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The World: Why Poles in Britain are still an attractive option

by Claire Billings, Campaign 17-Oct-08

While some have given up on the UK, the resident Poles continue to be a desirable demographic to reach.

It's almost five years since Poland joined the European Union and many Poles flocked to the UK to take advantage of the labour market and the strong economy.

But today's weak pound (which now buys only four zlotys compared with seven back then) and an improved standard of living back home have prompted many Poles to return. Some reports suggest that the number of Poles leaving is greater than those coming in.

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Against that backdrop, it doesn't sound like a good time to be launching a Polish newspaper in the UK, but Axel Springer is doing just that in bringing its market-leading tabloid Fakt to the UK and Ireland.

The publisher argues that only 12 per cent of the estimated one million Poles in the UK have declared a willingness to return to their homeland, and that Polish workers are expected to make up many of the construction workers required to build the 2012 Olympic Village.

The newspaper - a weekly UK version of its best-selling daily red-top - will contain a round-up of the week's news, plus advice on living as an immigrant in the UK. It will be available at newsstands and in Polish shops, and aims to capitalise on the growing number of younger, career-focused Poles.

"The Poles in the UK are an attractive target audience for advertisers, as the majority fall into the 20- to 40-year-old age bracket. Most of them are single, with fewer responsibilities, resulting in an increased disposable income. They are focused on success with a high purchasing potential," Joanna Szczepiek, a project manager at Axel Springer, explains.

Another Polish media brand in the UK, Radio Orla, targets a similar audience. It believes that Poles wishing to remain in the UK, or who are now arriving for the first time, are more attractive to advertisers than the early Polish immigrants.

Monika Kray, Radio Orla's marketing manager, says: "There are now more Poles coming over to Britain who have higher skills and a very good command of English. They are professionals working in jobs such as banking, international legal practice and PR, and although a lot of Poles are returning, those who are staying are more sophisticated and earning more money."

Kray says that in addition to the Polish-language posters offering services for Poles to send money home gracing popular destinations such as West London, banks are now targeting them with pensions, mortgages and insurance

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products.

In the travel sector, as well as ads from budget airlines trying to capture the business of those returning home, tour operators are also promoting adventure holidays to places such as Vietnam.

So how do you reach this lucrative market? One issue is the disparity of Poles in the UK, in terms of age, background and experience - and that they are spread far and wide from Wrexham and Norfolk to London, Leeds and Birmingham.

Simon Silvester, Young & Rubicam's strategy director for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, says: "The Polish community in Britain is much more developed and organised than many other immigrant communities. There are rich Poles and poor Poles, and those who've just arrived and those who are more established. There are big differences and they keep apart."

Cultural differences also need to be considered. While Poles' media consumption - such as TV, newspapers and online - is similar to the UK's, the fact that Poland was only introduced to capitalism 20 years ago, makes them a different type of audience.

According to Kray, Poles are much more suspicious of products and claims until they are proven.

Richard Pinder, the chief operating officer of Publicis Worldwide, believes Poles are now realising how valuable they are to the UK, but that they haven't always been treated as such.

"It's no longer, 'come on in, the water's lovely', it's, 'come here, we need you'. But the view in Poland is that they suffered racism and being treated like migrant labour rather than intelligent people and made to feel not valuable. Talking down to them or taking the view that you've got lower-educated people here would be a classic error."

Andrzej Czajkowski, the former director of Central and Eastern Europe at M&C Saatchi, believes Poles respond to more intelligent advertising. "Polish brands and advertisers should be more sophisticated in their message," he says. "Too often, they're banal and lack the English edginess and the challenge that we have in the UK. The Poles over here appreciate it. They don't need to be so literal."

Given their strong command of the English language and the similarities in their media habits, some believe that UK-based Poles get a lot of what they need from English media. The question, Pinder says, is: "What are you going to give them in addition that's different?"

The answer lies in catering to their needs and understanding their unique Anglo-Polish culture.

Pinder adds: "How do they get all the things that make the cultural shift more comfortable? Where are the churches and food groups? Maybe they do prefer Mum's cakes, after all. That's a summary of what Fakt needs to offer. If you look at any large ethnic group, they try to integrate but they also try to keep some of their cultural reference points, and I think advertisers need to recognise that. If you're Sainsbury's and you do a line in Polish food, then you need to tell them."

While the influx of Poles here is slowing, the evidence suggests that those who remain are media-savvy, ambitious and sophisticated consumers, whom advertisers would do well to embrace.

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