

BUSINESS

Black Press' economic viability underestimated

By Regina Lynch-Hudson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

"We underestimate the power and influence of the Black press and ourselves."

The universal chorus on the lips of African-American business owners is, "Can you get me in USA Today?" or in a leading mainstream publication?

On a crusade for mass publicity, African-Americans often neglect the most lucrative source of profitability: ourselves.

As a publicist with a clientele of largely minority-owned, mid-sized companies, I often witness what has become Black entrepreneurs' greatest mistake: measuring the success of our products and services by their acceptance or sanctioning in the mainstream American press.

From creators of goods and services angled at Blacks, to inventors of stylized merchandise reflecting our culture, we deem our victory-makers to be the very media sources that have historically portrayed African-Americans in a distorted light. In doing so, we underestimate the power

and influence of the Black press — and ourselves.

According to Legusta Floyd, publisher of the Prince George's Post, instead of going to the sole Black newspaper in the nation's most affluent Black county, many Black businesses opt to subscribe to and advertise in neighboring giant, the *Washington Post*, the city's dominant daily paper. (Virtually all Black newspapers are weeklies or bi-weeklies.)

The business pages of high-circulation newspapers and slick, glossy Anglo-American magazines are sparsely-peppered with African-American success stories. It's no surprise the magazine industry is manned by a 'good ole boys' club, where there are few Blacks in decision-making roles.

When Folio Magazine conducted a survey of 211 magazines, it discovered that more than 70 percent of the titles had no minorities on staff. Among 1,169 editors surveyed, less than 13 percent were minorities. And, we wonder why our success stories aren't trumpeted on the newsstand?

Today, African-Americans represent the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S., a population expected to swell to 39 million by 2010. It has a current estimated purchasing power of approximately \$427 billion.

Our monumental successes are just too insignificant to Caucasian editors.

The average Black-owned business is not a media magnet like The Bing Group (No. 13 on the 1996 Black Enterprise 100's list, with \$101 million in sales).

Rather, it is one with annual sales and receipts of only \$52,000, with many firms garnering receipts of less than \$10,000. Black business owners are more likely than their Anglo-counterparts to be sole proprietors. Many small Black-owned enterprises are part-time or supplemental ventures of people with 'regular' jobs, or mom-and-pop operations.

When Odette Russell, the determined mother of two, and

mastermind behind Kinte Kids, Inc., (a cultural apparel line for children), became the focus of African-American media outlets nationwide, her home-based business skyrocketed.

Anthony Underwood's rags to riches success-story of a lad who once sold pecans, and later grossed \$2 million a year in sales within two years of starting Underwood Automotives in rural Brighton, Ala., is a beacon to Black youth nationally. Were it not for minority publications country-wide who spotlighted his modest climb — he'd be forever waiting for *Fortune* or *Forbes* to knock on his door.

When Atlanta-based master optician Thomas Blair Jr., developed Nubian Eyewear, the enterprising company

snared headlines coast to coast — revealing that competitors were marketing 'pseudo-ethnic' brands of eyewear, targeted at African-Americans, using 'Black sounding' names.

For entrepreneurs like Russell, Underwood, and Blair, Black newspapers outweigh in content, what they may lack in circulation.

Traditionally, African-American media sources are more politically in tune to the communities they serve. The Black press 'has our back,' it features what's happening with us in a light that captures our people as we really are. It is the keeper of our words.

And after all, who patronizes our goods and services? We do.

Misconceptions about the buying power of the African-American market cause many Blacks to devalue media outlets, like the "Black Pages," inside our own communities.

Ken Reid, a former Wall Street financial analyst, recognized the African-American gravitation towards entrepreneurship and the absence of any industry directory showcasing Black

business owners. In 1978, he developed the first yellow-pages style community-directed publication to increase exposure of Black businesses. Now, widely recognized as the "Bible of Black Businesses," the 20-year old publication flaunts a wing span that stretches to exotic destinations such as Hawaii, and has become the connective tissue for Black business communities nationwide.

Today, African-Americans represent the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S., a population expected to swell to 39 million by 2010. It has a current estimated purchasing power of approximately \$427 billion. The number of Blacks earning \$50,000 or more has grown 41 percent over the past five years. Advertising research further indicates that savvy marketers are acknowledging our worth, shelling out \$834 million to target African-Americans last year — a self-worth and buying power we, ourselves have not fully realized.

Regina Lynch-Hudson is an Atlanta based publicist and writer.

Expertise key to business success

By Pierre A. Clark
Special to Sentinel-Voice

How can you differentiate your business from the hundreds of similar enterprises starting each year, all of whose owners insist their business is supremely qualified to offer the quality and service customers want?

What are the best strategies for building the confidence of your potential customers in your abilities and talents? How can you help consumers make an informed, knowledgeable choice about your firm and its capabilities?

One strategy is to establish yourself as an expert in your industry or profession. The favorable word-of-mouth buzz that results from public recognition of your knowledge and competence is one of the most powerful testimonials your firm can receive. Sharing your knowledge with current and potential clients enables you to establish a more intimate connection with them and increases your credibility and the attractiveness of your services.

You can share your expertise through (a) writing articles; (b) giving speeches, seminars and workshops; (c) distributing newsletters and press releases; (d) serving on boards and advisory committees and (e) appearing

on radio and television programs.

Newsletters. More than 8,000 subscription newsletters deliver expert information on topics ranging from finance to food to subscribers that sometimes pay hundreds of dollars a year for subscriptions. Tens of thousands of free

newsletters are also published by corporations, consultants and small businesses. Your newsletter's power will be determined by how well you provide concise, jargon-free information that your clients can use.

Direct mail letters. In a
(See *Expertise*, Page 14)

Cultural & Community Affairs Division

City of Las Vegas Department of Parks & Leisure Activities
West Las Vegas Arts Center

Concluding our Humanities Program and kickin' off Black History Month!

We would like to extend our sincerest thanks to all of the people that made the Humanities program, "Humanities And Language: Through the Black Experience" a great success. It was the valued contributions of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Las Vegas Clark County Library District and the community people that enabled us to present the tremendous talents of John Amos, Gladys Knight, our community leaders, neighborhood children, poets, singers, rappers, thespians, griots, dancers and authors.

"Literature in Motion"

Saturday, Jan. 31, 1998 at 1:00 p.m.

West Las Vegas Arts Center

951 W. Lake Mead Blvd.

call 229-4800 for information

Hosted by Anika Johnson-Cunningham

Community groups and artists will present a collage of poetry, dramatization, music and dance celebrating the African-American experience. Selected film segments will highlight significant contributions. Special appearances by Lawrence Weekly, Henry Shead & Trio, Miss Norma Miller (Queen of Swing), and Second Baptist Church Choir.

This program is made possible in part by a grant from the Nevada Humanities Committee, the state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



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