

Embracing diversity: How brands can authentically support the LGBTQI+ community

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In today's interconnected world, the importance of acceptance in human interactions is more evident than ever across diverse backgrounds. The universal desire for acknowledgment is shared, fostering an environment where inclusivity thrives. A notable example is the LGBTQI+ community, which has gained increasing recognition in political and societal discussions. Brands have joined the movement to ensure that these individuals feel secure and acknowledged when engaging with their products or services under the banner of Pride.

However, feedback from LGBTQI+ consumers suggests that while brands may outwardly show support, there is room for them to evolve their underlying perspectives. To guide brands in embodying genuine authenticity, here are some tips to ensure their efforts extend beyond mere opportunistic capitalisation on the 'pink' Rand:



Source: www.unsplash.com

For starters, the LGBTQI+ community comprises diverse people of diverse cultures, much like South Africa as a whole. But this community also includes people of different orientations, genders, and identities. Brands need to make an extra effort should they wish to target LGBTQI+ people during Pride, by using research – or their customers – to build an understanding of the members of this diverse community, and to appreciate the impact that being part of the LGBTQI+ community has on these customers' culture and background.



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Brands need to understand that the LGBTQI+ community is more than just its background, culture, or aspirations; and if brands cannot cultivate the community in their marketing efforts, they might come across as more unlikeable.

Second, one shoe does not fit all when it comes to LGBTQI+ marketing. During Pride, many members of the community celebrate their differences together. If brands choose to celebrate with them, it is crucial to do it in a way that makes all of these different people seen for who they are. There are bisexual, lesbian, non-binary, and transgender consumers – and

they should be included in Pride campaigns. Correct representation is what is needed the most; brands targeting a community by portraying only one facet of the community will produce only a complete lack of interest in their offerings.

Moving beyond tokenism – embracing genuine LGBTQI+ Inclusion in marketing

Token gay friend? Not in this instance. Tokenising LGBTQI+ consumers creates a worldwide perception that LGBTQI+ people are something that they are not. Using a 'token' queer person in marketing efforts forces LGBTQI+ consumers to believe that it is purely superficial, and that little effort is made to align with these consumers. Tokenising queer people does not create a safe space for them; it cultivates a situation in which everybody feels uncomfortable.



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Token characters are heavily used during Pride (month and the parade) to emphasise the importance of targeting LGBTQI+ consumers. But, outside of Pride, there is no mention of a LGBTQI+ person being included in who the brands are targeting. Tokenisation needs to be reworked into normalisation: that is, LGBTQI+ representation without the event or the 'hoo-ha' of queer representation. Inclusion needs to be a natural depiction of queer people as a part of society. We have laws that support and integrate LGBTQI+ members into our society; so why can't our marketing efforts do the same?

Most importantly, when brands want to support the LGBTQI+ community, it needs to be made clear in more ways than just using rainbow flags. When brands target other groups or organisations, their objectives usually include some kind of monetary support or brand sponsorship for a specific campaign; but this is missing in marketing to LGBTQI+ consumers (pink capitalism). Various LGBTQI+ non-profit organisations help LGBTQI+ people in need, such as the Triangle Trust, the Fruit Basket, or the Pride Shelter Trust. Not only does this show the world that brands are transparent and willing to support queer people, but it also emphasises the importance of walking the talk.

Authenticity beyond dollars – aligning organisational values with LGBTQI+ Inclusion

In addition to credible monetary proof, brands must ensure that their organisational values align in a way that is inclusive of their LGBTQI+ campaigns. If a brand's biggest target market does not include community members, or tends to be skewed towards consumers who are more conservative in nature, there is no authentic attempt to be supportive of the LGBTQI+ community. If brands are not willing to lose consumers who do not align themselves with the LGBTQI+ community, then their marketing efforts cannot be authentic, as their efforts are insincere and superficial.

At the end of the day, we all want to feel that we belong. As consumers, we want brands to make us feel special and looked after. If brands cannot fully commit to including LGBTQI+ consumers in their offerings, but still choose to market to them only during Pride, the brands' authenticity falls through the floor. Consumers are a lot more knowledgeable than brands give them credit for, and the little nuances that are picked up from consumers can have an everlasting effect on the authenticity

of a brand.

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