

Best-In-Class: Pop-Tarts Día de Muertos Impact and Innovation

Captura Group and Kellogg share insights and learnings behind award-winning multicultural campaign during HMC's Strategic Excellence Award webinar

By Alvaro Arroyo

With the aim of sharing exceptional case studies from top industry thought leaders, and as part of its Strategic Excellence Award webinar series, the Hispanic Marketing Council (HMC) recently hosted a session to highlight the strategy and execution behind Pop-Tarts' Día de Muertos campaign - winner of the 2022 Silver Award for Impact and Innovation.

During the session, Sandra Auren, Captura Director of Insights & Strategy, and David Greci, Senior Brand Manager for Kellogg's Pop-Tarts, shared the insights that served as the cornerstone for the campaign, the challenges & opportunities they faced, and how the teams were able to engage the Latino community through culturally relevant and purposeful innovation.

The Point of Ignition

Every successful strategy starts with deep and solid insights. This is what Auren referred to as a *point of ignition* for the Pop-Tarts campaign. The teams knew that U.S. Hispanic households are younger and tend to have larger families with children. The brand had been driving adoption with the existing portfolio through culturally relevant messaging but had an opportunity to further connect with consumers and celebrate everything that Pop-Tarts had to offer to the Hispanic community.

The general market grew up with Pop-Tarts, but the campaign needed to introduce the product to U.S. Hispanics to make sure the delicious pastries were a must on their shopping list. "What we discovered was that Hispanic moms are always trying to find new and fun ways to share cultural practices with their teens. They crave moments when they can connect," explained Auren. This pointed the team in a new and exciting direction.

The Innovation

After years of bringing more culture into its ads, Pop-Tarts set out to bring more culture into its food and create snackable moments that could be shared by Hispanic families, as well as the total market. The innovation consisted of new limited-edition Pop-Tarts featuring a Día de Muertos box and nine printed fun pastry designs. The brand built on the celebration's awareness, appealing to U.S. Hispanics and the mainstream population and bringing new life to a beloved Pop-Tarts flavor: Chocolate Churro.

Being a food brand, what made Pop-Tarts' innovation so successful is that it used its most distinctive assets: the packaging and the food itself. "We used it as a canvas to bring the story to life in a way that is meaningful for Pop-Tarts and for our audience. The fun printed designs on the food looked great, the packaging stood out on the shelf, and the results support that," said Greci.

Navigating Cultural Pitfalls

Featuring cultural elements of a beloved celebration for Hispanics such as Día de Muertos came with its own set of challenges, as there is always a fine line between authentically taking part in a cultural celebration and the negative perception of cultural practice appropriation.

In taking this deeper dive into culture, the brand had to avoid off-putting stereotypes and instead lean into crucial ingredients such as respect, sensitivity, and intentionality for Pop-Tarts to become the perfect pallet for one of our most endearing celebrations. To this end, the team started with a deep immersion for all involved teams, unpacking the meaning of Día de Muertos, mapping out the dos and don'ts, and getting feedback from Kellogg's internal groups and multicultural teams.

For instance, the team worked with HOLA!, Kellogg's Latino employee resource group, to help pressure test the campaign and provide a fresh set of eyes to make sure the brand avoided appropriation. In addition to these resource groups, "partnering with the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture (NALAC), one of the most prestigious Latino youth organizations in the country, also helped the brand generate impact in the community, allowing it to be part of that social fabric, authentically locking arms with them, and being part of the celebration," noted Auren.

Another potential risk the team considered was that many perceive Día de Muertos as a Mexican celebration, worrying that Latinos from other countries and non-U.S. Hispanics might not feel as connected to the campaign or the product. To mitigate this, Greci explained the team made sure that they "didn't try to portray it as anything broader than it should be. We tried to keep it authentic to the meaning of the Holiday. It's a big enough idea that we didn't need to expand beyond the intent of the Holiday. Hispanics as a group have a rich variety of celebrations, and Día de Muertos has become one of them, something we can all embrace and celebrate. Hispanics are more about what unites them, and not about what makes them different."

The Results

Once a clear path was set for the brand to tell its story and share in the celebration, Pop-Tarts Día de Muertos Chocolatey Churro landed in stores nationwide, driving awareness in paid and organic social, elevating credibility with Mariell Guzman, a powerful Latina influencer, leaning in with local radio, and partnering with NALAC to honor those who have passed by empowering our current generations.

Results included 91% Positive Consumer Sentiment (Social Listening powered by Infegy Atlas), confirming Pop-Tarts was successful in avoiding the potential backlash of being seen as taking advantage of a Hispanic holiday. It also saw over 20% lift from Instagram In-feed and stories engagement rate (Captiv8), 358 MM impressions in Spanish and English (Weber Shandwick), and a significant 70% growth in sales and household penetration for the featured Chocolatey Churro flavor (NielsenIQ Target Track / Homescan), a number that surpassed initial expectations by far.

These results would not have been possible without the buy-in and ongoing commitment of all involved teams, including the brand's decision-makers who embraced this innovation. Greci acknowledged that confidence in these results from the get-go was instrumental in moving forward: "We built a solid story business case behind it, where we had a strategy of increasing household penetration with Hispanic families. We felt confident that we had a strong enough campaign that would justify the resources that went into this with alignment from all the big decision-makers."

Key Learnings

Auren concluded the session by sharing three fundamental learnings teams took away from the experience of working on this campaign:

- Marketing efforts for the U.S. Hispanic market can lead total market growth. Consumers are hungry for innovation. Multicultural-led initiatives are able to transcend the market when they bring something valuable and new to consumers.
- Avoid analysis paralysis. Not everything is going to be perfect. It's not about perfection, it's about expertise. Make sure to identify the right areas that need support and that you have the right variables and put everything in place for their success.
- Take risks but be prepared. In the pursuit of embracing culture, there will always be a risk of less than favorable responses. Be prepared for authentic answers and to engage in conversation as this will become part of the consumer experience. Learn as you go and continue to optimize.

Being recognized for the impact and innovation of this campaign is particularly meaningful for Auren and the entire Captura Group: "We're constantly thinking: What's next? What more can we do for our clients? How can we do things better? How can we innovate? The landscape today, especially for multicultural marketing, is moving incredibly fast, and brands and society at large are hungry for innovation. There's no better time to be bold, take that risk, and go for it", said Auren.