

5 ways we can walk the inclusive talk

 By [Adam Hunter](#), issued by [Hook, Line & Sinker](#)

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As Pride Month draws to a close, it has continued to showcase the critical importance of both authentic and inclusive communications in the media and marketing world. More than just a month-long party - this is a campaign we can all get behind and support throughout the year.



Pride has become a key month in which brands can show their progressive stripes and engage with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) consumers. It commemorates the 1969 Stonewall uprising in Manhattan – a defining event in LGBTQIA+ history in the United States. In recent years, Pride Month has become more prominent globally, and is a time to celebrate an often-marginalised community, affirm LGBTQIA+ rights and uplift our voices.

As always, authenticity is integral to successful communications, and messages of support and equality are important all year round. To avoid accusations of rainbow-washing in today's crowded market, here's five ways brands can speak up and walk the inclusive talk:

1. Let values guide actions

Consumers are looking for brands that share their values and help them to do good in the world. [Among millennials](#), 83% want companies to align with their values and 76% want CEOs to speak on issues they care about.

Go to the heart of your brand, its values, purpose, and desired impact. Know what the brand stands for and what it has in common with the audience. Then, let people know the brand values their voice.

2. Be inclusive when communicating

Don't assume gender identity – and that goes for marketing communications and employee messages all the way to

customer forms. Greet people with 'hey folks' rather than 'ladies and gentlemen'. If the brand offers his and hers products, add variations such as 'Mr & Mr' too. Don't assume everyone identifies as either male or female on forms; offer a third option, such as non-binary. Add preferred pronouns to email signatures and encourage co-workers to do the same.

3. Diversify images

Visual communication is more powerful than ever. Feature trans models and same-sex couples of all races. Anyone and everyone should be seen in a brand's marketing. And stay away from stereotypes: Not all gay men are effeminate and not all lesbian women are butch.

4. Commit to the cause

Pride Month is one-twelfth of the year. LGBTQIA+ consumers are watching a brand's ads, following its influencers, and buying products year-round. Brands need to be committing to the cause with relevant sponsorships or social impact programmes that speak to LGBTQIA+ concerns. Update consumers about the progress your brand is making and be honest about where it is falling short and wants to make more changes. Do this consistently and suddenly coming up with a Pride Month campaign won't seem like a stretch.

5. Consumers are demanding action

Speaking out takes courage – and that's what consumers are looking for. Brands might wonder whether it's worth taking a stand and being visible during Pride Month at all. That's a decision each business must make for themselves. Brands often keep silent so as not to cause offence. That's why it's so important to be clear about the brand values and to be guided accordingly, while being confident in what they are standing up for.

It's clear that diversity is important – both in our personal lives as consumers, and in our work lives as employers and employees. [Around half](#) of millennials actively look for a diverse workplace. In a recent McKinsey [survey](#) examining support for Black businesses, two-thirds of consumers say their social values shape their shopping choices and 45% wanted retailers to do more to support Black-owned businesses. It's likely that in years to come, more consumers will choose brands based on inclusivity.

We can't take progress for granted. In many countries, LGBTQIA+ communities are often under attack and in others, hard-won freedoms may [soon be overturned](#). Speaking up in support of LGBTQIA+ communities makes a difference. It improves visibility and acceptance, and it reinforces the validity of our rights.

Today's consumers are increasingly diverse and multicultural. Equality, diversity, and inclusion are no longer 'nice to have's', but necessities, and it's our job as media and marketing professionals to understand these shifting demographics and deliver innovative, creative work using an inclusive and authentic approach for the brands we work with each and every day, not just once a year.

ABOUT ADAM HUNTER

Hook, Line & Sinker (HLS) is an award winning content agency that helps fellow brands across Africa to find the right hook and deliver the ultimate marketing and communications sinker!

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