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Study Finds Sellers Have a Lot to Learn About Muslim-American Buyers

According to a study conducted by one of the nation's largest advertising companies, sellers still have a lot to learn when it comes to knowing Muslim-American buyers. NY1's Shazia Khan filed the following Money Matters Report.

From tweens to metrosexuals, advertising agencies are always seeking new consumers. Marian Salzman saw the growing Muslim-American community as an untapped market.

As a result, Salzman, the executive vice president and chief marketing officer of JWT, one of the world's largest advertising companies, launched a survey to better understand Muslim-American consumer attitudes.

"It's a very, very engaged consumer population, but it's not a consumer population that shops exactly the way your average, everyday American shops," said Salzman. "So we really need to understand the differences."

More than 800 Muslims across the country were surveyed over a six-month period. One of the major findings shows

Muslim Americans—an estimated 2 percent of the national population—have more than \$170 billion in buying power.

"There is a lot of opportunity for marketers to get closer to these households, who have money to spend," said Salzman.

From food to fashion to finance, Islamic law plays a role in many areas of a Muslim's life. Banking and transactions with interest is not permitted. Modest clothing is required for both women and men. Food and products like cosmetics and toothpaste, must be halal, or prepared under specific guidelines.

Salzman says one way mainstream companies can tap into this market, is to put a mark on halal appropriate goods, much like the K on many kosher products. Another strategy is having stores carry a greater selection of conservative fashions.

While some big businesses are reaching out, Salzman says there is still a long way to go.

"I am unpleasantly surprised by the degree of reticence that the main stream companies have to openly embrace the

Muslim consumer in the U.S.," she said. "I am convinced they are happy to take their money, but I'm not necessarily sure they've made absolute peace with embracing them and communicating with them. So, Hallmark could probably do a better job of merchandising cards for Eid-ul-Fitr. I think every airline brand can learn to accommodate a Muslim passenger."

While the study finds Muslims in this country have particular needs in the marketplace, it also shows they still want to be considered part of the American mainstream.

Faiza Ali of the Council on American Islamic Relations agrees.

"Seeing a commercial with a Muslim couple would be the most idea," said Ali. "I think, again, like in a Home Depot commercial, because that's something we all can relate to regardless of our culture, regardless of our religion."