

Alma **DDB**^o



Fusionistas Always in Sync

Getting the most bang for your buck when targeting
Hispanic young adults through music

The **Yellow** Papers Series

...feeling both 100% American and 100% Hispanic...they have an instinctual way of navigating and harmonizing the new American diversity.



In 2009 our Cultural Curators unit at Alma DDB published the paper “Fusionistas – A Brave New World of Consumidores.” The paper was a result of primary research which dove into the world of today’s Hispanic young adults, and painted a panoramic picture of a proud bicultural segment dubbed Fusionistas¹. This group masters the landscape of their dual cultural identity, feeling both 100% American and 100% Hispanic, and they have an instinctual way of navigating and harmonizing the new American diversity.

As with most young adults, music is a prime passion point for Fusionistas. Yet marketers are hard-pressed to make

an authentic connection between these consumers and their brands by employing music as a platform. Most choose to aim for mass appeal by sponsoring big acts, but the days of one band reaching Beatles-esque proportions among fickle and easily distracted young adults are long gone.

Today’s YA’s no longer self-define by a particular genre of music and Fusionistas, given their proclivity for and ease with straddling cultures, are particularly eclectic in their musical tastes. Further, the exorbitant fees that top-tier acts demand and the level of control and restrictions they insist upon are huge barriers that marketers do not necessarily want to overcome.

¹Fusionistas were introduced in the Yellow Paper: “A Brave New World of Consumidores... Introducing Young Fusionistas.” A subset of the bicultural Hispanic young adult segment, they are the mostly U.S.-born children of immigrants. They prefer the English language, but their tie to Hispanic culture is nearly as strong as those of Preservers (their Spanish-oriented, high-Hispanic-affinity peers). Spanish language plays an important role in that dual identity, which happily expresses itself in a voracious appetite for music, food, social networking, fashion, sports and other forms of culture.



Angela A. Rodriguez is Associate Director of Strategic Insights at Alma DDB, the network's Hispanic arm. She's a modern multi-tasking mom of two under two with over 11 years of experience in the Hispanic market. Angela began her career at one of the first digital Hispanic shops before moving into traditional advertising and ultimately joining the agency in 2002. A true Fusionista, her love of all things digital, and a passion for music, led to a stint at leading Hispanic entertainment portal Batanga in 2007 to explore the evolved digital arena. Ultimately it was the desire to more regularly be able to walk alongside consumers that led her back to planning and Alma DDB where she's a chief contributor in consumer insights relating to the digital space, music and families.

Defining the Passion

Sabrina, a 19-year-old Mexican-American from Chicago who participated in 2009's Fusionista fieldwork, put it like this: "Being Latina is even better because I can listen to music like duranguense, banda and norteña with my Spanish-speaking friends, and I can listen to bachata and reggaeton with anyone really, and then of course my hip-hop, R&B and urban hits with basically anyone, too."

This was a common theme among participants in the study, most of whom reported that music was used as a way to "eclectically self-define." And being the digital loving creatures that they are, this self- definition can take on as many facets as they wish, thanks to easy access to Latin and non-Latin music content from both all over the world and their own backyard.

Reach vs. Connection

Almost since the inception of the Hispanic consumer market as a viable business sector, Latin music has presented a challenge to companies looking to use it as the gateway to this lucrative market. Sure, Sabrina and other Fusionistas like stadium-filling artists, but while this approach will certainly reach them, is it enough to make a lasting connection between a brand and their life experience?



Some brands are making huge strides in bridging the gap and really making an impact. In the last two years, State Farm sponsored an award-winning multiplatform campaign designed by Alma DDB and executed by FIRE Advertainment. The efforts featured a hard-working regional Mexican band, La Banda del Pueblo, which was recruited and promoted by the company, initially through a multicity tour and album, which then led to a reality television series.

The campaign was hugely effective and positively impacted all brand health measures without ever employing a known act to star as spokesperson. Nor was the band it chose playing pop or tropical; it was a regional Mexican band – a genre that is often derided in marketing circles.

Banda, Ranchera, Norteño, Mariachi, Duranguense —Oh My!

Any discussion of Latin music must recognize the breadth and diversity of the regional Mexican genre. Comprising 60% of all Latin music sales, it is itself a huge category of music that includes Banda, ranchera, norteño, Mariachi, duranguense, and several other styles associated with various regions of Mexico where they came into their own.



Billboard
Leila Cobo
Executive Director
Latin Content

“Mexican music enjoys a rare dichotomy,” says *Billboard*’s executive director for Latin content, Leila Cobo. “On the one hand, it is purchased by those first-generation arrivals who long for home. On the other hand, it has become increasingly more popular among second and third-generation Mexicans who may speak little Spanish but still feel strongly connected to their parents’ music.”

This appeal to both Traditionalists and Fusionistas is precisely why the State Farm campaign was so effective. Not only was the band’s backstory compelling (the struggling artists arc is particularly appealing to Hispanics, who can easily relate to struggling for a dream), but it also provided a bridge for first-generation parents, who saw the band’s antics on the television series to connect to their second-generation Fusionista kids; the kids were further drawn in by the invitation to connect with the band on social networking platforms.

Regional Mexican fans are rabidly enthusiastic, supporting a lucrative touring circuit that provides many opportunities for sponsorship. People dance for hours to a multi-act lineup and then they buy ringtones of their favorite songs. Regional Mexican bands tour most of the year, covering vast geographic spaces, which makes them ideal for regionally focused efforts. And since most regional Mexican bands are developed first in the U.S., then introduced into Mexico (not the other way around as is typically assumed), there are many up-and-coming players who are affordable targets for marketers.

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Influential Beyond Natural Fan Base

In December 2009 Mexican singer Alejandro Fernandez – a balladeer whose father, Vicente, is a quintessential Mexican ranchera star popular for decades among both Mexicans and Mexican-Americans – had three albums debut simultaneously on the Top Ten of *Billboard's* Top Latin Albums chart. That his pop album debuted higher (at #2) than the regional Mexican version (#3) is impressive evidence of cross-Latin appeal, given that aficionados of that genre are typically more likely to buy CDs than all other groups.



In April 2010, perhaps emboldened by the success of the “Banda del Pueblo” series sponsored by State Farm, Mun2 began airing a reality series based on Adolfo and Omar Valenzuela, hit-making producers of regional Mexican music based in Los Angeles. Los Twins (named for the brothers’ company Twins Enterprises) offers an inside look at how these slick producers are trying to make the genre the next big thing beyond its current fan base.

They are also trying to make the genre cohesive enough for big advertisers to sink their teeth into. The series features product-integration, almost as prominently as the artists the brothers produce, such as Paulina Rubio, Jenni Rivera and La Banda del Recodo.

Los Twins’ success in signing up sponsors like Subway Restaurants, Kraft Foods, Ford Motor Company and T-Mobile is a testament to the marketability of Latin music beyond pop, rock and tropical. All this is not to say that regional Mexican is a panacea for all marketers looking to reach Hispanics, but certainly it is not to be avoided based on prejudices rooted only in personal preference.

Transcendent Tropical

While regional Mexican has presented both opportunity and frustration for the Latin music industry because of its localized appeal (it’s called regional for a reason), other genres have had more success in demonstrating the power of blending cultures. The east coast sounds that get lumped together as “tropical” – including salsa, cumbia, bachata and merengue, among others – have gotten more recognition among Latino audiences and the general market.

Salsa is extremely popular and mutable dance music, with a lot of artists taking the base and blending it into other styles (Marc Anthony, La India). It is also another Hispanic music that is sometimes created in the U.S. and travels to and influences music in Latin countries, and vice versa.

Cumbia is another genre with broad appeal, given that several countries feel they “own” it – just ask Mexicans and Colombians where it originates – and is constantly being re-energized as talent is influenced by ideas both north and south of the border.

Music overall can be a bridge between marketers and consumers, but not all Latino musicians are good bets. Those in the tropical genre may be the safer choice, given the clear connection between mainstream urban and pop, and tropical and Latin pop. If a general market strategy is to be in these arenas, using a band working in the tropical genre would allow a natural connection among Hispanics and should be considered the baseline for any music efforts targeting Latinos.

An Alternative for All

Hugely popular, but still niche players, are the Latin alternative bands. From Control Machete, one of Latin hip-hop’s most prominent bands, to the classic and still hit-making rockers Maná, the Latin alternative scene is thriving.

This segment can be particularly impactful for marketers looking to demonstrate an understanding of underground youth culture and what acts are coming up. As part of last year’s music initiative for McDonald’s, Alma DDB uncovered one of those rare finds: a band with an extremely catchy song that hadn’t exploded yet and was open to marketing deals.

Bomba Estéreo, a then little-known Colombian band, has since become popular in the Latin rock and alternative scenes in the U.S. After having their song “Fuego” featured in a McDonald’s spot, the band has seen their popularity take off. In the 60 days following the McDonald’s campaign launch, their web search interest grew by 400% and hits to their YouTube videos more than doubled. They have since won the title of MTV’s Best New Band in the World and had their song included in the official FIFA Soccer 10 soundtrack.



Crossing Over and Cross-Pollinating

While it has been relatively easy for major labels to figure out how to deliver big crossover artists like Ricky Martin and Shakira, the industry has also tended to push Latin American music rather than music produced in and for the U.S. Hispanic market. Music produced in Latino countries is often less problematic to market, cheaper to produce, and less likely to suffer competition from the Anglo market.

Only fairly recently has Hispanic identity been considered a strength in marketing an artist in English, and success has been found on a platinum level by the likes of Christina Aguilera and Jennifer Lopez. Building on their success is a steady progression of Hispanic-American artists who have been embraced by pop culture, like Cuban-American Pitbull, whose Wikipedia profiles simply categorize him as “an American rapper” but whose music liberally deals with Hispanic and Cuban/Miami themes.

Further, we cannot discuss Hispanic-American artists who are increasingly just “American” without a nod to young up-and-comers like Disney Channel darlings Selena Gomez and Demi Lovato. Both of these talented girls have the chops to become pop icons in their own right and are already well known to the booming generation of young Hispanics who are tomorrow’s Fusionistas.

“Latino people have a golden key in their hands, a common treasure. That treasure is fusion.”

- Shakira, *Time Magazine*

The Fusionista Embodied

U.S.-grown Latino acts embody the Fusionista mindset and reflect the same kind of cultural balancing that Fusionistas themselves live with every day, which adds to these bands' appeal. For example, bilingual California rapper Eddie G is purely involved in hip-hop, however, his lyrics mirror some of the traditional subjects of the corridos (Kun, *The Twins: Mexican Music, Made in America*, 2006).

Then there are artists like Victor Ochoa, aka El Mayo de la Sierra, who blends together regional Mexican sounds with country in what is known as *sierreño* music or urban country. Ochoa samples from the two genres and makes them his own in a way that his producers hope will be the next big thing (Kun).

This particular Latin-country fusion has not gone unnoticed by Nashville, and today country artists are creating music targeting Hispanic country music lovers. George Strait for one, included a cover of Mexican folk classic “El Rey” on his latest album.

In fact, many top-selling English-language artists (like Beyoncé and Nelly Furtado) are now releasing Spanish versions of their work because they are looking to appeal not only to bicultural Hispanics who already listen to them in English, but to reach their cousins in other countries as well.

The Takeaway

How can we be so sure that we know what music Hispanic youth are listening to? Ethnographic research conducted in 2009 on a range of Hispanic-Americans' playlists led to a singular finding: *Los playlists son un guiso*. Playlists are a stew. For all Hispanic-Americans, playlists are a living testament to their personal intra and inter-cultural fusions. For Fusionistas especially, they are the perfect showcase for their approach to life, and are very unlike the linear “Amazon recommends.” Rather, an infinite number of variables influence a Hispanic-American's taste in music, the least of which are country or language of origin. For them, more than other Hispanics, their playlists are not defined by genre; they are mood pieces that showcase their living cultural reality.

In 1999 Shakira, not yet the star she is today, made a point about how Latin music brings people together that applies just as strongly now as then. “Latino people have a golden key in their hands, a common treasure,” she said in a *Time* magazine article that year. “That treasure is fusion. The fusion of rhythms, the fusion of ideas. We Latinos are a race of fusion, and that is the music we make.”

That is the core experience of the bicultural Hispanic young adult – roots are important and to be celebrated, but so is the unique ability to fuse two established cultures and even to create a crazy, mixed-up third.

Implications

The lessons for marketers and advertisers are simple to understand and devilishly tricky to implement. Any campaign targeting U.S. Hispanics must be multifaceted and multiplatform in order to really penetrate.

- If you are talking only to artists in the top 40 you may be missing the Fusionistas entirely.
- Nostalgia isn't only for the old, or those who remember "back home." Hispanic youth also appreciate music that ties them to their roots, though they may be far from the root's origins. You must go beyond stereotypes and recognize that traditional sounds, especially as they pertain to regional Mexican, have an appeal beyond recent immigrants.
- Different styles and genres of music, not just Latin music, are flowing into one another and creating new musical fusions. Of particular import is the melding of urban-American culture and Hispanic cultures.
- Anglos are becoming more in tune. Everyone in the industry, from artists to labels to promoters, is learning a bit of Spanish in order to get their fair share of wallets. Brands can capitalize on this as the Latin music market is more accessible than ever.
- Grassroots opportunities abound. While digital is a leading way to experience music, there's nothing like communing with fellow like-minded fans. And although few artists have national appeal, few plans lack regionality; a strong music platform will incorporate both. Further, an effective music platform will allow brands to create content, create experiences ,and in the best cases create revenue streams.
- Niches are a reality in today's fragmented playlists, but digital platforms are democratized in favor of both consumers and brands. Marketers must take advantage of the opportunities allowed.
- Ringtones are an affordable, quick way to promote, taking advantage of mobile, the most popular digital platform among Hispanics.
- Social networks – both in their on and offline manifestations.
- Video content with product placement.
- A logo is not enough. Technology allows for the ultimate in self-selection and total access. Brands that actually facilitate the discovery or provide access to something new or otherwise walled-off are the ones that stand out.



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With more than 200 offices in over 90 countries, the DDB Group has always believed that creativity is the most powerful force in business through which we develop ideas that people want to play with, participate in and pass on, ideas that connect people with people as well as with brands. We call this Social Creativity which creates ShareValue, the transformative combination of influence within social communities and tangible business results.

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