

Customer backlash drives Target to pull some LGBT+ merchandise

Article

The news: Target is pulling some LGBTQ-themed merchandise from its shelves just ahead of Pride Month, per Reuters.

- Target's Pride Collection includes "gender fluid" mugs, "queer all year" calendars, and children's books with titles such as "Bye Bye, Binary" and "I'm not a girl."

- While Target has sold Pride-related items for over a decade, this year's collection led to a significant uptick in confrontations between customers and employees.
- The retailer explained the decision to pull some items stemmed from threats “impacting our team members’ sense of safety and well-being while at work.”

The context: Target is hardly alone in being thrust into a LGBTQ-related culture war.

- **Anheuser-Busch InBev** saw a rapid decline in US demand after its **Bud Light** brand ran a social media campaign with transgender social media influencer **Dylan Mulvaney**. The brand’s sales have declined for six straight weeks since the controversy broke, per Nielsen IQ and Bump Williams Consulting.
- **Walt Disney Co.** is embroiled in a high-profile fight with Florida Gov. **Ron DeSantis** after the company voiced public opposition to his so-called “Don’t say gay” bill.

The big takeaway: Corporations should choose their battles wisely (and steer clear of them when possible), but they need to stand up for the values that are core to their brands when they’re drawn into a fight.

- While AB InBev may have miscalculated in its initial outreach to conservatives, the company’s bigger misstep was when it put two of its executives on leave in response to the backlash. It’s a similar story with Target.
- Companies may want to increase their sensitivity to decisions that could attract undue attention. But if they choose to support a particular group, they should stand by those decisions rather than give in to the loudest voices in the room.

Ways a Brand Can Demonstrate Support For Diverse Communities According to US Internet Users, by Demographic, Dec 2022

% of respondents in each group

	Black	Hispanic	Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)	LGBTQIA+
Purposefully investing marketing/advertising dollars with media that is owned by/focuses on the [x] community	70%	65%	60%	72%
Creating ads/content that are inclusive of the [x] community	70%	67%	62%	75%
Posting messages that are inclusive of the [x] community on social media	63%	61%	59%	66%
Creating ads and content in both English and Spanish/additional languages	-	74%	56%	-

Note: ages 18+; responses were 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale where 1=does not demonstrate support at all and 5=strongly demonstrates support; read as 72% of LGBTQIA+ respondents who were surveyed indicate that purposefully investing marketing and advertising dollars with media that is owned by/focuses on the LGBTQIA+ community demonstrates/strongly demonstrates support

Source: Direct Digital Holdings, "Dollars & DEI: Multicultural Consumers' Insights on Brands' Media Buying and Marketing Practices" conducted by Horowitz Research, Feb 14, 2023

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