

CMI's **3** steps to cost-effectively reach and serve the Gay & Lesbian Community

1 *Research*

Market intelligence. Gather and study as much data as you can about your prospective markets, and learn about the sensitivities, preferences, motivations, etc. of those markets. We use a mix of intelligence-gathering approaches with our clients. Depending on the client and the desired markets, these may include regional, national or international surveys; focus groups in target markets; exit or field surveys; customer satisfaction surveys; and advisory boards. Only with this information will the marketer be prepared to make educated decisions about what to market, how, to whom, and with what message or offer.

Research also helps evaluate market size/feasibility/potential, and establishes a base line against which the marketer can measure success. It's often difficult to determine how well a campaign is actually doing, because a majority of LGBT consumers prefer to remain anonymous (for many, varied reasons). That reality makes it a challenge to measure success with the usual coupons or tracking codes, which gay men and lesbians are averse to using. You could be generating significant new business but not know it, and may then lose heart (and your budget) by making incorrect assessments. Surveying for a base line and then conducting follow-ups has been a far more accurate way of measuring results against goals.

2 *Positioning & Preparation*

Positioning is an important step, to determine where your product or service fits into an increasingly competitive market space, and how to message your value proposition. Again, it may have been enough to just "show up" several years ago. No more. You need to rise above the noise. Take a look through popular LGBT publications to see how other companies, perhaps including your competition, are representing themselves. Then do better.

Equally important is, simply put, preparation. This exercise involves taking an assessment of your own internal policies and best practices. Gay and lesbian consumers are acutely aware of corporate policies and practices that are usually overlooked by the mainstream, and this influences their purchasing preferences. Examples: Don't even take your first step toward the LGBT marketplace until you have ensured equality in your hiring practices, and in your company's treatment of its gay and lesbian employees. Be sure you have earned

the gay marketing buy-in at all company levels, from top execs to the line staff who will interact with your LGBT customers (retail sales reps, receptionists, customer service agents, etc. as appropriate). Sensitivity training may be important in certain circumstances. Dedicating resources to well-matched LGBT charities should be considered. These days, no gay or lesbian consumer will take a major corporation seriously if it does not have a high HRC index rating (see HRC.org) indicating that it's genuine about serving the LGBT community.

Also: Look at your consumer offers. Are they equal, as well? Avis made a meaningful statement when it promoted its "no extra fee" for same-sex partners to drive a rented car, equal to their policy for married heterosexual couples. These may seem like small issues but they can be leveraged into important messages of inclusion.

It's simply a waste of resources to invest in marketing but then not deliver on the explicit or implied, "we're gay friendly!" promise. Ensure a good, solid start with proper preparation. You'll enjoy results much sooner, and for a lot longer than otherwise. This is the firm foundation on which to build a successful plan.

3 *Marketing*

Unfortunately this is the "first step" for most marketers, but it ought to be the final one. Marketing planning should to be based on market intelligence. Otherwise, what are you selling? To which targeted LGBT markets? With what message and imagery? In which media? Clearly, without this information marketers are shooting in the dark. Launching a campaign, without the benefit of survey and focus group insight is, in fact, research; it's just a far more shot-in-the-dark, time-consuming and budget-burning way of going about it. Better: Make educated decisions. Build a powerful plan that includes a variety of approaches (see below), based on your market research findings, your positioning, and your corporate citizenship strengths.

Community Marketing will guide you toward meeting your goals with minimum risk, and maximum potential.