



DETERMINATION & INTEGRITY

by Alexa Peters

For Kai Fuentes, president and CEO of Ebony Marketing Systems (EMS), building a thriving business and providing her clients with high-quality multicultural market research comes down to two key pieces of advice her parents gave her: “Don’t give up,” and “Your word is your bond.”

Tenacity and integrity are essential to Fuentes, who established the women-owned, minority-owned, multicultural market research firm in 2011, picking up where her mother, the original founder of EMS, left off.

"When mom retired in 2010, I opened my own shop, which is like the sister, if you will, of my mom's company," says Fuentes. "I grew up in this business.

EMS, a certified MWBE, specializes in a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods to assist companies with product improvement and placement in underrepresented communities, specifically. Offering everything from surveys, focus groups, and ethnographic research to statistical data analysis, media evaluation research, and project management, EMS tailors their services to each client's individual market research goals.

A brand will come and say, 'I want to figure out how Latinos think about this new lipstick shade.' "Based on who we are talking to and what we're talking about, that's when we come up with the actual research methodology," says Fuentes. "And then they'll go ahead and, based on the research, hopefully change the product based on what the research dictates."

Fuentes looks at delivering clients high-quality results, and working within underrepresented communities to generate those results, with a sense of deep responsibility and ethics. EMS sets itself apart by staying true to their word, drawing on the inherent creativity and innovation of their diverse team, and offering a personal, human approach to customer service.

"I say to folks all the time, 'We have the expertise, the excellence, and the experience to do this,'" says Fuentes.

"And if we tell a client, 'we'll get it done.' It is our integrity to get it done. It's just a cornerstone of who I am."

With Fuentes staying true to her values, EMS is thriving and continuing to offer essential help to women- and minority-owned businesses hoping to get ahead in the market. Likewise, in the last couple years, EMS has also worked with people living with HIV and black breastfeeding mothers, helping to better connect diverse consumers with products and services created for them.



GAMECHANGERS



Fuentes' impact with EMS hasn't gone unrecognized. In September 2023, Fuentes was nominated for the Women in Research (WIRe) 2023 #MRX Diversity Champion Award, which recognizes individuals making significant strides in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

"I'm proud and grateful that I get to do what I love every day, and impact others and help feed other people's families and my own," says Fuentes.

Looking forward, Fuentes wants to expand the direct impact EMS's work has on underrepresented communities. That looks like hiring and growing her diverse team at EMS and pursuing more innovative projects in the social science field.

"To me, there's nothing quite like working on a small business that fits your passion and that is directly impacting you and your family and your community," said Fuentes. "That's the best feeling of success and accomplishment." ■

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