



It's time to earn the pink pound

Following the first same-sex marriages in England and Wales, Gemma Goldfingle looks at the retailers aiming their advertising at gay consumers and other previously marginalised groups

Formalwear retailer Moss Bros captured column inches when it launched its first same-sex couple advertising campaign last week.

Designed to coincide with the first gay marriages in England and Wales last weekend, the retailer's Mister and Mister campaign, which features boyband Union J member Jaymi Hensley and his partner, is the latest attempt by retailers to target the lucrative 'pink pound'.

But the fact that an ad featuring gay men still makes headlines shows that this is still an underserved market.

Richard Lane, spokesman at gay rights charity Stonewall, says it is poor business sense to ignore gay people.

"In this current economy businesses need to be targeting consumers from all backgrounds," Lane says. "There are 3.7 million gay people in Britain who are worth £70bn to £80bn to the economy. That's a large market to ignore."

However, it is a market that nevertheless is overlooked often. Matthew Todd, editor-in-chief of gay lifestyle magazine *Attitude*, says gay people feel alienated by traditional marketing.

He says some brands still refuse to advertise in *Attitude* – which expects to topple *GQ* to become the UK's best-selling magazine app this year – because he's told they don't want to be seen as a "gay brand".

However, brands as diverse as McDonald's, NatWest and Coca-Cola have come out of the closet to target the pink pound.

Coca-Cola used February's Superbowl, which with 100 million worldwide viewers is one of the biggest advertising vehicles on earth, to debut an advert that featured a gay couple taking their daughter roller-skating.

The couple featured alongside a lineup of people of many ethnicities set to the song *God Bless America* sung in multiple languages. The ad both won praise and generated outrage.

Omaid Hiwaizi, chief strategy officer at WPP-owned ad agency Geometry, applauds the ad and says global companies such as Coca-Cola need to be attractive to as wide and diverse a group as possible.

Targeting niche consumers makes business sense, Hiwaizi argues. He cites retailers such as Sainsbury's that have found success targeting multiple niche markets – such as gluten-free shoppers with its Freefrom range – whereas those who have tried to be everything to everyone such as Tesco and Asda have struggled.

Stonewall's Lane points out that the 'cookie-cutter' family with 2.4 children is not representative of most people's lives and that gay people want to see themselves reflected in advertising.

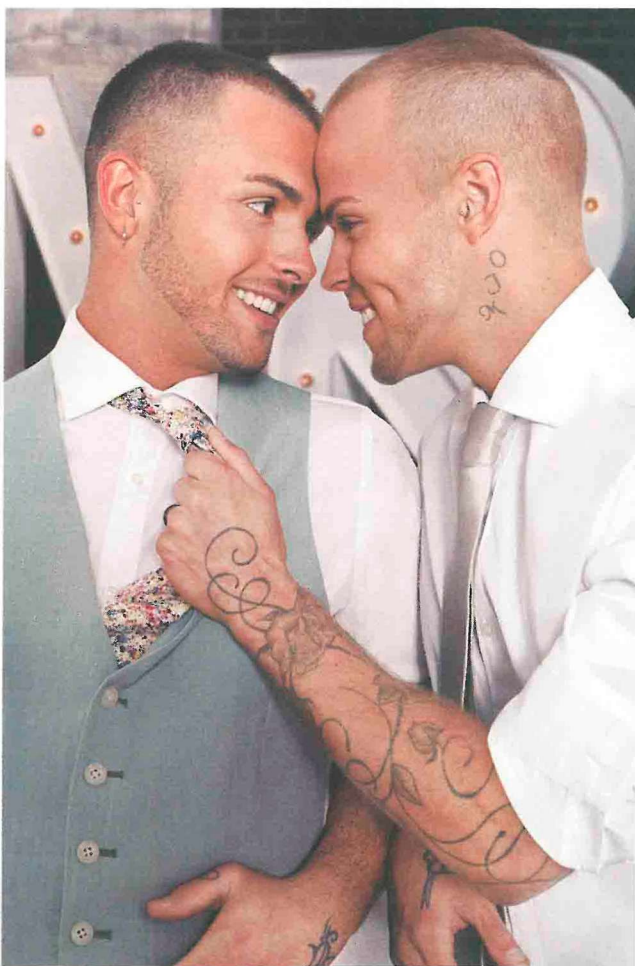
Seeing gay people represented in ads impacts purchasing decisions, says Todd. He argues that gay people have had to endure prejudice throughout their lives so are often willing to respond to brands that cater to them.

Todd uses the example of Absolut Vodka – a big advertiser in the gay press – which has launched initiatives such as a bottle with a rainbow flag design, which he says have become popular not just in gay bars but gay households.

Gay consumers are often powerful in influence as well as in monetary terms. They are often early adopters of new ideas and technologies and hold a disproportionate number of positions in fashion and trend-related magazines which sway others – yet

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Boyband member Jaymi Hensley and his fiancé Olly Marmon (left) have been recruited for Moss Bros' new gay-friendly ad campaign

few brands actively market to them.

Todd says: "A lot of gay men are obsessed with gadgets. I'm surprised more technology providers or mobile phones don't try to target the gay geek."

Conversely, gay shoppers can shun brands that ignore their existence. Todd says: "People tell me that they don't go to newsagents that don't stock our magazine as it is symbolic that they are not supportive of gay people."

"IF BRANDS WANT TO BE RELEVANT TO GENERATION Z, THEIR ADVERTISING SHOULD REFLECT THAT"

Omaid Hiwaizi, Geometry

ADVERTISING FOR REAL PEOPLE

It is not just gay people who are neglected by advertisers. Retailers rarely break the norm when it comes to advertising, argues Ed Watson, director of communications at plus-size specialist N Brown and a campaigner for inclusivity in advertising in his former role at Debenhams.

"Retailers use size 8, 20-year-old models, which is not reflective of our customer base," he says.

Research for the YMCA and the Centre for Appearance Research at the University of the West of England found that a quarter of all adults feel depressed about their bodies and more than half of adolescent girls have body image issues.

More than half of women, a third of men and a quarter of girls compare their bodies to people on TV.

Watson, who helped pioneer the use of a diverse range of models at Debenhams, from plus-size to 70-year-olds and those with disabilities (above), argues that retailers have a "moral obligation" to showcase a more diverse range of beauty.

He says there is a genuine appetite for real people in advertising and highlights the success of skincare brand Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty, which ditched models for ordinary women.

However, he admits that this doesn't work in fashion, as shoppers also want to see aspirational images.

This does not preclude more diversity being introduced.

Watson points out that Shannon Murray, the model Debenhams used to launch Principles in 2010, was a beautiful woman who shoppers would love to look like – she just happened to be in a wheelchair.

"The chair did not define her in any way," he says.



The Principles launch was one of Debenhams' most successful and the products the model wore became a best-seller, Watson says.

Diversity in advertising makes commercial sense, he argues.

"There are 10 million people with a disability living in the UK. Why shouldn't retailers reflect them in their advertising?"

"Clothing is meant to make you feel great about yourself. Retailers should show how great people of different sizes and shapes can look."

However, Watson warns that reflecting the customer base in advertising is easier said than done. N Brown is committed to using models who represent its larger customers (pictured, left), but Watson says it is difficult to find models over size 16.

He urges retailers to persevere and show that beauty comes in all shapes and sizes.

"The media is quite single-minded about what the body ideal is. As retailers we need to push the boundaries of those ideals," he says.



Sending out a wider message

Moss Bros chief executive Brian Brick agrees that inclusive advertising does send out a wider message about the company. He says the gay marriage campaign is intended to show Moss Bros is not "fuddy duddy" and is a "modern-day retailer".

But some retailers still fear that integrating gay people into their brand message will alienate their core consumer. After all, how many grocers show anything but a happy, nuclear family in their adverts?

Hiwaizi urges retailers to be brave and says it is integral for a brand to stay relevant to the modern consumer.

"Some in society will object but this is part of a bigger piece about the company's whole brand essence," he says.

"Society is changing. If brands want to be relevant to Generation Z, for whom sexuality is not an issue, their advertising should reflect that. If you want to be seen as bold and forward-thinking, why wouldn't you?"

In fact, he believes advertising agencies that are willing to be "brave" stand



WHICH RETAILERS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN TARGETING THE PINK POUND?

Moss Bros is not the first retailer to use same-sex couples in campaigns. In an ad using the strapline 'How we Roll', baby and toddler specialist Mamas & Papas featured gay couples with their son, along with a single mother and daughter.

The 2012 campaign, which Stonewall named ad of the year, was designed to "celebrate modern family set ups", according to Mamas & Papas.

The retailer's creative director Olivia Robinson said at the time: "It is certainly not just a publicity stunt – it comes from a belief that parents are changing."

It followed Ikea's use of a gay, mixed-race couple with their daughter and dog, which aired in 2006.

"It's really worked," says *Attitude*'s Matthew Todd. "If you've ever been to Ikea, you will realise how popular it is with gay shoppers."



to gain early competitive advantage for their brands by showing them to be gay-friendly.

Todd points out that campaigns such as Moss Bros' not only attract the gay shopper, but can woo those who are supportive of equal rights, regardless of their sexuality.

"Racism is not just an issue for black people and homophobia isn't just an issue for gay people," he says.

How to get it right

It's not just about targeting the gay consumer – it's about getting it right. Hiwaizi admits that advertising for gay people tends to vie on the slightly stereotypical side.

Attitude's Todd says retailers should seek advice from gay consumer groups before launching targeted campaigns and urges them not to be patronising with old-fashioned views of gay people.

"You still see, even from gay brands, the stereotypical image of teeth, tits and tans," he says. "Gay culture is often depicted as hot pants, discos and bulging pecs."

There are even stereotypes about what brands can advertise in gay magazines. "It's fine for pop stars and night-clubs to advertise but what about cars? Men are passionate about cars, whether straight or gay," says Todd.

Lane warns brands targeting the gay market that authenticity is key. He says the consumer is savvy and picks up when a campaign is just a box-ticking exercise. "People see through it. It's like 'it's gays this month, next month it will be disabled people'," he adds.

Not getting it right can risk offending gay consumers. Lane recalls that in 2008, Heinz launched an ad for its Deli Mayo product which featured two men kissing. The ad, which depicted a traditional family on a morning routine, had a straight-talking New York man in the role of the 'mother'. The concept was that the product tastes so good "it's as if you have your own New York deli man in your kitchen."

However, after the firm received complaints about the ad it quickly withdrew it and apologised. This knee-jerk reaction fuelled a backlash from gay consumers with calls for a boycott of Heinz products.

Lane says: "My advice is if you do it, do it properly. Even if you get criticism, you've got to commit to it or it sends out a message that you're not actually supportive of equality."

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Matthew Todd, *Attitude*

INCLUSIVE AT HEART

Businesses that have succeeded in targeting gay consumers have put inclusivity at the heart of their business, argues Stonewall's Richard Lane, who cites the Co-operative as one of the best examples.

The mutual has a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender [LGBT] network, Respect, which is the largest in the UK.

The Co-operative, which was voted the most gay-friendly retailer in the UK by Stonewall and came third in its sector-wide Equality Index last year, also supports more than 80 LGBT events including Manchester and Brighton Pride and Student Pride.

The Co-operative sponsors events such as Manchester Pride

