge the divide and bring corporations closer to Black communities because these venues are at the epicenter of Black culture where African Americans go to exchange ideas, learn about new trends, and connect with their communities. This makes them a perfect location for sparking organic marketing and word-of-mouth endorsements. Furthermore, Black salon and barbershop owners and stylists are highly trusted by those they serve and so are their recommendations, so they are in a unique position to set trends.

Imagine if your brand had access to a network of over 100,000 African American salons and barbershop nationwide and the ability to reach over 100 million Black consumers annually. Now imagine that in each of those shops, you had an army of stylists and barbers already making recommendations about products,

movies, television shows, and music to their customers. Wouldn't you want your brand to be a part of those organic conversations?

Savvy marketers can earn credibility by providing local stylists and barbershop owners with promotional items and letting them do the work of getting the word out. These beauty experts fully understand how to bring brands and brand messages into a largely Blacks-only environment, and they know and can speak to this audience in authentic ways. This automatically generates strong endorsements and builds credible narratives that help brands become part of the salon or barbershop experience itself.

The influence of Black stylists and barbers is so large that it goes beyond the four walls of their shops and online where the average Black barbershop or salon owner may have hundreds of thousands of followers. Make no mistake, they are micro-influencers, and if they recommend your content, you can be sure word is going to get around. Snapping pictures of in-store events and sharing them online can quickly generate excitement and provide companies of all kinds with an unignorable opportunity for creating a buzz.

In this eBook, I will explain the significant role salons and barbershops play in Black culture and provide insight into how marketers can gain admission to these spaces. I will also go deeper into what companies who have stumbled in the past can do to repair or reaffirm their commitments to African Americans and how barbershop and salon marketing can help.

Multicultural marketing hasn't always been a focal point for large brands nor has it received enough of an investment in



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terms of marketing dollars. That may be because marketers don't fully understand the goal. Many companies focus so much on demonstrating diversity and inclusivity they forget to tailor messaging to the unique tastes of their audience as they would with any other consumers.

This lack of focus leads to instances when African American marketing efforts are simply bolted on to larger marketing campaigns almost as an after-thought. When this happens, tweaks to an existing general campaign—such as adding a Black actor to demonstrate “diversity” or switching out Black models for white ones—are sometimes made on the fly without cultural sensitivity to how certain settings, symbols, and messages might not be relevant to African Americans and might even be offensive.

This simplistic approach has led to serious marketing missteps that have not just embarrassed brands but cost them their reputations among Black consumers. The resulting Blacklash comes fast and fierce, often lighting up social media and even resulting in boycotts from African Americans and their non-Black supporters. The impact of such a Blacklash can have lasting consequences on brand perception and should be avoided at all costs.

It's time that companies stop thinking solely about “including” Blacks in their advertising and show respect for African Americans as people, taking the time to understand the nuances of their culture and treating the Black demographic as a valuable category unto itself. This means creating niche campaigns from the ground up to ensure they are received as culturally relevant.

CPG, entertainment, and other global brand categories have plenty of incentive to get their marketing efforts right. Beyond having over a trillion dollars in spending power, African American consumers are avid media and tech consumers and trendsetters who spend more on leisure-time activities than any other demographic.² Furthermore, when brands communicate inclusively and act responsibly, Black consumers are brand loyalists who will actively drive organic and powerful word-of-mouth marketing campaigns on the ground and through their social media networks.

To put the value of the African American demographic in perspective:

- Black consumers account for **\$3.1 billion annually** in leisure-time spending³
- They make **eight times more shopping** trips than any other group in America⁴
- Blacks also **consume 21% more media content** than any other demographic in America, watching 40% more television and visiting movie theaters more often than the total market does⁵
- African-American millennials spend about **12-and-a-half more hours per week** watching video and TV streaming services than other millennials⁶

As Cheryl Grace, Senior Vice President of U.S. Strategic Community Alliances and Consumer Engagement at Nielsen has said, “Our research shows that Black consumer choices have a ‘cool factor’ that creates a halo effect, influencing not just

consumers of color but the mainstream as well.” In other words, African American consumers hold the purse strings to the purse strings of America simply by letting other cultures know what’s cool now and what’s coming next.

If you’re a marketer who is motivated to step out of the frame and refocus on what makes African American culture unique, you can start at Black beauty venues. These venues have historically acted as a townhall for African Americans, and we go there for more than just haircuts or a shave. We also go to be among people who understand us and who allow us to relax and be ourselves.

Urban barbershop and salon marketing can be a gamechanger when it comes to building trust in African American communities. For instance, almost 80% of the approximately 23-million Black women living in this country can potentially be reached at their weekly salon visits. And though that number may have dipped slightly due to Covid-19, it is still an unmatched opportunity to connect with African American consumers in a unique and captive environment where they are already open to new ideas and products.

But to gain admission—and regain trust—brands must play the long game by committing to crafting culturally relevant campaigns that show they understand their audience and value their dollars.

To continue reading this eBook, watch your inbox. In a week, we’ll be sending you a link to **Chapter 2: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF SALONS AND BARBERSHOPS IN BLACK CULTURE** so you can learn more about the beauty of African American salon and barbershop marketing.



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