

Urban Trends

COLLECTION



ENTERTAINMENT



WHO'S HOT WHO'S NOT!!!

Who Captivates Urban
Youth and Why

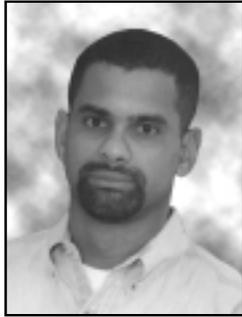
The New Role OF NEO-SOUL

USING RESEARCH
TO Better Black
ENTERTAINMENT

ORAL CULTURE
IN AN INTERNET
WORLD



Don't Like the Messages? Counter, Don't Just Criticize



Sometimes you're so busy doing the work that you don't have time to sit back and take stock of all you've accomplished. This first-ever *UrbanTrends Collection* is one way of doing that. We've collected and updated more than a dozen *UrbanTrends* articles analyzing how entertainment media impact and influence urban populations, especially youth. (Original issue numbers are indicated at the end of each article.) Some pieces have been edited for space, but subscribers can access full versions at the password-protected page on MEE's Website, www.meeproductions.com. This edition also features several brand-new takes on the world of entertainment, all focused on examining the many ways that it can move and motivate us.

With the explosion of media, today's urban youth are inundated with negative, conflicting and often destructive messages about sex and sexuality from everywhere—from their peers, over the Internet, 24-hour access to music videos, television shows and the movies. The question is, What are we going to do about it? Attempt to kill the messenger — or counter the message?

Adults need to be prepared to deal with the issues raised in the media. Rather than see it as a nuisance or a threat, current entertainment programming presents an opportunity to open a dialogue and initiate conversations with young people about their issues. Whether or not we agree with current portrayals of urban youth is beside the point. Those depictions are out there in the "marketplace of ideas," and we need to be ready to compete with them.

Don't be fooled into thinking that inner-city

rap and hip-hop messages will only resonate in "hardcore communities." There are implications for every part of society because many trends that start with hip, urban youth often eventually find their way into the suburbs, and even mainstream America.

The characters and situations in these media may not reflect your individual reality, but for some, what's on the movie screen and on CD represents the folks they see every day on the corner, at the bus stop, in the 'hood. Watching popular movies and videos or listening to hip-hop music, adults hear the kinds of thoughts and ideas that most of us would otherwise rarely be privy to.

Before we raise our voices condemning current manifestations of hip-hop culture, the first thing adults need to do is to take a look at ourselves. We must make sure that we are clear about the messages we are sending to young people, directly or indirectly. What examples are we setting for the next generation, which we are often so eager to criticize?

After ten years of working in urban youth communications, I can tell you that mainstream "just say no" public campaigns have been a dismal failure in encouraging more responsible behavior. In urban African American youth culture, engaging in risky behavior is, unfortunately, a reality. Such activity is not necessarily viewed as unhealthy, negative or wrong. Yet it's clear that the adverse consequences of these behaviors—including STDs, violence and unplanned pregnancies—invariably are having a disproportionately greater impact on our communities.

Without positive messages to counter what adults perceive as the negative ones, the negative becomes what's accepted as "keeping it real." We have not focused enough of our attention on how to create and share positive, alternative messages for young people. We can continue to put our heads in the sand, to turn off and tune out messages that offend, scare or annoy us. But the truth of the matter is that we are in a battle for the hearts,

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Hip-Hop Entrepreneurs: Now Ruling More Than Music

Hip-hop culture and rap music have staked their claims in the entertainment industry and as mogul Sean "P. Diddy" Combs brags, "[it] ain't going nowhere." Everywhere you turn, whether in U.S. suburbs or in cities abroad, hip-hop's presence is felt in movie theaters, concert halls, clothing stores, online and in advertising. Now, hip-hop influence shows itself in the financial world, as it has produced a new breed of entrepreneurs that understands why you "can't knock the hustle."

The original "b-boy" executive, Russell Simmons, co-founder of Def Jam, expanded the game when he grew from a concert promoter to CEO of Rush Communications, a corporation that does it all: music (Def Jam Records); clothes (Phat Farm); advertising (dRush), movies/television (Def Films); and the Internet (360 Hip Hop.com). Simmons, with an estimated worth of more than \$200 million, opened the door. Others made their own marks, both within entertainment and across a number of industries.

Sean "P. Diddy" Combs, founder and CEO of Bad Boy Worldwide Entertainment

Group and Percy "Master P" Miller, CEO of No Limit, have made it clear that they are in it for the long haul. Both have graced the pages of *Fortune's* "40 Richest Under 40," with an estimated worth of more than \$400 million each. Today, Bad Boy has its hands in everything from music (Bad Boy Records), to fashion (Sean John), to fine dining (Justin's restaurant in New York and Atlanta), to marketing/advertising (Blue Flame).

Master P turned \$10,000 from a malpractice suit into a New Orleans, based hip-hop "army." His No Limit domain includes everything from music and films (which he finances himself) to real estate, sports management, telecommunications and clothes/toys. The Roc-A-Fella "family" is the latest entry of hip-hop into big business. A trio of executives Shawn Carter (better known as mega-rapper Jay-Z), Damon Dash and Kareem "Biggs" Burke work to keep their recording label family (Roc-A-fella Records), clothing line (Rocawear), sports management firm (Rocafella sports) and films (Roc-A-Films) in the spotlight.

These hip-hop entrepreneurs have parlayed their business acumen into multi-divisional conglomerates while giving back to the community that supported them. Combs' Daddy's House provides social programs for New York youth and Roc-A-fella funds a charity called Team Roc for youth who are interested in higher education.

The crew has also taken an active interest in ensuring hip-hop's survival. In June 2001, Russell Simmons hosted a hip-hop power summit, "Taking Back Responsibility," in which Combs, Master P and the Roc-A-fella trio were among the many of hip-hop's most influential in attendance. Hip-Hop can no longer be mistaken as just rap music. It is a culture with various components that is devoted to its community and creates opportunity for expansion into different venues.

(Black Enterprise)

UT

OfftheShelf

Too often the media prefers the stereotype to the authentic black experience. After a while whites don't know the difference. The original Bill Cosby television show was criticized for being "unrealistic" and "not black enough." ...What's unrealistic about a black family where the father is a physician and the mother a lawyer?...What's "not black enough" about blacks who appreciate the life, culture, and heritage of their people? The Cosby show was criticized because it refused to play to the stereotypes, while shows like *In Livin' Color*, and *Martin* are celebrated by media critics for doing just that. Black men in drag, pistol-packing mamas, hoods in the hood, and female dancers who can bump and grind with the best of 'em—now, that's an authentic picture of black life in America.

It's the Little Things: The Everyday Interactions that Get Under the Skin of Blacks and Whites by Lena Williams (Harcourt), 2000.

Black conservative Mike Green, in an article "The Digital Divide is a Voluntary Gap," argues that the digital divide is a myth that was "concocted to continue coddling the poor and minorities" and to get the federal government more involved in people's private lives. He insists that Black children are not deprived: "They have stereos, but not computers. They have books, but not computers...the same parents who complain their children do not have a fancy computer at home will instead spend money on cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, expensive sports clothing and fancy cars."

(National Center for Public Policy Research)

RADIO PROMOTIONS: Beyond The Buy



MEE has conducted several media campaigns for television programs; radio has been a central component in most of these campaigns. In this article, we share how to use radio promotions to leverage this traditional media in conjunction with non-traditional activities.

The Urban Radio format remains popular, especially with young, ethnic audiences in urban areas. It is a cost-effective vehicle (particularly as compared to television and some print materials) that allows buyers to be very specific in the targeting of their audience based on age, race and ethnicity. Radio can also be leveraged with promotions and other non-traditional activities tailored to local tastes and fashions.

Radio promotions take advantage of a radio station's local popularity, credibility and influence to create positive word-of-mouth advertising for your television program. Urban radio stations' popularity is based on their ongoing efforts to be the source of all things that are cool, hip and in style among their audience. Popular stations can be powerful resources to launch or differentiate television shows, using the popularity or "hip capital" that the radio station has invested.

Most urban stations see themselves as community-oriented experts on their chosen audience. They are very visible, using clubs, parties and concerts as vehicles to attract their audience and further define their image. Many stations do remote broadcasts, van sweeps and regular giveaways. Their DJs are local media stars. They attract tens of thousands of their listeners to large annual events (jams, family reunions, community picnics) at parks and convention centers.

By getting popular radio stations to promote specific television shows, programmers gain major benefits. An on-air and/or event promotion is tantamount to an endorsement by the radio station. However, radio stations will not support an on-air promotion that they feel will not

resonate, or worse, will bore their listening audience. This reality is an important hurdle, but can also help focus marketing efforts, by listening to and benefiting from the radio station's experience with the audience. Doing so will make future efforts compelling enough to compete with other promotions on the same radio station. Using the station's resources in planning and implementing your activities leads to a successful promotion. The key is to work with a good account executive that is interested in helping his or her clients be successful, not just in making a sales quota.

An interesting case study in using radio to promote a mainstream TV show is MEE's marketing project for *3rd Rock from the Sun*. As the show headed to its syndication launch on FOX stations, the challenge was to introduce this popular television show to African American audiences (in Philadelphia and New York) that had not watched *3rd Rock* during its network run and, in many cases, were not aware of the show at all. Besides the traditional media buy, MEE devised a comprehensive radio promotions plan. It included on-air giveaways by popular DJs that promoted the show and held local viewing parties. Top DJs were hired to host the culminating social events at local nightclubs, where excerpts of the show were previewed for the audience.

In addition, using classic R & B music updated with new lyrics proved to be a breakthrough element in connecting with potential urban viewers. The chorus of the Parliament-Funkadelic party anthem "P-Funk" was changed to "Make My Rock the 3rd Rock." The radio ads were extremely effective in capturing listeners' attention, capitalizing on their good memories of the late '70's and early '80's.

In Philadelphia, the African American ratings increased significantly for *3rd Rock from the Sun*, while the general market numbers were flat. In New York, ratings increased slightly, while the general market numbers decreased. The results were particularly satisfying because in both cities the show ran against popular programs with African American casts.

As in every successful project, great working partnerships make a difference. In this example, the effort was significantly enhanced by the support of a radio account executive who championed the show within his skeptical radio station. Also critical was the strong support from and partnership with the client, Carsey-Werner, who was committed to a successful venture. The company provided exciting gifts that were used for on-air giveaways and at the viewing parties.

UT

Don't Like the Messages?

Continued from inside cover

minds and souls of our young people and we better be about the business of fighting for their attention. We must be just as aggressive in promoting our pro-social messages as those who want to sell them sneakers, soda or dangerous ideas about what life is all about.

Let's not spend energy railing against what's happening on the screen at the multiplex when instead we could be using that energy to talk to young people where they are, in front of us every day — across the kitchen table, in our classrooms, at our community centers. Real discussions about current entertainment provide an exciting and unique opportunity to raise awareness and influence future behavior. It's time to get the dialogue started!

As you read this special edition, you'll see many examples of how entertainment media have touched almost every aspect of our lives. Our challenge as communicators is to come up with solutions that harness that power to promote pro-social messages. These articles should stimulate some fresh, news discussions between and among the generations. As always, we welcome your response.

Peace,

President and Founder
MEE

UT

URBAN RADIO DISC JOCKEYS: Still Powerful Message Senders

Over the years many have believed – with the proliferation of cable, satellite television, computer games, and the Internet taking more of America's "entertainment time" – that radio would go the way of the dinosaurs. However, radio still continues to be a powerful medium. Radio has survived, and even thrived, in urban areas of the world, but it would merely be a "static" medium if it were not for the personalities that help to color and shape it. In particular, urban radio disc jockeys remain powerful "message senders" with their audience.

Urban DJs exhibit a lot of power behind the microphone, and have the opportunity to relate to and greatly influence their listeners: they announce everything from the weather, time and traffic to the latest celebrity gossip. (Most DJs, incidentally, are considered celebrities by their listeners.) DJs regularly interact with their audience, and are powerful representations of the oral communications culture which is so prominent among African Americans. Listeners can call to request songs, give their opinions or win prizes.

The urban radio DJ is very often someone right from the community; someone who shares the same background as his or her audience. This familiarity means that they are never perceived as "outsiders" but as peers. Urban DJs do much more than play tunes that listeners can nod their heads to. They also inspire, educate and motivate. Tom Joyner, for example, is not only one of the most entertaining and popular syndicated DJs in the nation, he has helped to initiate boycotts and has voiced opinions against companies that he has felt do not hire African Americans or respect their buying power. In this manner, he has shown that he protects and respects the community, which makes him a powerful message sender.

Urban radio DJs are the consummate communicators, the "storytellers" or griots of old who are viewed as celebrities, authority figures and "hip" members of the community, passing information orally to a captivated audience. The special qualities that he or she brings to the communications process, including portability, high-watt talent and charisma, means that the urban radio DJ will remain "on the air" well into the new millennium.

UT 5

☞ **Funkmaster Flex, a premier radio personality on New York's "Hot 97" radio station, has become a radio superstar because he long ago understood the power of urban music and culture. Flex has blazed his own trail by keeping in touch with both the underground and the mainstream. He keeps his ear to the street and the street keeps its ears on what Flex is playing on the radio and in clubs. By being the #1 DJ in his time slot and remaining dedicated to a cutting edge street sound, Flex has been able to diversify his talents and become a thriving entrepreneur. He is a DJ/host for Hip Hop Sunday nights at Manhattan's Tunnel nightclub; founder of a record pool; a gold recording artist/DJ for Loud Records; CEO of Franchise Records; a chart-topping producer; and producer of the groundbreaking Funkmaster Flex Mix Tapes.**

UT 5

☞ **One of the most popular syndicated drive-time radio talk shows today, heard by five million listeners in over 95 markets, is "The Tom Joyner Morning Show," which combines both storytelling and music through a mix of R&B music, humor and social activism. When informed about racist or unfair policies in business and government, listeners have taken on the roles of activists who have been responsible for major change in this country. That same power has been used to save urban/African American-themed television shows that were being considered for cancellation. The show was also instrumental in voter registration in the 2000 presidential elections and raising funds for African American victims and their families in the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks.**

UT 3



☞ **According to Arbitron, 54.5% of the total African American population can be reached by advertising on urban contemporary, hip-hop/rap and Black adult contemporary radio formats. Latino populations are even more avid radio listeners. Often, they will listen to the radio throughout the day, with an entire family listening to the same station, on an average of 26-30 hours a week. This is more than 13% above the amount of time the general population spends listening to radio.**

UT 5

☞ **On average, African Americans listen to up to four hours of radio per day, significantly more than other groups. Radio stations, along with individual radio programs, often have a very loyal, demographically similar listening base. From an advertising perspective, this phenomenon is beneficial because it allows a very specific form of targeting.**

UT 3

Ruling the Airwaves

Hip-Hop music is no longer relegated to late night radio as it was in its infancy. Urban-formatted radio stations are the leaders in many markets across the country and rap/hip-hop music sales continue to increase exponentially. In fact, it was hip-hop music that saved many of the record companies from going under in the 1990's. When Lauryn Hill won five Grammys in 1998 and appeared on countless magazine covers, Middle America began to sit up and take notice. What was once underground is now situated next to Garth Brooks at the local music retailer. Now you're as likely to hear DMX thumping from car speakers at a suburban mall as you are in the heart of the inner-city. According to Soundscan, three-quarters of all rap music is sold to White consumers, most of who reside nowhere near the inner-city. **UT 6**

☪ **The Roots**, which mixes live instrumentals with the more traditional beats and samples, staked out new ground in the ever-changing world of commercial hip-hop with their Grammy-winning song, "You Got Me." Along with other acts such as Common, Outkast, and Lauryn Hill, The Roots are at the head of "The Next Movement" which aims to steer popular hip-hop away from gangster-based, violent music. In its place, these artists offer songs that are more complex both musically and lyrically, and aim higher than the standard popularized depictions of "thug life." With the introduction of instrumental and vocal improvisation into their hip-hop, The Roots have brought new respectability to the form, drawing raves from jazz and pop listeners.

(*Philadelphia Inquirer*)

UT 6



☪ **Gospel** is penetrating everything from the club scene to aerobics. The New York region has seen the emergence of half a dozen gospel cafes, supper clubs and nightclubs in the last two or three years. Gospel has even inspired a New York City aerobics program, "Gospel Moves," which fuses spiritual music with aerobics.

(*The New York Times, BET Weekend*)

UT 1

☪ **Music** is the future for ethnic marketing. Music events are becoming increasingly popular as corporate sponsorship vehicles for targeting ethnic groups. Music is a unifying force and a means of drawing upon the passions of diverse ethnic populations. Leading advertisers such as American Airlines, AT&T, Miller Brewing Co., Sears and Visa USA will spend \$10 million dollars each on the sponsorships of multicultural events this year, and that number should increase by 20 percent by next year. (*Advertising Age*)

UT 1

☪ According to the Recording Industry Association of America, rap alone accounts for about 10 percent of the sales in the \$13 billion record industry. Moreover, hip-hop music and its rap component have a wonderful spin-off power. Though mostly African American men perform rap music, young White males buy more than half of the records. The "crossover" trend spans further than the music scene. Now the connection between the hip-hop scene and the apparel styles is closer than ever. Hip-hop fashions generate revenues between \$750 million and \$1 billion a year and growing. As one executive put it: "Kids look at TV now to see how low-income urban kids wear their clothes, so they can wear theirs accordingly." (*Emerge*)

UT 3

☪ From gathering around the fire to the rhythmic beat of drums in an African village, to the Negro spirituals sung by slaves toiling on Southern plantations and the marchers in the '60's Civil Rights Movement; from the Motown Sound to the Hip-Hop Generation, storytelling and music have always been major components of African and African American culture. Music serves as a guide to consumer decision-making, an interpreter of social issues, and a gauge of community attitudes within the African American community.

UT 3

☪ **Urban music** is BIG business. According to *USA Today*, rap, hip-hop, gospel and jazz account for 35 percent of the \$13 billion generated yearly by the music industry. In 1998, for the first time, rap was the top-selling genre in music. In an article in the *Houston Chronicle*, chairwoman of Elektra Entertainment, Sylvia Rhone said "The fact is that hip-hop music is really driving the economy of the record business these days. It's the force drawing consumers into record stores."

UT 3



New Trends in Urban Music: “Food for the Neo-Soul”

African Americans have always been influential in music, and Black music has long been a trendsetter in the entertainment industry, from blues to jazz, rock & roll to rhythm & blues, and rap to hip-hop (a fusion of Rap and R&B). The latest newcomer is becoming widely known as Neo-Soul. Born around the mid-1990's, it fuses the 1970's sounds of soul, jazz and funk with modern-day soul, hip-hop and spoken word. Others have described it as the love child of soul, R&B and funk, with a spoken word upbringing. Whatever the case, it is making an impact as a new trend in urban music. Artists such as D'Angelo, Maxwell, Erykah Badu, Jill Scott, Musiq Soulchild, Bilal, India.Arie and Alicia Keys have all been identified with this latest music phenomena.

There is a theory by some musicians in the industry that when required learning of music/instruments was no longer funded by the public school systems (during the Reagan era), music (especially for urban youth) changed drastically. Without basic formal musical training, their music (although highly creative under the circumstances) was limited in range, originality and performance.

The music and the lyrics of Neo-Soul artists (many who have had some formal music training) are different. Many of the philosophies and teachings of Ancient Kemet, such as Ma'at, can be found in

the songs of these artists, who sing and deliver spoken words about positivity, spirituality, ethnic pride and consciousness. Neo-Soul is also an attitude and lifestyle, which (much like the spoken word “Next Movement” rap community) often includes natural facial, body and hair care; holistic methods for fitness, healing and cleansing; and healthy eating habits, including vegetarianism/vegans, raw-foodists and fruitarians.

Most Neo-Soul artists were raised on hip-hop, which influences their music, but they also channel the energies and styles of artists such as Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin, Isaac Hayes and Curtis Mayfield. They pride themselves on not relying on commercial sounds, never-ending samples or other gimmicks to achieve mass sales; instead they rely on originality, expressive messages and the rawness of their vocal and musical talents.

A music trend prediction is that the next wave of urban young artists will be further inspired to study music, become musicians themselves, and use live musicians and instrumentation to further create new, unexpected and/or experimental fusions of existing musical styles. So the next time your son or daughter starts banging on that toy piano, you should think about getting them some lessons... and maybe a guitar, too.

UT



Hip-Hop music, in particular has been expanding beyond boundaries of race and geography. The continued diversification of rap/hip-hop combined with increased airplay on both domestic and international radio stations has facilitated the spread of the African American culture to other cultures in America and around the world. Through hip-hop music, the social, religious, political and economic conditions of our society are reflected through the prism of an urban worldview. The international youth culture, in particular, has embraced this new influence ranging from hip-hop dance classes to adopting the “urban look.” For example, a *Philadelphia Inquirer* article, “Gangsta in the land of geisha,” notes that all things African American are suddenly very beautiful and “totally cool” to the youth of Japan.

UT 3



HIP-HOP MUSIC IN ADVERTISING

Hip-Hop music in advertising attracts and keeps the attention of urban youth. For example, Sprite's use of hip-hop music in its commercials attracts urban youth to its advertisements, if for no reason other than to listen to the songs themselves. By appealing to urban youth with hip-hop music, Sprite is able to then express its message of trying to get them to purchase its products.

Additionally, the use of actual hip-hop artists in advertising can better direct your message to urban youth simply because urban youth very much respect the opinions of hip-hop artists. They are extensions of themselves, often having come from the same backgrounds. At the same time, especially among young people, the attraction to hip-hop artists has been shown to hold even across cultural boundaries.

UT 3

WHO'S HOTWHO'S NOT!!!

The following results were compiled from surveys administered to African American teens and young adults ages 15 – 25 from 1999 – 2001. Surveys were administered to more than 500 people in Los Angeles, Oakland, Atlanta, New York, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Baltimore, Miami and Houston.

	1999	2000	2001
MALE RAPPERS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DMX 2. Jay-Z 3. Outkast 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DMX 2. Jay-Z 3. Nas 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jay-Z 2. Nelly 3. Ja Rule
FEMALE RAPPERS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lauryn Hill 2. Foxy Brown 3. Mia-X 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eve 2. Lauryn Hill 3. Missy Elliot 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eve 2. Trina 3. Missy Elliot
MALE R&B ARTISTS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dru Hill 2. K-Ci & Jo Jo 3. Ginuwine 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dru Hill 2. Ginuwine 3. K-Ci & Jo Jo 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ginuwine 2. R. Kelly 3. Musiq Soulchild
FEMALE R&B ARTISTS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monica 2. Mya 3. Brandy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Destiny's Child 2. Mary J. Blige 3. Erykah Badu 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Alicia Keys 2. Mary J. Blige 3. Destiny's Child
MALE ACTORS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chris Tucker 2. Will Smith 3. Martin Lawrence 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chris Tucker 2. Martin Lawrence 3. Will Smith 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chris Tucker 2. Omar Epps 3. Martin Lawrence
FEMALE ACTORS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vivica Fox 2. Jada Pinkett 3. Jennifer Lopez 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jada Pinkett 2. Vivica Fox 3. Nia Long 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Halle Berry 2. Vivica Fox 3. Jennifer Lopez
MALE SPORTS FIGURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kobe Bryant 2. Allen Iverson 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kobe Bryant 2. Allen Iverson 3. Shaquille O'Neal 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Allen Iverson 2. Kobe Bryant 3. The Rock
FEMALE SPORTS FIGURES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lisa Leslie 2. Sheryl Swoopes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sheryl Swoopes 2. Lisa Leslie 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Laila Ali 2. Serena Williams 3. Venus Williams
MALE COMEDIANS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Steve Harvey 2. Cedric the Enter. 3. Bernie Mac 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Martin Lawrence 2. Chris Rock 3. Cedric the Enter. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cedric the Enter. 2. Bernie Mac 3. Steve Harvey
FEMALE COMEDIANS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sommore 2. Chocolate 3. Adelle Givens 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sommore 2. Chocolate 3. Kim Coles 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mo' Nique 2. Sommore 3. Chocolate

MEE's Who's Hot/Who's Not survey is quantitative research designed to uncover those celebrities that young African Americans think are "Hot" and "Not Hot" in the entertainment and sports worlds. Not only does this research identify celebrities that youth would be proud to call spokespersons for the African American community; this data also provides valuable insights for those interested in casting recommendations for upcoming movies, television shows, music videos, public service announcements or commercials.

Male Rappers

Only those artists that establish a meaningful rapport, visibility and credibility maintain the staying power necessary to remain "hot" over time. Jay-Z and DMX (who finished a close fourth) are two New York-based rappers that have developed a national following and maintained high visibility through releasing multiple albums in a relatively short amount of time. They also repeatedly collaborated on other artists' albums and headlined successful national tours. Newcomers to the top three include Ja Rule and the St. Louis-based rapper, Nelly.

Female Rappers

Like Jay-Z and his Ruff Ryders labelmate DMX, Eve, Philadelphia's first lady of hip-hop, is establishing her own level of staying power. She remained in the number one spot for the second consecutive year. Combining sexuality and hardcore street credibility, Eve was the only artist in this category to receive votes from more than 50% of the survey participants. Joining Eve in the top three for the second consecutive year is Missy Elliot and her futuristic sound. The newcomer in this category is Trina. Similar to past vote getters Foxy Brown and Lil' Kim, this rapper has captured the attention of Black youth with songs laced with sexually-explicit lyrics. Lauryn Hill, a top vote-getter the past two years, fell from the top three. However, her fifth place selection in 2001 suggests that she is only a solid album release away from reclaiming her spot atop the pack.

Male R&B Artists

The Male R&B category revealed some interesting trends, including a major drop-off in the popularity of former Jodeci front-men, K-Ci & Jo Jo. They went from one of the hottest R&B acts in 1999 and 2000 to hardly drawing a mention in 2001. In stark contrast, Ginuwine (garnering votes from over 50% of respondents) has seen his popularity steadily rise, as he continues to gain the eyes and ears of young ladies across the country. R. Kelly is another artist that received votes from over 50% of respondents as he vaulted into the top three. After releasing his first solo album, Philadelphia-based artist Musiq Soulchild debuted in the number three spot. In fact, after Ginuwine and R. Kelly, the next three selections were artists classified by the "neo-soul" sound.

Female R&B Artists

In 1999 and 2000, this category saw six different artists/groups in the top three spots. In 2001, the voting continued to be balanced, with no selection receiving 50% of the participants' votes. Newcomer Alicia Keys garnered the top spot, followed by Mary J. Blige and Destiny's Child. Blige has seen a significant positive transformation in her popularity since 1999, when Black youth specifically designated her as "Not Hot."

Male Actors

The top three rankings in 1999 and 2000 were held by a group of Black actors each with at least one movie grossing over \$100 million — Chris Tucker, Martin Lawrence and Will Smith. In 2001, the top three included a new member, Omar Epps. Those three ran away with the field, with each garnering votes from over 50% of the participants. Interestingly, in 1999, MEE predicted that Tucker (relatively new to the movie scene at the time, but a mainstay on the Black comedy circuit) would maintain a high level of popularity for at least five years. In addition, even though Epps received low ratings in 1999, MEE's qualitative research suggested that his popularity would rise over the next couple years and in 2001, Omar Epps claimed the number two spot. Martin Lawrence remains popular as his syndicated TV show *Martin* continues to be a hit in Black households.

Female Actors

If there is one thing that the top three females have in common, it is that all three are seen as extremely talented and beautiful. Halle Berry, Vivica Fox and Jennifer Lopez all received over 40% of the total votes. Fresh off her sexy performance in the movie *Swordfish*, Berry established herself as the top selection after two consecutive years in the number four spot. Fox has proven to have staying power, as she continues her presence in the top three for the third consecutive year. Lopez, who has a high level of "hip-hop appeal" due to her urban dance album, frequent presence at hip-hop events and former relationship with industry giant P. Diddy, returned to the top three after not appearing at all last year.

Male Sports Figures

They have battled for supremacy in the NBA Playoffs and they continue to battle in the WHWN survey. Allen Iverson and Kobe Bryant have established themselves as the two most popular sports figures in the minds of Black youth, each with well over 50% of voter selections in 2001. Though different in many respects—Bryant with the more "corporate" image and Iverson with the hip-hop flavor—the talents they showcase on the basketball court have allowed both to broaden their appeal, bringing Bryant urban credibility and Iverson mainstream acceptance. The Rock, a star in the world of professional wrestling and a newcomer to the survey, has emerged to narrowly replace Shaquille O'Neal at the number three spot.

Female Sports Figure

While Lisa Leslie has maintained a high level of popularity with urban youth, this year's survey tracked the emergence of Serena and Venus Williams into the national spotlight. Even though tennis has not been a sport heavily followed by African-Americans, the Williams sisters have shown that they truly transcend their sport and have garnered the respect of Black youth. Though not in the top three, Marion Jones went from last place in 2000 to fifth place in 2001, after a successful Olympic experience. The most surprising addition to the list was Laila Ali, the daughter of former heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali, who debuted at number one.

Male Comedians

Comedians tend to have a higher capacity for staying power than other celebrities. Much of that is generated through repeated appearances on Black comedy shows. There are three comedians, in particular, that have established themselves as the hottest around. The *Steve Harvey Show's* Steve Harvey and Cedric the Entertainer, along with Bernie Mac, have remained at or near the top three every year of the survey, with only Martin Lawrence and Chris Rock breaking through into the top tier.

Female Comedians

Sommore and Chocolate have consistently established themselves as the hottest female comedians around, finishing in the top three every year. The third individual on the list has changed each year, with Mo'Nique easily claiming the top spot in 2001. Look for Mo'Nique to maintain this positioning as she continues to maintain a television presence in the series *The Parkers* and continues her stand-up routine.

THE STATE OF BLACK TV

In this article, we take a brief look at the current state of "Black" TV shows, particularly marketed to this community. What kind of shows are out there this year [2000]?

The so-called "urban sitcoms" have been popular viewing choices for Black Americans. The WB and UPN networks, where you can often find African American viewers on a typical evening (instead of "The Big Three" networks), have been successful by carving out a niche and targeting programming to urban markets. Shows such as *The Parkers* (the top-rated show in Black households), *Moesha* and *The Jamie Foxx Show* have been among those cited in MEE focus groups regarding TV viewing habits. Yet, those shows recently came under attack by filmmaker Spike Lee, who accused them of perpetuating racial stereotypes, a theme he also explores in his latest film, *Bamboozled*.

Some believe that the quality of Black TV shows has actually improved over the past few years, as the programs with the most egregiously stereotypical portrayals had low ratings; viewers voted them down by flipping the dial. They point out that, for the most part, the characters on Black TV today are in or approaching America's middle class. The shows are also less reliant on jokes about sex than in the past; at least two feature married couples, and *Moesha* often touches on issues of sexual responsibility.

Yet, characters remain who are not far removed from the "pimp daddy" or sexy, sassy mama-with-major-attitude-mode. Lee has particular enmity for the Eddie Murphy-produced *The PJs*, which he said makes fun of the "whole pathology of lower-income African Americans living in the projects." Supporters of such storylines say that "poor Black people" are a reality in America, and that the show actually criticizes the "system" that holds them down, rather than making fun of them.

Lee will have his chance to put his art where his mouth is as he fulfills a recent development deal with Studio USA, the primetime production arm of the USA Network. His first focus will be to develop an hour-long

drama, the type of show which has traditionally been a hard sell to Black viewers.

Debates about the content of shows being developed for Black viewers will without a doubt continue to rage, as will the dispute over who controls the images of African Americans in not just television, but also in the movie and music industries. Promoting "good" Black programming correctly increases the odds that we will have a different conversation about the state of Black TV in the future. The verdict is out on whether African American viewers will consistently support quality programming that reflects the subtleties and realities of their lives, because as of yet, there are too few shows in any given year to comprise a reasonable sample size. Whatever is produced, finding an audience for it is the critical step in successful entertainment marketing.

Effective ethnic and multicultural marketing will be a key strategy in building market share. Though it is a traditionally underserved market, African Americans are known to be huge TV viewers. At the same time, there has been a huge increase in their buying power over the past decade. Therefore, producers (and advertisers) are beginning to "see the light" and are targeting them as a new source of viewers and revenue. Even programs with all-White casts have begun to reach out to and court more Black viewers, especially once they reach syndication. They have employed communications experts like MEE to generate significant "word of mouth" about the television shows that they want Black viewers to watch and support.

To "create a buzz" in urban and ethnic markets, messages must be developed to reach the audience both respectfully and responsibly. Culturally-relevant research that uncovers the unique characteristics of urban African American consumers is the foundation for effectively delivering your message directly to them, whether it's selling a product, promoting a film or changing behavior. Smart marketers realize that they need accurate, up-to-date portraits of the urban consumer in order

to make effective strategic decisions about messages used to promote their products and services. They need to know both the current state of the market (including the social context, attitudes and values that affect choices) and be ahead of the upcoming trends.

Once a marketer has developed an understanding of the audience he or she is trying to reach, it becomes much easier to develop a game plan for generating word-of-mouth. Two strategies that MEE has successfully implemented are: promotions on urban/R&B/hip-hop radio stations, using DJs (who have a high degree of credibility in urban communities) to spread the message; and community mobilization and outreach, including using street teams to publicize programs by putting materials directly into the hands of those who make the viewing decisions within their households. A comprehensive, well thought-out and culturally-relevant marketing strategy always results in "moving the numbers," whether the goal is selling a product or promoting a wide range of ideas and programming, from HIV testing to major films and television shows.

UT 9



Black and White Television: What Are We Watching?

To win meaningful ratings, producing a television show that appeals to urban markets must be accompanied by a culturally-relevant campaign to assure viewership. MEE has combined responses from focus groups and surveys with our insights from years of working with African American youth and adults in entertainment marketing to develop strategic recommendations for reaching the urban demographic.

TV Viewing Habits

MEE has found that television-viewing decisions of African Americans, especially during prime time (8-11 p.m.), are largely made based on race. This is particularly true when it comes to half-hour situation comedies, which Blacks often name as their favorite kind of TV program. Favorite shows among African Americans, not surprisingly, are those with a predominantly Black cast, including *The Steve Harvey Show*, the *Wayans Brothers* and *Moesha*. As a result, favorite stations were usually UPN, the WB Network and Fox, in that order, because of the African American programming offered. Fox was less likely to be mentioned for sitcoms, but came up frequently for sports (among males) and for shows such as *Ally McBeal*, *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Party of Five* (among women).

The news is the most watched show among our focus group participants. Soap operas were the most popular programs during mid-day.

There is a perception among African Americans that there is no programming that will appeal to them on the "Big Three" networks. Instead, participants report that they find themselves watching more cable programming (especially HBO) or movies (including pay-per-view). Since Blacks have turned off the networks for their sitcom viewing, the gap between the shows that African Americans and Whites watch is wider than ever. (See chart for 2000 data)

Interestingly, most of the focus groups' favorite programs were in syndication. Over the last few years, our participants have begun to list more "mainstream"

shows like *Friends* or *Seinfeld* among their favorite programs. However, they reported only starting to watch these shows when they hit syndication, where African Americans do most of their sitcom viewing. Before that, their awareness of shows like this was low or non-existent.

Changing the Marketing Focus

African Americans we talked to said they rarely "channel surfed." Instead of just flipping channels, looking for new programs, they turn on the television to watch a specific program. That increases the importance of alternative forms of program promotion—promotions that do not necessarily reach people in front of the TV, but rather when they are out of their homes and in their communities.

[continued on page 11](#)

Top 7 Shows for Black Viewers

The Parkers (UPN)
Monday Night Football (ABC)
City of Angels (CBS)
Moesha (UPN)
Grown Ups (UPN)
The Steve Harvey Show (WB)
Malcom and Eddie (UPN)

Top 7 Shows for White Viewers

Who Wants to Be A Millionaire*-
Tues. (ABC)
Who Wants to Be Millionaire-
Thur. (ABC)
ER (NBC)
Who Wants to Be A Millionaire-
Sun.(ABC)
Frasier (NBC)
Friends (NBC)
Monday Night Football (ABC)

*Show was 8th popular highest among African Americans
Source: Nielsen Media Research/Philadelphia Inquirer

AnUpdate

Recent Nielsen data shows some overlap in the programs watched. According to a study by Initiative Media, nine programs that were among Nielsen Media Research's 20 most popular for the 2000/2001 season for White audiences were also in the top 20 for Blacks. What does this mean? Do Blacks and Whites now share similar TV viewing habits? There are several variables that contribute to this phenomenon.

Syndication

MEE focus group research shows that many African Americans' favorite programs, especially sitcoms, are shows that are currently in syndication. However, many say that they only started to watch "mainstream" shows when they hit syndication. As Blacks become aware of mainstream shows that are in syndication and begin to relate more to the characters on them, they become more likely to watch the original episodes as they air on prime time network television and perhaps begin to feel that some "White" shows can be funny or interesting.

Blacks and Mainstream Programming

With a limited selection of predominantly-Black programs, Blacks who want to watch TV may be "forced" to watch mainstream programs during times when Black programs are not on. There are very few nights in a week where there are two or more programs running with Black casts. Even when they are, it is not on any of the "Big Three" networks. The smaller, second-tier networks that have traditionally developed programs targeting African Americans are still the "place to go" to see Black lives represented.

Blacks and Cable

Since many African Americans feel that there is no programming for them on the major networks, they turn instead to cable programming, particularly on HBO. Cable viewership among Blacks continues to increase as a result of several cable programs that feature Blacks in significant roles. Leading the way is Showtime's *Soul Food*, with its sexy and engaging ensemble cast. The hour-long program revolving around a Black family's trials and triumphs is the first network Black drama to be renewed for a second season.

UT

SURFING THE STREETS: The Internet and Urban America



In an effort to determine critical factors behind the well-publicized “digital divide,” MEE has conducted focus group and secondary research across the country with African American students and working adults, ages 20 to 45. Participants had modest incomes and at least some familiarity with personal computers (PCs) and the Internet, whether at home, work or in public settings such as libraries or recreation centers.

Access to computer technology is being touted as the future for exchanging information and making money, and is, according to Rev. Jesse Jackson, “the newest stage of the civil rights struggle.” Therefore, it is critical to understand the key factors affecting computer ownership and Internet access. MEE particularly wanted to explore current and/or potential reasons why African Americans use computers and the Internet, along with their comfort levels with computers and Internet services.

Some of the key findings of our qualitative research have recently been expanded on by a national quantitative research survey conducted by the Washington-based Pew Internet and American Life Project. That report said that more Blacks are using the Internet, but that the digital divide, while getting smaller, still exists. The number of African Americans surfing

the Web surged last year. According to the Pew study, 3.5 million African Americans started using the Internet in the last year, bringing the estimated total number of Blacks online to about 7.5 million. That number represents 36% of African American adults, compared to 50% of all White adults who use the Internet.

Some Additional Snapshots

Most participants in MEE’s survey sample use their computers both at home and at work. Very few of the participants did not have at least some reasonable access to PCs and the Internet.

Our participants use the Internet in a wide variety of ways. The most frequently mentioned use was entertainment-related. The Pew study confirmed this, showing that Blacks were 69% more likely than Whites to have listened to music on the Web and 38% more likely to have downloaded music files. Students and other participants who used a PC for work were most likely to use the Internet for research purposes.

We found a high degree of sophistication among our participants, both in the regular use of a PC and their online experience in the work environment and at home. Younger participants, especially college graduates, see their future as based on a high level of dependency on PCs, similar

even to the telephone. They are also more creative in using the Internet and are more likely to access it for almost everything.

Older males and females are more likely to get online for specific reasons, such as to look for job information. Many participants, particularly older females, described an initial obsession period when they first bought their computers, which subsided after a few months of being online.

Male participants across age groups took more pleasure in and notice of the technical aspects of being online. They were much more likely to discuss buying computer equipment online and/or downloading software.

Despite nearly unanimous mention of concerns regarding security online, the vast majority of participants have made purchases online, especially in the areas of electronics, travel and music.

As with other emerging trends, there are market opportunities related to these findings. Developers who create content and Websites targeted to African Americans, whether for information or entertainment, are poised to take advantage of the increasing numbers of Black Web users. Many “surfers” are still seeking Websites they can go to for the information they need and deserve. As word-of-mouth spreads about the many things that can now be accomplished online, we can count on seeing user-numbers increase, especially among those for whom cost and access is less of an issue.

Community-based education programs, along with increasing the number of computer access points in urban communities, can increase African Americans’ interest in getting online. In order to effectively promote the benefits of being connected to the world through the Internet, all off-line outreach to the community must, however, be short, concise and culturally-relevant. Incentives such as contests and DJ-driven radio promotions can also be used to drive people to Websites where their needs can be met.

URBAN AMERICA ON THE INTERNET: Oral Culture vs. Literate Culture – Can They Be Brought Together?

Usually, discussions about Internet usage and African Americans focus on the “digital divide.” According to “Falling through the Net,” a 1999 report released by the U.S. Commerce Department, the gap in computer access between Blacks and Whites was close to 40%, with Whites having significantly more Internet access in their homes. Explanations offered for this disparity often center on economics, but is it possible that a literate-based medium (such as the Internet) and an audience with an oral-based communication style (African Americans) are simply incompatible?

Contemporary African American communication has emerged from an oral tradition that has its roots in African culture. From an African perspective, *Nommo*, the spiritual power of word, is the sacred secular mode of discourse. It relies on a shared knowledge and understanding within a group structure, lending credibility to the parties involved. This style of communication puts emphasis on the face-to-face interaction between the communicator and his or her audience.

In contrast, the Internet often distances communication from its social context, and is quite linear in conveying information to its audience. This literate-based approach to communication is in direct opposition to the urban audience's desire and need to challenge the information it is receiving, and blocks the ability to counter the speaker's arguments. This weakens the credibility of the message sender to the African American community.

Many African Americans perceive the Internet as controlled by “others,” and that its messages, from mainstream sources within the dominant culture, are not meant for them. Web information often lacks the insider status that allows for “telling it like it is.” Ownership of ideas and positions on many Websites are linked to a mainstream source, making them immediately suspect to this audience.

Given the incompatibility of the some aspects of the Internet and of the urban community, it would stand to reason that this medium simply has not completely

caught on as a primary communications vehicle for this audience. However, as the Internet continues to evolve, this may change. The word-of-mouth component of oral urban culture is reflected in e-mail, message boards, e-groups and chat rooms, which welcome feedback and responses from the audience. They also allow for argument/counter-argument interaction on every topic imaginable. The fluidity of the medium enables messages to travel throughout the world, without geographical boundaries, a new manifestation of communication within the traditional African village.

Topics and activities on Websites are now being tailored specifically to urban populations of color. This narrow targeting that is very similar to what has occurred with radio programming, which has long been proven a very effective communication medium in the urban community.

Still, Internet usage among African Americans has continued to increase. Chicago-based *Target Market News* reports that African Americans spent \$1.3 billion on computer products, increasing 143%

Many African Americans perceive the Internet as controlled by “others,” and feel that its messages, from mainstream sources within the dominant culture, are not meant for them.

over the past year. These numbers demonstrate that when a technological medium becomes relevant to the lives of the Black people, they not only make great use of it, but they adapt their communication style in such a way that it retains its storytelling, rhetorical component. African Americans may often be found online exchanging recipes, hair tips, poetry, rap lyrics and gossip, as well as voicing their likes and dislikes in the areas of film, music, fashion, politics and education. Instead of swapping stories over the fence, the online community is sharing tales by tapping on their keyboards.

UT

Black and White TV

Continued from page 9

Promoting Programming to Urban Audiences

Capture Their Attention

Try new and different ways of reaching this savvy and street-smart audience. Create interesting promotion that urban audiences can relate to. Use bright colors and interesting packaging.

Take It To the Community

Find ways to promote to urban audiences from “within the community” by having co-promotions with local radio and television stations. Get people involved. Go to their barber shops, hair and nail salons, record stores and malls. Give away cool items that promote the name and theme of your show.

Be Authentic

To make shows more appealing to an urban audience, promotions must reflect their lifestyle, language and music. Inauthentic marketing will turn the audience off. And once the effort has been branded corny or offensive, you may never get a second chance to reach out to them.

Integrate the Cast

It may seem obvious, but audiences are more into programs where they see characters that they can relate to. Even a single African American character who has some significant “face time” could make a big difference in increasing the overall popularity of a show.

UT 7



A Way to “Better” Black Entertainment?

A national research project on urban youth entertainment trends could revolutionize movies and other programming with messages for young people. *Inner-City Truth: Going Beyond Media Hype* is a nine-city, MEE qualitative research study that has many applications, including the development of socially-responsible entertainment programming for urban youth. It is also expected to generate public awareness and foster a community dialogue about the Black urban youth perspective on sexual health and other pressing issues.

Focus groups, one-on-one interviews and surveys are being conducted with hundreds of urban youth (ages 16 to 20) from

nine urban markets. Cities include New York, NY; Los Angeles, CA; Chicago, IL; Baltimore, MD; New Orleans, LA; Philadelphia, PA; Detroit, MI; Miami, FL; Atlanta, GA; St. Louis, MO; Oakland, CA; and Houston, TX.

A thorough analysis of the responses will provide extensive insight to producers, directors and scriptwriters about the attitudes and behaviors of urban African American youth regarding the most relevant issues in their daily lives. The project brings to the surface the best ways to transfer pro-social information, in a “real” and “relevant” manner, to urban-oriented film, cable and television programming.

Some of the areas to be probed include:

which genres of entertainment are most popular with urban youth, and what kinds of stories they want to see portrayed; who their favorite entertainers are, along with credible peers and (adult) role models from other fields; and youth’s assessment of current entertainment programming. Because urban youth are often the trendsetters for American and international popular culture, *Inner-City Truth* also has implications for general market programming. **UT**

To find out more about the research project, contact MEEPROD@aol.com or call (215) 829-4920.

☞ **The influence of urban music continues its extension to the silver screen. The list of rap and R&B performers to make the leap to film careers is rapidly growing. From mainstream acts like Ice Cube, LL Cool J, Will Smith and Queen Latifah, to “harder” stars like Method Man, Redman, Q-Tip, RZA, Raekwon and to divas Mary J. Blige, Erykah Badu and the late singer Aaliyah, many are starting to become enthralled by the idea of appearing on the big screen.**

Most of these artists see film as a way to expand their star power. Meanwhile, the studios see popular hip-hoppers as a way to produce bigger returns at the box office and boost sales for a film’s soundtrack. But not everyone is overjoyed with these recent developments. Veteran actors such as Samuel Jackson are concerned that these untrained actors are stealing roles that otherwise would be available to “legitimate” actors who have worked, trained and struggled for a chance to gain film roles. (*Vibe*) **UT 7**

☞ **Product placement in movies is a very effective way of marketing to African Americans. This tool provides repeated national exposure for the duration of the movie cycle, while practically guaranteeing that the intended target market is reached. Movie companies may soon be able to get rid of their costume budgets, as deals with apparel manufacturers proliferate. The intent of these tie-in deals is to provide added exposure for the movies, while delivering the critical buzz needed to keep brands hot in the eyes of the most fickle of markets the lucrative teen market. Levi’s, J. Crew, and Tommy Hilfiger have taken the step to tie-in with movies and TV shows. The top two teen habits are buying clothes and “going to the movies,” so the connection between the two industries is highly logical. (*American Demographics*) **UT 3****

Traditionally relegated to the roles of villain or sidekick, Asian and African American actors and actresses are now starting to get top billing in commercially and critically acclaimed films. In fact, both Hollywood and independent filmmakers are beginning to explore a mix of African American and Asian cultures. One of the biggest commercial examples, *Romeo Must Die*, featured Hong Kong martial arts star Jet Li opposite the late R&B artist Aaliyah, in a retelling of the classic Romeo and Juliet theme.

In a much different approach, maverick director Jim Jarmusch’s *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, stars Forest Whitaker as an inner-city mob hit man who follows bushido, the traditional code of the Japanese samurai. These recent developments can be traced back to the success of 1998’s *Rush Hour*, which teamed perennial action favorite Jackie Chan with comedian Chris Tucker to the tune of \$141 million. These films did so well that famed comedian-actor, Chris Tucker, reportedly earned \$20 million for the sequel *Rush Hour 2*. He is the second Black actor, after Eddie Murphy, to reach that salary milestone. Buoyed by that crossover success, Hollywood action films are starting to globalize. Marquees may never be the same. (*Jet Magazine, Vibe*) **UT 7**

Making Money Out the Box

With an explosion of movie offerings, the competition for audiences is more intense than ever. More and more, even the urban market, once overlooked and underestimated, is bombarded by a multitude of competing films. That means advertisers and marketers must be more creative in their attempts to reach potential moviegoers and to influence pivotal peer-leaders. The greatest film in the world is no good without a campaign to put people in movie theater seats. This means studios need to work harder to positively differentiate their films. Despite the fact that African Americans are high consumers of movies, it still takes a cultural sensitivity and financial commitment to develop a loyal audience base among them.

One of the most effective types of communication for promoting urban films is peer-to-peer networking, which generates word-of-mouth interest for a film. Urban youth and young adults, trendsetters for popular culture in America and around the world, consume films in large numbers, going to an average of three to four movies a month. By capturing their attention, studios and distributors increase the chances of getting a strong start at the box office. We know that many entertainment trends begin with “hip-hoppers,” with all other demographic, ethnic and cultural groups gradually following. Youth in America’s inner-cities, with their extraordinary peer-to-peer network, generate tremendous word-of-mouth, especially on that all-important first weekend at the box office (a phenomenon that often deter-

mines the success or failure of an urban-market film). Creating that “buzz” is critical to ensuring a sizable turnout and a long, profitable run for an urban-interest movie.

What’s needed is an effective, culturally-relevant marketing/advertising campaign, and MEE’s research shows that “authenticity” is the key to creating one. It should be specifically developed with the sensibilities and edge of the urban community in mind.

Developing the Buzz

To get those big box office numbers on the first weekend, the hip-hop community is often the key. First, you must take your campaign to where the audience is. Use creative marketing techniques that incorporate non-traditional marketing channels that will allow messages to be crafted in a language and style which might otherwise be restricted. These strategies, such as local, grassroots promotion through street teams, merchandise giveaways, underground media and event marketing expand the viewing audience. The goal is to generate awareness and exposure at critical contact points in both the urban communities and the audience immediately involved in marketing efforts.

The most common and effective way of meeting those goals is through neighborhood-level marketing and distribution of available promotional materials: posters, stickers, videos, etc. Our focus group participants consistently identify free movie-related merchandise as being an important factor in generating word-of-mouth

interest. The key is to successfully identify where the target audience hangs out (i.e. shopping malls, hair and nail salons, basketball courts, video arcades, etc.) and what community-based events should be blanketed with materials.

MEE has also found Black colleges and urban community colleges to be effective launching points for urban films. Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are key points of intersection that not only serve a breadth of potential African American consumers, but also enable great word-of-mouth. In addition to the students themselves, marketers who use this strategy have access to their instructors, college employees and the surrounding community, which often has historical and emotional ties to HBCUs.

Promoting films to urban audiences can also continue after they leave the neighborhood theater. Those movies are quick to turn up on home video rentals and on cable television, where a significant portion of the profits on these films are made. Research shows that urban audiences rent a lot of movies for home viewing, with VCR penetration being more than 94% in Black homes (compared to the national average of 85%). These multiple viewing opportunities provide substantial opportunities to make profits for film marketers who know how to effectively target an audience which generates nearly \$10 billion in ticket sales each year.

UT 8

Movies&MEE

MEE provided market research, script and ad testing, execution of promotional or company campaigns and other marketing services for some of the most popular films of the last decade:

Movie	Studio	MEE Services
Rush Hour, Rush Hour 2	New Line Cinema	Trailer and Ad Testing
Mulan	Disney	Trailer and Ad Testing
How to Be A Player	Island Pictures/DEF Pictures	Script/Casting Development
Blue Streak	Columbia	Trailer and Ad Testing
Life	Universal Pictures	Trailer and Ad Testing
Panther	Gramercy	Concept Testing
Ali	Columbia	Promotions/Community Campaign
How High	Universal Pictures	Trailer and Ad Testing
Backstage	Miramax Pictures	Screening/Trailer Development and Testing
Friday, Next Friday	New Line Cinema	Trailer and Ad Testing
Finding Forrester	Columbia Tri-Star	Trailer and Ad Testing
Bones	New Line Cinema	Post-Release Analysis



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