

LGBTQ+ Media and Influencers Share Advice For Marketers This Pride Month



Mike Morra, Senior Account Executive, Taylor

June marks Pride Month, and this year WorldPride, a global celebration of the LGBTQ+ community, is being held in New York City in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising.

Pride is a powerful societal tool that is being increasingly embraced around the globe and, in the marketing and communications space, is often associated with a story of progress and triumph... The narrative focuses on how far we've

come as a society, the celebration of love around us, as well as the hardships the community faced and overcame.

Indeed... every day it seems as though we're taking another step in the right direction, but for every step forward, it feels like we're uncovering a few more hurdles that we will need to overcome.

Last year, Samantha Allen, former Senior Reporter at *The Daily Beast* and author of *The New York Times* critically-acclaimed new book 'Real Queer America', pushed me into a space of reflection about how Pride initiatives are discussed and treated in our industry.

Allen noted: "the commercialization of LGBT Pride seems like an age-old topic of debate—even though it wasn't that long ago, in the grand scheme of things, that none of these companies would want to be seen touching anything queer with a ten-foot pole." And I think that's important to remember... LGBTQ+ pride initiatives can seem to be more of a branding exercise than catalysts for change that directly benefit the LGBTQ+ community.

This past month, I had the opportunity to ask six LGBTQ+-identifying media and influencers what advice they have for marketers trying to activate in the LGBTQ+ space.

1. "Do not lose sight of how much further we have to go" – Ryan Fitzgibbon

Ryan Fitzgibbon is the founder and creative director of former gay lifestyle magazine, *hello mr.* It was seen as one of the first magazines to spark LGBTQ+ conversation in its space before larger publishing houses emerged in the market. 

It's easy to get caught up in the current landscape of the LGBTQ+ community and compare it to years past. Yes, the community has achieved some equality and increased equity in

recent years, and we've come a long way since Stonewall, which is great, but the community and world still have a ways to go.

According to a recent article from *Money.com*, 26 states in the United States do not have state-wide protections for LGBTQ+-identifying people, and Wisconsin has only state-wide protections for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual-identifying people, explicitly excluding people who identify as Transgender, Queer or other (Source: *Money.com*, 2019).

That is SCARY. Marketers and communications practitioners should direct attention to this fact and help to bring exposure to other issues like this that our community faces. Ryan further argues that "the budgets spent on Pride floats and the revenue made from sales of rainbow-painted merchandise during the month of June should find their way into to the ongoing fight for LGBTQ rights."

2. "Hire Queer People" – Adam Schubak

Adam Schubak is the partnerships editor for a number of publications under Hearst Magazines including *Men's Health*, *Elle*, and *Redbook*. He is also the founder of Hearst's first LGBTQ+ group Q+A, standing for "Queer + Allies," which offers information to Hearst employees and editorial assistance on LGBTQ+ topics for the publishing houses' brands.

"The only way to truly understand the wants and the needs of the LGBTQ community is to work with people who are members of that community who can be the voice of your brand in that space," said Schubak.

Hundreds of brands have come out with Pride campaigns this month, and every day it seems another ten campaigns are announced... At this point, it feels like brands who are not supporting LGBTQ+ Pride this month are in the minority. If you

are working in the marketing and communications space, you or someone you know is likely working on one of these campaigns.

It's great to have everyone involved, but it is essential to hire and consult an array of LGBTQ+-identifying people throughout the stages of a campaign. "Understand that we're all different," Schubak added. "LGBTQ+ covers a lot of people and we're not all about glitter and drag queens."

3. "Pride cannot just be a celebration. It has to be a resistance and call to action" – Adam Eli

Adam is a New-York based LGBTQ+ activist. He is also the founder of the LGBTQ+ activism group Voices4, a group fighting for global LGBTQIA+ liberation.

LGBTQ+ visibility and celebration are important inclusions in a LGBTQ+ initiative or campaign, but so is bringing light to those who do not have the visibility or are not able to freely celebrate who they are or how they identify.

I repeat... 26 states in the UNITED STATES!!! do not have state-wide protections for LGBTQ+ people, and Wisconsin only has partial state-wide protections. What can marketers do to encourage acceptance, inclusivity, and the adoption of laws that protect LGBTQ+ people?

In order to be recognized as an ally to the LGBTQ+ community, it is vital for marketers to 'fight the good fight' alongside LGBTQ+-identifying people and help to uncover the real issues that the community faces.

4. "Ask Questions" – Maxwell Poth

Maxwell Poth is a photographer and founder of the LGBTQ+ youth project, Project Contrast, an organization aiming to educate individuals on mental health and teen suicide within the LGBTQ

community. Project Contrast depicts stories of what it is like living as an LGBTQ+ person in America today.



Ask people in the community why something would be impactful to them or what their needs are. Make their voices heard.

Maxwell's project, Project Contrast, works to shed light on stories of LGBTQ+ youth in the United States through his photography. By being curious and asking questions, Project Contrast depicts and shares the stories and lives of LGBTQ+ youth in America.

There should be a curiosity factor in all marketers to enhance and strengthen their respective marketing strategies toward the LGBTQ+ community.

5. "Show Your Work" – Samantha Allen

Samantha Allen is the author of *Real Queer America*, and was formerly a Senior Reporter at *The Daily Beast*. Samantha holds a Ph.D. in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Emory University, and has been awarded the GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Digital Journalism Article.



"Don't just say you're donating a portion of the proceeds from certain products to LGBT charities. Specify the portion, and state your company's commitment to the cause," says Allen. When activating within the LGBTQ+ space it is imperative to show how you're impacting the community.

Are you bringing exposure to black trans women of color in an advert, who have been subjected to a growing number of hate crimes and fatal violence, and donating to causes that protect them? Are you exposing LGBTQ+ youth and the hardships they face, while supporting organizations that provide that group

vital resources? Prove your follow-through and commitment.

LGBTQ+-identifying people want to know exactly why you're supporting X charity or organization, and how much you're donating to said organization. LGBTQ+-identifying people will see through any work that solely allows a brand to capitalize on their share of the market and will call marketers out for it. This is proven time and time again when brands try to activate around any marginalized group.

Allen also added, "I think LGBT people generally don't like it when a company tries to market us when they don't fully support their LGBT employees, so it never hurts to boast a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index... or [shine light on] other LGBT-focused initiatives and work the brand has done."

6. "Sustain Engagement" – Joshua Allen

Joshua Allen is a queer/trans artist, writer, speaker and model, who speaks and writes about race, gender and LGBTQ+ justice. Joshua has given a TEDx Talk and has written for the likes of *Them* and *AfroPunk*.

"I would suggest that brands invest in a long-term, sustained-engagement strategy with LGBTQI+ communities throughout the year to maximize impact during Pride Month. In my opinion, the brands that have built the most loyalty amongst LGBTQI+ communities are the ones who show sustained support, appreciation and honor for our communities year-round," said Allen.

Don't stop here, marketers. Be an ally and remain an ally. Show the LGBTQ+ community that you are here because you care about us and are willing to stand with us as we conquer those hurdles that seemingly never end.



Making change in the world and being profitable do not have to be mutually exclusive. In the marketing and communications space, let's set the example for the next 50 years of LGBTQ+ Pride and inclusivity.



About the Author: Mike Morra is a Manhattan College alumnus, who currently works as a Senior Account Executive at Taylor, an independent PR & digital strategy agency for the world's leading consumer brands. Named "Consumer Agency of the Decade" by The Holmes Group, Taylor has partnered with the most influential corporate marketers, utilizing lifestyle, sports, and entertainment platforms to drive consumer engagement. Founded in 1984, Taylor is headquartered in New York, with offices in Los Angeles, Chicago and Charlotte. Taylor's current portfolio of client partners includes AMB Group, Capital One, Diageo, DraftKings, P&G and Panini America.