

Roses are red but rainbows have impact

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Earlier this week I spotted a man reading a Sainsbury's ad in his newspaper, a "Melt their heart" campaign for Valentine's Day. I braced for a reaction but nothing happened, the man simply read it, turned over the page and carried on reading. It wasn't the promotion of steaks for valentines that had me worried (although a slab of meat adorned with pink butter doesn't scream romance to me personally), it was the fact that the ad featured an older gay couple. I was shocked that my own unconscious bias had me assuming that the man would laugh at it, or curse, or drop the paper in disgust.

Looking back though it is easy to see where that old fear came from. As a gay man of a certain age my first memory of seeing a gay advert wasn't a good one. Whilst never specifying a target audience, EVERYONE knew who the Government's [1986 Public Information film](#) about AIDS was about. The ad was designed to promote discussion about prevention of a new disease, but for a boy still coming to terms with his sexuality, it was terrifying – a sombre voiceover as an unseen hand chips away at a vast gravestone – it was brutal but at the time it was necessary and ultimately effective in its goal.

These days gay people can now be seen in adverts for everything from broadband to breakfast cereals, whilst the big brands are doing everything in their power to shout about their LGBT inclusive credentials. Only a few years ago a previous employer (a major brand that shall remain nameless) told me they were keen to support their newly founded LGBT Network but asked if they could change the group's logo to approved shades of its well-known corporate colour – rainbows didn't meet their brand guidelines.

Thankfully they listened, but I couldn't help but wonder what would have happened if they had persisted. Trust is vital in any fledgling relationship and courting the LGBT community is no exception.

Know what you want to say, but most importantly be clear on *why* – what is the business objective behind an inclusive campaign? Also consider whether your business 'walks the walk' – despite its supportive corporate messaging, Sainsbury's found itself facing a 'kiss-in' protest at one of its stores in 2014 after a security guard ejected two women for kissing, leading consumers to question the company's credentials on inclusion.

The good news is that there are resources available which can help. Two examples are The Human Rights Campaign's guide to [LGBT marketing and Advertising](#) and an excellent [PDF](#) created by the charity Stonewall that explains why businesses should implement marketing strategies that target gay people as well as giving practical help and guidance.

As we mark LGBT History Month at MediaCom I can daydream of a time, hopefully in the near future, where this blog will seem antiquated – there won't be supporting documents as LGBT

targeting won't be needed, campaigns will simply be inclusive as standard.

But for now, I hope to see many more ads like the one I saw on the bus this week, breaking down barriers one steak at a time.

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