

The Space Place: Multifarious Merchandise for Omnifarious Folks

By

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“The Space Place” is a coordinated NASA educational outreach program that, from its inception, has sought to reach diverse and under-served groups and organizations. These audiences were considered to be minorities, girls, inner city children, and rural populations. In addition, according to the 2000 census, over 27 million Americans speak Spanish as their first language. Of those, 13 million stated that they do not speak English very well. The Space Place also considers those Americans an important audience.

The Space Place began in 1998 with a child-oriented Web site (<http://spaceplace.nasa.gov>) presenting simple "make and do" activities and fun facts related to the technology validation space missions of NASA's New Millennium Program. The Web site now includes over 30 space science and Earth observing missions. The Web site is now also available in Spanish.

Having materials available on the internet, however, does not guarantee that everyone in the target audience will have an opportunity to obtain them. Therefore, The Space Place went on to create a suite of products and a network of partnerships that would allow more direct and diverse ways to communicate with its target audience. Thus was invented Club Space Place.

Club Space Place is administered via two different types of partnerships: national and local. The products provided: quarterly guides for original Club Space Place group activities, plus NASA space and Earth science and technology bulletin board display materials.

The first of the national organizations participating in Club Space Place was Boys & Girls Clubs of America. With 3100 chapters and 3.3 million members ages 6-18, 67% of whom are minorities, BGCA has been able to distribute the quarterly Space Place activity guides electronically (.pdf files) via its Web sites to all chapters that have internet access and by hardcopy to those that don't. Other national organizations that receive the activity guides include YWCA, 21st Century Learning Centers, and Civil Air Patrol.

Local community partners include about 240 museums, libraries, planetariums, zoos, and aquariums, largely in small cities, towns, and rural areas, with a combined annual visitorship of 26 million. These community partners receive personalized, individual attention. Each receives the Space Place display materials, updated with at least quarterly mailings, as well as the quarterly activity guides.

Another product is a monthly Space Place newspaper column written for children. This column is currently published in 14 English language newspapers and 7 Spanish language newspapers, with a combined daily circulation of over 2.5 million copies. And, for the target audience that has neither internet nor newspaper access, The Space Place has a toll free phone line (1-866-575-

6178) with answers to often-asked questions about space sent in by the community partners. The monthly phone message is also given in Spanish.

Evidence continuously points to the success of The Space Place program at reaching its target audience. Counts of visitors to the Web site continue to grow, as does the number of awards for its excellence and educational merit. The inauguration of its Spanish version was marked with coverage by CNN en Español and BBC Ciencia (radio program). Feedback during personalized contact with community partners is extremely positive, and the number of partners continues to grow. The number of both English and Spanish language newspapers wishing to carry The Space Place column is also growing.

The Space Place program owes its success, first of all, to the quality and diversity of its products, whatever language they are in. But without appropriate and effective partnerships for their dissemination, they would be worthless. With both, the winners are the youth who can see the excitement and hope of science, technology, and NASA's programs—youth who might not otherwise recognize their choices.