

NNPA-Nielsen Black Consumer Report seen as new empowerment tool

Written by Hazel Trice Edney
Friday, 30 September 2011 13:20



(TriceEdneyWire.com) - By the year 2015, African Americans will be spending \$1.1 trillion a year on products and services.

Currently, the Black population in the U.S. has a buying power of nearly \$1 trillion - a figure larger than the gross domestic product of most countries in the world.

The number of African American households earning \$75,000 or more has grown by 63.9 percent in the last decade, a rate greater than that of the overall population.

African-Americans shop more often than all other groups, but spend less money per trip because they make quicker/smaller purchases based on short-term needs.

These are just a few of the facts pulled from a new report compiled by the 71-year-old National Newspaper Publishers Association, known as the Black Press of America, and The Nielsen Company, a global monitor of media, marketing and consumer information.

NNPA leaders say the report, released Sept. 22, will generally empower African-Americans with the knowledge of their worth. But it will also empower Black newspapers with a new weapon - credible information about the power of Black consumers - to defeat advertising discrimination.

"Every time we go and talk to advertisers, including Fortune 500 Companies, there's always the possibility that they will ask us, 'Where did you get your information? How do you claim these numbers?'" says NNPA Chairman Cloves Campbell, publisher of the Arizona Informant. "Now we have a partner - a legitimate partner in Nielsen - that can say, 'Hey, these numbers came from us.' This is a legitimate firm that does business across the world and now we have a partner that can legitimize all the things we talk about when we talk about African American consumers."

The 19-page report, "The State of the African American Consumer", was released during a conference at the National Press Club.

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NNPA, a federation of more than 200 Black-owned newspapers around the country, has long battled bias against the Black Press - in part - because of the undocumented spending power Black newspaper readers.

Now that the documentation is complete, Cheryl Pearson-McNeil, senior vice president of Public Affairs at The Nielsen Company, says it can be used for Black newspapers as well as other Black institutions.

"This report really is a valuable piece of communication that I am so hopeful that your companies, your organizations, your businesses will be able to utilize to help tell the African American consumer story," Pearson-McNeil told the standing room only audience at the press conference.

Among those present were NNPA publishers, corporate and advertising executives as well as representatives of the civil rights and legal communities.

"This is going to have a tremendous rippling affect. The bottom line is that at the end of the day, we want to hold people accountable," said Danny Bakewell, former NNPA chairman who initiated the Nielsen-NNPA partnership that led to the study. "We spend our money. We expect you to be a good corporate citizen and return a fair share to our community at all levels. If we represent 25 percent of your market share, it's not unreasonable for us to ask for 25 percent return to our community."

Campbell says he sees the report working in three ways for the average Black citizen:

"One, making them more aware of what their buying and purchasing power is. Two, giving them an opportunity to understand all the products that they use and all the services that they spend money on. And three, giving them the opportunity to empower themselves, to be more assertive when they go to spend their dollars, and make sure that people understand and respect the fact that we come to your stores, we spend our dollars, we make sure that your businesses are in business and so it's an overall affect that happens from it."

Bakewell agreed with Pearson-McNeil that the report will be used by various organizations for diverse purposes. For example, he said it will also be given as a tool to members of the Congressional Black Caucus and civil rights leaders.

But, mostly it is viewed as the ultimate Nielsen-confirmed evidence that Black corporations have downplayed the value of the Black dollar - evidence that can now be used as leverage.

"What it will do is substantiate in the minds of Black people the power that we have based on the money that we're spending and specifically allow us to direct our recognition to certain companies that we're spending our money with," said Bakewell, publisher of the Los Angeles Sentinel. "And when those companies recognize the kind of buying power that we have, it then gives us more influence with those companies. And of course the reverse of that is that to the extent that they're not supporting our communities, then why should we be supporting them?"