

What Success for LGBTQIA+ Representation Looks Like Outside June

Earlier this month, SCOTUS outlawed employment discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people—a joyous moment as we honor Pride. However, this fight is far from over. We still need protections in housing, public spaces, education, federal funding and more so we can truly be equal and feel safe living authentically. Until then, society will keep missing out on our true value and potential. In marketing, this means creativity and innovation are lost.

Today's crucial discussions of systemic racism have made it painfully clear: In most companies, diversity and inclusion efforts haven't been adequate. Now, big brands, media companies and agencies are responding by doubling down on D&I efforts, promising more sizable and accountable progress, and throwing tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars at the problem.

These efforts are paramount to achieving equality, and yet, we find ourselves absent of information, which is desperately needed for more transparent data on representation.

How can we freely express ideas when we can't even be seen as ourselves?

Acknowledging our intersectional world as this work begins, we'd be remiss not to call for better data on LGBTQIA+ representation, too. There's no reliable data set about LGBTQIA+ representation specific to our industry, nor how we fare in leadership or other spaces where we can make a positive impact on the work. Now is the time to plan a holistic data strategy for your company's talent and target audiences so that you can expand creativity with inclusive and

relevant marketing.

Companies have D&I programs because they know top talent insist on working in inclusive environments. And truthfully, many companies have been safe havens and true vanguards in the LGBTQIA+ civil rights movement by implementing policies like domestic partner benefits and transgender healthcare inclusions long before our legislatures and courts have caught up.

Not all companies are so progressive, of course, and even in the best workplaces queer people are still in hiding. The Human Rights Campaign's latest figures (2018) show that fewer than half of LGBTQIA+ people are out at work. We're estimated to be 4.5% of the U.S. population and growing as more of us feel safe reporting our identity. However, we're not 4.5% of marketing budgets, of families depicted in advertising and certainly not of boardrooms.

Nearly 15 million Americans are LGBTQIA+, but for most marketers, we're still considered a niche or special-interest category. Think about it. The entire population of Ohio is 11.7 million. If we're special interest, what are they?

This comes at a cost, not just to the people working so hard to hide their authentic selves, but also to their employers. Aaron Walton, co-founder and CEO of Walton Isaacson, underscored the problem perfectly: "Innovation happens when you bring in people with different viewpoints and open up to possibilities. When team members feel they can't be authentic, they put energy into covering and code switching, and creativity and innovation are lost. That's not good in our business as I've never met a client who didn't want to be innovative."

There's a connection between the micro-level personal interactions and macro-level business dynamics. As an industry, we state creativity is the most essential resource

to advance client business, but we represses creativity when our leaders don't acknowledge our pronouns or allow us to fully present our gender identity at client presentations. How can we freely express ideas when we can't even be seen as ourselves?

Data-driven insights we do have reveal that marketers are missing out. Because seeing ourselves in brand content outside of June is rare. And when we do see ourselves represented, we may view it as tokenistic. A study last year found that a whopping 72% of queer Brits thought ads featuring them were just that. Still, brands investing to be relevant to LGBTQIA+ consumers can reap benefits, being viewed as "progressive and inclusive," garnering 44% higher purchase intent and generating better brand recall to name a few.

Continue Reading

Pages: 1 2



Standout amongst the industry's best and give your employees something to celebrate. Become an Adweek Fastest Growing Agency and gain industry recognition for your success over the past three years (2017-2019). Submit today.

<https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/what-success-for-lgbtqi-a-representation-looks-like-outside-june/>