

LGBTQ+ Advertising Can Be Effective, but Customers Know When Brands Use Pride Month as Marketing Ploy

Article

As Pride Month continues, brands keen to use Pride-themed content to advertise their products should be aware that customers pick up on this as a marketing ploy.

New data shows that half of internet users in the US said that if a company debuts Pride-related merchandise or content, they're more likely to see that as a marketing tactic than as a true reflection of the company's values, according a YouGov survey.

But companies that have shown their support for the LGBTQ+ community may benefit from being inclusive in their advertising. About one-quarter (24%) of US internet users also said they are more likely to do business with companies known to be LGBTQ+-friendly.

Particularly, gay and lesbian individuals (71%), bisexual people (54%), millennials (32%), and high-income earners (34%) all said they're likely to spend money with LGBTQ+-friendly businesses.

Are US Internet Users More Likely or Less Likely to Consider Purchasing a Product if the Advertisement Features a Same-Sex Couple?

% of respondents, by demographic, May 2019

| | More likely | Less likely |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 13% | 21% |
| Male | 13% | 33% |
| Generation | | |
| Gen Z (2000 and later) | 18% | 24% |
| Millennial (1982-1999) | 18% | 23% |
| Gen X (1965-1981) | 13% | 24% |
| Baby boomer (1946-1964) | 10% | 31% |
| Senior (1928-1945) | 3% | 39% |
| Sexual orientation | | |
| Heterosexual/straight | 10% | 29% |
| Lesbian/gay woman | 66% | 3% |
| Gay man | 55% | 3% |
| Bisexual | 38% | 11% |
| Other | 27% | 14% |
| Prefer not to say | 10% | 22% |
| Total | 13% | 27% |

Note: lower n-count for lesbian/gay women; more likely includes "much more likely" and "somewhat more likely"; less likely includes "much less likely" and "somewhat less likely"

Source: YouGov, "LGBTQ Pride," June 10, 2019

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"I was struck by the amount of ambivalence among the survey's gay and lesbian respondents," said eMarketer principal analyst Mark Dolliver. "Yes, 71% said they'd be more likely to patronize a company known for its LGBTQ+ friendliness. But an underwhelming majority (57%) said they'd be 'much more likely' to do so.

“My hunch is that gay and lesbian consumers may be especially alert to the possibility that a company’s friendly stance—especially in the form of advertising—may be more a marketing ploy than a serious commitment,” he said.

It’s probably not surprising that age is a sharp dividing line in attitudes on the survey’s question. Among millennials, those more likely to buy from such a company outnumbered those less likely to do so nearly 2:1, 34% vs. 15%. But among baby boomers, the split was slightly negative, at 19% “more likely” vs. 21% “less likely.” It’s conspicuous that a plurality of respondents in most of the survey’s demographic niches said a company’s reputation for being LGBTQ+-friendly would make them neither more nor less likely to do business with it.

“There’s a lot of indifference on the matter, which to my mind seems like a healthy sign of social progress,” Dolliver said.

The YouGov poll also found that companies that feature same-sex couples in their ad campaigns may not yet have convinced a plurality of internet users in the US to purchase a product. About half (46%) of respondents said that seeing an ad with a same-sex couple would make them neither more likely nor less likely to purchase a product, with only 13% of the total population saying they are more likely to consider buying a product if they see an ad that features a same-sex couple. However, gay and lesbian individuals (58%) are much more likely to do so, in addition to 18% of those who have an annual household income of \$100,000 or more.

“Considering that respondents overall were more positive than negative toward companies with a reputation for being LGBTQ+-friendly, it’s interesting that the skew is more negative than positive when it comes to ads featuring a gay couple,” Dolliver said.

“There’s something a little more in-your-face about ads that feature a gay couple, and that may raise hackles among some consumers who otherwise think it’s fine for companies to be friendly toward the LGBTQ+ population,” he said.