How to Update Your Consumer Archetypes for Gender Inclusivity

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Brands thrive by channeling their creative energies into what works—and away from what doesn't. Yet many marketers and agencies focused on DEI in marketing aren't hitting the mark when it comes to widening the aperture of the gender lens. Accordingly, they're missing the chance to invite people to see themselves in the products and services they promote.

There's little argument that gender inclusivity in marketing is essential. Consumers of all generations, especially Gen Zers and millennials, question the traditional two-gender binary. Pew Research reporting indicates that more than half of buyers aged 18 to 29 believe digital forms should include multiple gender choices. Forty-seven percent of those aged 30 to 49 agree.

However, a March 2023 CreativeX advertising report shows a distinctive imbalance in female representation in marketing content. Though ads represented women more than males, specific female cohorts were not. For example, women of color and women over age 50 were portrayed less often than their lighter-skinned, younger counterparts. Similarly, The Wall Street Journal found that only 1% of ads targeted LGBTQ+

consumers (outside of Pride month) despite more than 7% of people self-identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community, which has intercorrelations with gender.

This begs the question: Why are the bevy of marketing personalization strategies not getting DEI in marketing "right" from a gender perspective? It's not a financially driven decision, because the purchasing power of women and underrepresented genders is high. Nielsen predicts that by 2028, women's spending will make up 75% of discretionary purchases. Instead, it's an issue with marketing archetypes and how they've conventionally been used to drive diversity and inclusion in marketing.

Time for more inclusive archetypes

Marketing archetypes—segments, audiences and personas—enable us to empathize and connect with users early in a campaign's research, strategy and ideation phases. They allow us to look outside our vantage points to what matters to consumers. Often, we construct archetypes based on actual reflected audiences we see in our data. Sometimes, we create fictional characters that match our "ideal customers." However, we rarely research and include archetypes who do not resonate with our brand because we've already—albeit inadvertently—ostracized them.

Essentially, our archetypes are limited because we can't see beyond our data and objective biases. Ideally, we would construct future experiences with expansive, inclusive archetypes to provide all audiences with a tailored, bespoke journey.

To date, one of the most significant challenges getting in the

way of gender-based DEI in marketing has been consumer archetypes that haven’t factored in underrepresented gender communities. This means the data pulled from ad campaigns will overlook those same communities. It’s a perpetuating cycle that can harm a brand’s reputation and bottom line. Consumers who don’t see themselves in one brand will look to another.

It’s our responsibility as marketers to ensure we’re deliberately expanding the scope of our marketing archetypes to encompass as much gender diversity and representation as possible. That’s true even if it means challenging the data at hand. After all, the data can only reflect what’s been done in the past.

So how can brands, marketers and agency professionals create deeper connections with consumers from all genders? Factor gender-inclusive archetypes into the mix early. If a brand’s marketing personalization strategies don’t recognize gender from the get-go, they’re probably never going to reach comprehensive inclusivity in marketing. Generally speaking, archetypes are laid out in the first phases of the consumer experience discovery. During those pivotal moments, gender discussions should be had.

Again, this may require bucking existing data to weave gender throughout the conversation. Nevertheless, the outcome should foster an incoming wave of new research to illuminate other ways to reach buyers of all genders. Bringing as many perspectives as possible to the creative table erodes behavioral bias from decision-making and generates a level playing field that promotes building ideation session frameworks that embrace the hive.

To kickstart your journey toward more inclusive advertising, consider these specific tactics designed to weave gender

inclusivity into your marketing efforts right from the start.

Diverse datasets

Utilizing datasets that reflect diverse gender identities and expressions may require looking beyond your existing customer database. Look to research studies, partnerships with LGBTQ+ organizations and social media trends that offer insights into underrepresented gender communities. By diversifying your data sources, you ensure that your marketing strategies are informed by a broad understanding of gender diversity.

Inclusive market research

Conduct research that deliberately seeks to understand the experiences, preferences and needs of people across the gender spectrum. This step goes beyond conventional demographic inquiries, diving into gender identity with respect and recognition of its complexity. Surveys, interviews and focus groups are integral, crafted to encompass a broad array of gender identities to ensure the data collected genuinely mirrors audience diversity.

Incorporating insights from a diverse research team, focusing on brand interaction over gender specifics and using tools like social listening when original research isn’t feasible can enrich this process. It’s about understanding key barriers and motivators through the lenses of those different from us, aiming for empathy rather than exhaustive cataloging of the nuances of identity.

Empathetic messaging

Craft marketing messages that speak to the universal desire to feel seen and understood. Partnering with forward-thinking

agencies is a great way to keep your marketing inclusivity on point; many now use proprietary audience tools that help to understand and map consumer insights, barriers and motivators at a granular level to ensure you’re factoring gender inclusivity into archetypes early.

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