

DON'T GIVE ME JUST ONE

How Ethnicity Trends Affect Gift-Giving in Canada By Ian Gordon

Many Chinese people who receive a single gift would really prefer a second. This is not being ungrateful but rather an issue of a culture where odd numbers are considered unlucky. Here is just one instance of opportunities gift retailers and suppliers might consider as they cater to customers in an increasingly diverse Canadian marketplace. The question managers often ask is whether there is sufficient economic potential from specific market segments to warrant focused attention in areas such as packaging, promoting and selling gifts. This article discusses changes in Canadian demographics, and concentrates on immigration, culture and language changes for their implications to gift suppliers.

A New Canada

A more ethnically diverse Canada has emerged and it offers new marketing opportunities to alert businesses. Almost one in five Canadians were born outside Canada; there are over 5.4 million immigrants, 4 million of whom reside in Ontario and British Columbia. In these provinces there is greater concentration of immigrants than the national average, with more than 26% of the provincial population being foreign-born.² In some cities, immigrants make up an even greater proportion of the population, as suggested by Chart 1 that highlights immigrants in 10 cities where the proportion is highest. In Toronto, for example,

immigrants comprise 44% of the population and in Vancouver, 38%, and in both these cities immigrants have become a significantly larger proportion than 10 years previously. Increasingly, immigrants have the potential to make their economic power felt in the giftware industry not just in terms of their purchasing power but also in respect of owning retail stores and giftware suppliers. (See Chart 1)

A Diverse Canada

While the very early immigrants to Canada came primarily from Europe, recent immigrants are from all over the world. For example, as a percentage of all immigrants to Canada, there are now almost as many people born in Asia as in Europe. Chart 2 describes the regions (or countries) in which immigrants to Canada were born. Immigration to specific provinces differs from national averages. Over 95% of all immigrants have located in four provinces: Ontario (56% of immigrants), British Columbia (19%), Quebec (13%) and Alberta (8%). Chart 3 describes immigrants in these provinces and shows the significance of immigrants from Europe and Asia in all provinces, with immigrants born in Asia more highly represented in British Columbia, and Quebec having proportionately more immigrants born in Africa, the Caribbean and Central and South America. (See Charts 2 & 3)

Many Languages

English and French are obviously the predominant official languages in Canada – 59% of the population speak English, 23% French. More people have as their mother tongue non-official languages than French in all provinces west of Quebec. In B.C. the difference is particularly pronounced, with 25% of the provincial population having a non-official language as their mother tongue (over 8% speak Chinese languages such as Cantonese and Mandarin), compared with about 1% French. In Ontario, 24% of the population has non-official languages as mother tongues such as Chinese languages (4%), Italian (3%) and many others. (Chart 4 provides detail.)

In some cities, the differences are magnified further. In Toronto, for example, 40% of the population have a mother tongue other than English or French. In Vancouver, the comparable percentage is 38%. In Montreal, a combined 19% of the population have a non-official language as their mother tongue; although this is more than English (12%), no single mother tongue exceeds that of English. While most business people communicate in an official language, customers may be more inclined to consider products where labels and instructions are in their mother tongue and recognize cultural differences, where appropriate.

CHART 1: PERCENTAGE OF IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN CENSUS METROPOLITAN AREAS

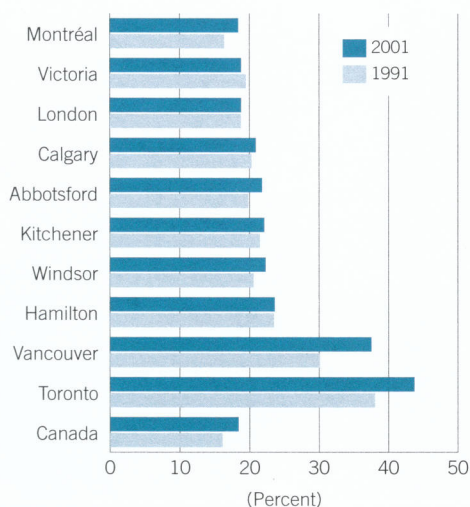


CHART 2: IMMIGRANTS BY COUNTRY OR REGION OF BIRTH – CANADA

SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, CENSUS OF THE POPULATION, 2001.

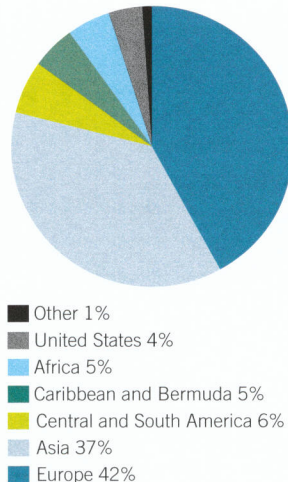


CHART 3: IMMIGRANTS IN FOUR PROVINCES WHERE MOST IMMIGRANTS HAVE LOCATED

SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, CENSUS OF THE POPULATION, 2001.

