

Cristina Benitez

President, Lazos Latinos

For two decades, Cristina Benitez has developed a wide range of branding and marketing programs that targeted the growing Latino population in the United States. In 1998, she founded Lazos Latinos, a specialty Hispanic, strategic branding and advertising company based in Chicago. In 2005, Lazos Latinos added “Latinization” to help Fortune 500 companies understand and develop their Hispanic employees. Lazos Latinos’ mission is to build leadership by embracing, understanding and respecting Latino employees and consumers.

Formerly senior vice president of ethnic marketing at DraftWorldwide, Ms. Benitez directed Hispanic direct marketing campaigns for Sprint, AARP, PacificCare, HFC and Miracle-Ear. While at Draft, she spearheaded Dimensión Draft, the agency’s nationally recognized study on Hispanics and direct marketing. This research was the first of its kind to examine direct opportunities targeting Hispanic consumers.

Cristina’s prior Hispanic advertising experience was in New York at FOVA, Grey Advertising’s Hispanic marketing group, where she served as vice president, account services. In this capacity, she was responsible for clients such as Procter & Gamble, Kraft General Foods (Post Cereals), The Dannon Company, Domino’s Pizza, Quaker State and SmithKline Beecham, among others. Cristina’s expertise across all aspects of program development, and her culturally diverse background as a bilingual native of Florida, proved invaluable in creating highly successful Hispanic marketing campaigns.

Before entering the field of marketing, Cristina spent eight years teaching Spanish at the secondary and college levels. She has traveled extensively and lived in several U.S. Hispanic and Latin American markets including Cuba, Mexico, and Central and South America. Fluent in Spanish with conversational skills in French, Italian and German, Cristina attended the University of Georgia and received her undergraduate and masters degrees from Furman University.

Cristina is a Board Member of The Chicago Public Library, The Gateway Foundation, The Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement, Luna Negra Dance Theater, and serves on the Audience Development & Diversity Committee of the Museum of Contemporary Art. She served on the Governor’s Commission on the Status of Women in Illinois, the Lt. Governor’s Ethnic Advisory Council, and the Advisory Council of the Women’s Business Development Center. Cristina is former vice chairman of Directo, the Hispanic Marketing Council of the Direct Marketing Association and a member of the American Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies. She teaches courses on Hispanic marketing at Columbia College and the Instituto Cervantes in Chicago and is a mentor to Latino youth for the Youth Economic Empowerment Initiative. Cristina is a frequent speaker at national conferences on “Trends in the U.S. Hispanic Market” and “The Latinization of the United States”. In 2007 she wrote her first book on *Latinization... How Latino Culture is Transforming the U.S.*

