



Date : 03/07/2008

## **Changing Demographics: Marketing to Communities in Transition: Reaching Out to New Immigrants**

**Fred J. Gitner**

Coordinator, New Americans Program & Special Services  
Queens Library  
Jamaica, NY USA

[fred.j.gitner@queenslibrary.org](mailto:fred.j.gitner@queenslibrary.org)

**Meeting:** 118. Library Services to Multicultural Populations

**Simultaneous Interpretation:** Not available

---

**WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 74TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL**

10-14 August 2008, Québec, Canada  
<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla74/index.htm>

---

### *Abstract*

*Using ethnically diverse Queens Library as an example, this paper focuses on successful marketing and promotional efforts targeted to newcomer immigrants through its New Americans Program. Key elements of these efforts include ongoing community analysis, a focus on immigrants as customers taking into account their specific needs, culturally and linguistically appropriate programs and services developed in partnership with community organizations, technology resources with a multilingual approach, and staff training in cultural diversity. Immigration is a global phenomenon and other libraries can tailor elements of this proactive marketing approach to their own local situations.*

The makeup of our communities is changing. Immigrants no longer live only in our cities as in the past, but now move directly to suburban and even rural areas to find a better life. Libraries, being the most democratic of our institutions, have always tried to meet the needs of the entire community. Many immigrants, however, come from countries without a public library tradition. The challenge is to understand their needs and find ways to make them aware of what a public library can offer. In this paper I'd like to share with you some ideas on marketing and public relations from an American context, focusing on outreach to attract newcomers to the library. I will look at different means of promotion that have proven effective at Queens Library by focusing on the customer. After a brief overview of Queens' immigrant

population, which is the most ethnically diverse in the United States, I will highlight our successful outreach to specific ethnic communities. At New Americans Program we keep in mind two goals: 1) assisting immigrants to adjust to life in the U.S. and 2) celebrating the many cultures represented and providing an opportunity for sharing them with the community-at-large. I will also mention some specific examples of promotional tools we use. Finally I will review some challenges and future directions for reaching out to new immigrants.

Before starting any sort of marketing efforts you need to know who you want to reach and where they are located. This is where community analysis is essential at the county, city and if possible, neighborhood level. The major sources of data for community analysis that we use are U.S. Census Statistics, N.Y.C. Department of City Planning Reports, N.Y.C. Department of Education Statistics, and N.Y.C. Department of Health Statistics. In addition we consult with community organizations, and review books and articles relating to immigrants in our communities. This process of gathering and interpreting statistics - community analysis- has been recognized for several decades as an important part of the library professional's work in serving a heterogeneous community. In other words -to serve them well, we must determine who they are and where they are (and of course, anticipate their needs and bring them in).

We look at the kinds of programs and services we would like to provide and take into account the specific multicultural context, for example past library experience. Depending on their country of origin, immigrants may be unfamiliar with a public library as we know it in the U.S. There could be fear or distrust because we may be seen as a government agency or people may believe that a library is for researchers only, and not for the general public. In order to discover customer wants and needs and create an ongoing relationship with ethnic communities we try to form partnerships that may ultimately become a valuable source of speakers and performers or assistance with collection development input. To learn about a community we have used phone / mail surveys, in-person focus groups and met with community leaders. All of these efforts need to be revisited as time goes on since communities change. But we always keep in mind that the customer (our preferred term for those who use our services) comes first and it is up to us to determine customer needs and wants. Also helpful in this is use of bilingual library staff as "ambassadors" or as some libraries have done, training bilingual liaisons from the community they want to reach, such as the cultural mediators found in some European libraries. We want the library to be seen as service provider open to a variety of communities. By becoming a community partner the library creates visibility. Some means to this end include:

participating in ethnic festivals and community fairs; providing attractive collections in visible locations with clear bilingual signage; offering bilingual introductions to library services at ethnic events at the library with accompanying book displays; providing a mail-a-book service in international languages as an invitation to use the library and developing a multilingual web page and OPAC.

Queens Library's mission is to provide "quality services, resources and lifelong learning opportunities in books and a variety of other formats to meet the informational, educational, cultural and recreational needs and interests of its diverse and changing population." The New Americans Program serves residents of Queens whose primary language is not English. The program works closely with ethnic community organizations and community libraries to assess local needs, link residents with existing neighborhood and system-wide library services, and create new services. As I mentioned above, the New Americans Program, which recently celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> year of serving immigrant residents of Queens County, keeps in mind two important goals: helping immigrants adapt to life in the United States as quickly as possible, even before they may be fluent in English, and at the same time helping them to maintain their culture and traditions and share them with the community-at-large by celebrating the many diverse ethnic groups living in the borough.

At Queens Library meeting the needs of our diverse customer base is first and foremost. Serving immigrants is an integral part of the library's philosophy and good service for immigrants is simply good customer service. Queens County is one of the five boroughs making up New York City with a population of just over 2.2 million people. Queens is considered the most ethnically diverse county in the U.S., with over 190 nationalities represented and over 160 languages spoken. Almost 49% of the population is foreign-born and almost 56% speak a language other than English at home. The largest groups are Hispanics who make up almost 27% of the population and Asians (primarily East Asian and South Asian) who make up 18%. Of that foreign born population, 53% came here between 1990 and 2006. Of the 56% who speak a language other than English at home, over 29% say they speak English less than "very well." This is important to know for marketing purposes.

Over the past 30 years, NAP has successfully forged partnerships to provide quality services to the diverse groups in Queens. A proactive approach including contacts by phone and in-person to local community agencies, attendance at community fairs and press releases to the ethnic media has served to let immigrants know that the library welcomes them and has many programs and services to offer them and their families. Thanks to partnerships we have increased awareness of library services among ethnic communities; expanded the scope of services offered; increased library use by new

immigrants and strived to have the library be seen as a community center open to all. Our community partners, whether they be ethnic organizations, health-related, legal providers or government agencies, receive added exposure and both the library and partners are perceived as key service providers in the community. For example in partnership with the public hospital system in Queens, a doctor presented a workshop in Spanish about prevention, detection, and treatment of diabetes. Twenty-five persons attended and they were screened by staff of the hospital. It turned out that two persons needed immediate medical attention and were scheduled for follow-up visits at a local clinic. A true example of how a library can change people's lives.

Let's take a closer look at some of Queens' Library's successful marketing efforts to our culturally diverse communities. The starting point is using accurate and timely demographic data to create ethnic & language profiles for each community library service area. We ask our community library staff for grassroots knowledge of changes in the community from walking around the neighborhood, personal contacts, visits to local merchants, noting foreign newspapers for sale, new restaurants and business signs. Every two years we survey the 61 community library managers regarding use of the library by immigrant customers, international language collection needs, and programming needs. New Americans Program maintains a close collaboration with the Marketing & Communications Department. We have also created targeted mailing lists including ethnic media, schools, and community agencies for notification of upcoming programs.

Let's look at some specific marketing campaigns. In 1986 we launched the Say Si to Your Library ("Diga si a su biblioteca") campaign to increase library use by Spanish speakers who, according to a Gallup poll commissioned by the library, were using the library less than other groups. A critical component of the campaign, which included increasing the number of programs in Spanish and related to Hispanic cultures, translation of library forms and creation of communication aids to assist non-Spanish speaking staff, was the expansion of the collections in Spanish. This included merchandising of collections using attractive displays. Large popular collections of books, cassettes (now CDs), videos(now DVDs) , books-on-tape and magazines, including materials reflecting the countries of origin of newcomers were placed in libraries in appropriate communities, (there are now collections in 25 libraries), a name was officially given and a bilingual promotional brochure was developed and distributed to Hispanic community groups and churches. Bilingual signage, in English and the vernacular, was added to the libraries housing the Spanish collections. A follow-up poll two years later showed that Hispanics were using the library as much as the general population.

Over the years, given the size of the population, the library added a full-time Spanish-speaking Public Relations associate in the Marketing & Communications Department focusing on media relations & community outreach. This has enabled the library to create press releases in Spanish; arrange radio & TV interviews with upcoming speakers; create public service announcements in Spanish; make community contacts for specific groups e.g. Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador; increase our presence at community events such as Latino festivals and health fairs and has given us flexibility in taking advantage of opportunities presented such as visiting Hispanic authors or local theater groups.

In 2003 we launched the “Bienvenidos a Queens” web site, a Spanish language site for newcomers to link them directly with community agencies providing services in Spanish, as well as with Queens Library services designed for Spanish speakers. As part of the marketing campaign we created attractive bilingual promotional bookmarks and bags with the Bienvenidos logo. In 2005-06 we began a new Hispanic Marketing Campaign to bring Queens Library’s new organizational branding (Queens Library Enrich your Life®) to Hispanic communities using newspaper ads, advertising on the sides of buses and bus shelters (Latino “Faces” campaign- “I am your Queens Library”-“Yo soy Queens Library”). There was also a focus on the summer reading program for kids and teens and a library card registration drive with newspaper ads in the Spanish language press and a home circular mail drop including library card applications in Spanish in Hispanic neighborhoods. We have also worked with the Mexican consulate and arranged a photo op with the Consul General and a well known newscaster from Spanish language TV showing them getting library cards for free using the “Matricula Consular” (photo ID issued to foreigners living abroad) as an acceptable form of ID, enabling undocumented immigrants to get a library card.

Outreach to Chinese-speakers also began almost twenty years ago, modeled on the Spanish language success. An easily identifiable name (Ni Hao- Greetings in Mandarin) was chosen for the program and collections of books, magazines, CDs, and DVDs are now in 30 community libraries. An NAP librarian was designated as Asian Collections Librarian with responsibilities including making personal contacts, attending community events, and maintaining contact with Chinese language media. The librarian identified the communities served and the best way to reach them, for example newspapers for Mandarin speakers (Mainland China & Taiwan) and radio & TV for Cantonese speakers (Southern China & Hong Kong). The librarians on our Ni Hao Committee have done radio interviews highlighting collections and services. Recently the Asian Collections Librarian created a brochure in Chinese highlighting the electronic resources available at the library. She also creates a bilingual listing of new popular books and DVDs twice a year for

distribution to community organizations. Over the years new efforts have been added including making presentations at Chinese senior centers. We have also had book donation ceremonies with local organizations to thank them for supporting the library.

As you can see, we did not try to target all groups at once. Outreach to Korean-speakers began a few years later. ("Hannara," a traditional name for the Korean people, was chosen to identify the program and collections). Efforts have been enhanced over the past several years since we had a Korean speaking librarian on staff who has been able to make presentations at Korean senior centers, do press and radio interviews and with the assistance of the Hannara Committee, write articles about different aspects of the library for local Korean papers. We have also generated publicity with book and monetary donations from community businesses, and the Cultural Service of the Korean Consulate. Korean collections are now in 14 locations.

Similar programs and marketing efforts have been introduced for the South Asian community in 6 languages ("Namaste Adaab"- Greetings in Hindi/Urdu) in 1994 and for the Russian-speaking community ("Privyet"- Greetings) in 1996. On a smaller scale we also offer collections and programs in Arabic, French, Greek, Haitian Creole, Polish, Portuguese and 10 other immigrant languages. Each time a new language is added, a bilingual promotional flyer is created indicating the locations of collections and services offered. Naming the collections has proved to be a very effective strategy. It's useful for easy identification and for promotion, and fosters a sense of ownership by the target group. People are genuinely pleased when they first hear the name in their language.

Now I'd like to focus on various types of promotion that we have found to be successful in our outreach efforts. Public relations is one part of a marketing plan. It follows once you've determined your target audience and service needs. In a library setting generally low cost means are used at first, including flyers, postcards, brochures, public service announcements, and press releases. It's important to identify the best ways to reach a particular target group since different groups rely on different media, e.g. visual (newspapers), audio (radio), and video (TV). We regularly use illustrated bilingual program flyers/postcards, bilingual / multilingual brochures about collections, booklists and bibliographies in various languages, targeted mailings based on lists of community organizations, houses of worship and schools, as well as radio spots and interviews on ethnic media that help demonstrate what the library is doing for a particular community. We have also installed a multilingual telephone system at the Central Library with four language options besides English to welcome speakers of other languages.

An effective way to attract newcomers is with performing arts programs, extensively promoted through bilingual flyers and through the ethnic media. Close relationship with the ethnic media has been a key factor in the history of our program. These celebrations of the arts of Queens' cultural mosaic attract large audiences and promote intercultural understanding. We aim for an audience that is 50% from the target community and 50% from the community-at-large. Everything from Haitian storytelling and songs to a celebration of the Egyptian spring festival to our highly successful Lunar New Year... In preparing the promotional flyer, we pay attention to color and graphics ensuring that it is culturally sensitive and appropriate. For example, pale blue or pale yellow which connote sadness in Chinese culture would not be appropriate for Lunar New Year.

Coping skills programs are a critical link between immigrants and their new environment. These practical workshops are presented by lawyers, social workers, psychologists, business and health professionals fluent in one of Queens' principal languages, on topics such as immigration law, job training, the American educational system, parenting skills, how to start a small business, tenants rights and health issues. Topics are not imposed, but arrived at in conjunction with practitioners who belong to the target group and are familiar with its needs. Bilingual flyers/postcards indicate the language of the program. Coping Skills programs are often the result of very successful partnerships. Some examples of coping skills programs: understanding the American public school system in Urdu...rights of immigrants, for Spanish-speakers... Starting a small business in Mandarin...

We also work collaboratively with other units, for example with Children's Services we worked on translating "Family Reading Tips" into Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Bengali and Haitian Creole for distribution to parents at our programs. We have reviewed translations for "Surfing the Internet" in Spanish, Chinese, Russian and French and coordinated the production of a Help! Guide for finding your way around the library in 12 languages.

New Americans Program staff is also very active in the area of technology, an excellent way of marketing the library. As new technologies develop, we are making sure that speakers of other languages have their place in this area as well. We assist with updating the international language home pages and OPAC interfaces in Chinese, French, Korean and Spanish, promoting non-English databases (currently Russian and Spanish) at our programs, as well as e-books & e-magazines (currently Chinese and Russian). Our staff participates in virtual reference service in Chinese with Shanghai Library and we organize computer classes in Spanish promoted through press releases to Hispanic media. Queens Library has developed annotated links to web

resources from around the world, known as WorldLinQ ([www.worldlinq.org](http://www.worldlinq.org)) including WorldLinQ Local Resources in Chinese, French, Korean, Russian, Spanish and more. Years of outreach and partnering with community organizations, resulted in the Queens Directory of Immigrant Serving Agencies, which includes almost 200 services in 50 languages. Maintained by New Americans Program, this online directory assists newcomers and social service providers in locating referrals to needed services.

Other means of promotion used include merchandising the international language collections in our community libraries, hiring activity assistants, pages and teen-net mentors from the community who speak another language and who can better assist customers who are not fluent in English. The customer is more likely to return if he knows there is someone there he can communicate with easily. ESOL classes meeting in the Library include a library component to show students how to locate materials and the vocabulary needed to get around the library, while ensuring that students get library cards.

Part of a marketing strategy is evaluating whether you have reached your goals. You need to look at what was effective and what wasn't, ensuring you use measures based on your original strategy/goal. Did you want to increase attendance at Hispanic programs by 20%? Evaluations should be based on actual outcomes and results. There are a number of tools you can use, including program reports, attendance figures, customer feedback and informal or formal surveys.

In this paper I have presented a number of successful marketing and promotional techniques that have proven successful in an urban public library in the United States and that I believe could be adapted to other libraries, taking into consideration the local context. We have seen that partnerships between the library and the community can be a model for promotion of library services to all. Once communities are aware of specific services and programs of interest to them, the word will spread- even back to the home country. A few years ago we received an e-mail message from future immigrants still living abroad in Hong Kong inquiring about enrolling in Queens Library's ESOL classes! There is no doubt that public programs increase awareness of library services among ethnic communities leading to increased library use by new immigrants.

Challenges do exist in maintaining the quality of services already established as you try to reach out to newer communities. Funds and staffing may not be adequate. There is a need for ongoing training of staff to be proactive and attuned to cultural diversity. At Queens we offer a workshop in "Customer Service in a Multicultural Environment" for newly hired librarians and all

staff can register for “Customer Service in a Diverse Society,” offered on a regular basis. Community analysis must be ongoing, since people leave and others take their place and it is important to use a variety of data sources to get a fuller picture as was indicated above. A few final thoughts I’d like to leave with you that we try to develop through our marketing and promotional efforts include an underlying belief that good customer service is for all who come into the library, as we strive to make the library a community center that is open and welcoming to all. In this way the library can facilitate acculturation and help foster a lifelong library habit. As we have seen, celebrating the variety of cultures that enrich our lives is an important step in this direction. Efforts at developing library programs and services targeted to newcomers are a good investment in your community’s future and are worth the time and effort involved. Although change is constant and continuous, the library can make a positive contribution to bettering people’s lives through outreach and targeted marketing. New Americans Program is pleased to serve as resource for other libraries interested in doing the same.

Countries throughout the world are facing the issue of increased migration in a global economy and the challenges of integrating newcomers into the “host” society. There is no one answer since circumstances vary greatly, but I believe that sharing the ideas we have tried in Queens can assist others who may be just at the beginning stages of reaching out to new immigrants. I hope I’ve provided a good foundation for you to begin or enhance your own marketing and promotion efforts for your ethnic communities.