

Companies Continue To Market to Gays

Advertising in Gay Media Grew 28 Percent Last Year Despite Some Groups' Urging



The New S-TYPE 2004 (Ford Motors)

By **HEATHER CABOT**

Dec. 16, 2005 — The silvery copy reads, "Gorgeous deserves your immediate attention." With its chiseled cast of golden-tanned men and women lounging at a luxury resort, the Jaguar ad on Advocate.com is certainly eye-catching. And its message of affluence and taste is targeted at a community with money to spend. The annual market value of gay America is now estimated at \$610 billion, according to advertising agency Prime Access.

Ford Motor Company, which owns Jaguar, is just one of dozens of mainstream businesses pitching products to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender consumers today. Over the last decade, more and more U.S. corporations, including General Motors, Coors and Wal-Mart have decided they cannot afford to ignore this lucrative niche. Advertising in gay media grew more than 28 percent last year, according to the "2004 Gay Press Report" by Prime Access and media placement firm Rivendell Media. The report also found that more than 150 Fortune 500 brands bought into GLBT media in 2004, an all-time high.

Businesses have a clear incentive to target the estimated 15 million self-identified gays and lesbians in the U.S., said **Howard Buford, chief executive of Prime Access.**

"They (gays and lesbians) not only have greater discretionary income, which can be used for luxury items like cars ... But they have much more disposable time, time for travel and entertainment," said Buford, who said it's because the majority of gay households do not have children and the expenses associated with child-rearing.

But gay-specific advertising has come at a price for some companies, which have found themselves snarled in the political debate over gay rights.

The American Family Association renewed a boycott threat against Ford on Thursday after the automaker announced it would advertise all eight of its brands in gay publications. The AFA posted a statement on its Web site accusing Ford of "renegeing on some agreements" reached in recent discussions after the Christian conservative group threatened a boycott last spring.

"All we wanted was for Ford to refrain from choosing sides in the cultural war. And supporting groups which promote same-sex marriage is not remaining neutral," said Donald A. Wildmon, chairman of the AFA.

Ford said in a letter to gay rights groups Thursday that it "values diversity among all of its constituents." And by most accounts, it seems mainstream Americans do, too.

The Commercial Closet, an association that promotes gay advertising and education, pointed to a survey conducted by Opinion Research Corporation's weekly telephone omnibus poll for Fleishman-Hilliard last June. It found that 68 percent of American adults said that knowing a company promotes its products or services to gays and lesbians has no effect on how they feel about the company.

"If you are a corporation, you have to play to the largest audience. It is very dangerous for a corporation to say we want some people to buy our products, but not others," Buford said. "When you talk about marketing to gays and lesbians, there is always a significant layer of politics & (but) from a corporate point of view, there is a very clear business case to be made".