

## Targeting Gays, Lesbians Is A Win-Win, New Survey Shows

by Aaron Baar, Thursday, May 15, 2008 5:00 AM ET



Gays and lesbians are not a large segment of the population - only about 8%--but they do reward marketing messages targeted at them, according to new research.

Furthermore, targeting messages at the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual) community is barely registered by the general population.

According to a survey by marketing agency Prime Access and media and entertainment company PlanetOut, more than two-thirds of LGBT consumers said they are more likely to buy products from a company perceived to be gay-friendly. Meanwhile, 74% of consumers identified as straight said a company's attitude toward the gay community had no effect on their purchasing decisions.

"There may exist in the minds of some marketers that there's a downside [to targeting LGBT community]," Howard Buford, CEO of Prime Access, tells *Marketing Daily*. "But for the vast majority of consumers, it doesn't make a difference."

According to the survey of nearly 2,300 consumers, the most gay-friendly brands were Bravo, Apple, Showtime, HBO, Absolut and Levi's. All of those companies, Buford says, have either undertaken significant LGBT-targeted marketing efforts or have featured gay imagery in their advertising (such as a Levi's ad that was cut in both straight and gay iterations).

Conversely, the companies that had the lowest marks from gay and lesbian consumers--Wal-Mart, Dunkin' Donuts, Cracker Barrel, Exxon Mobil and Samsung--all had some controversy involving the gay and lesbian community.

"LGBT consumers are very vigilant about companies and what their policies are and how they understand the LGBT consumer," Buford says. "The number one way they find out about companies is through media and marketing."

According to the survey, only 8% of the population self-identified themselves as gay or lesbian. Despite being less than 10% of the population, 64% of gays and lesbians said they were likely to be consulted about purchases, about twice the response from the straight community (34%). As early adopters, they can have an impact on sales beyond the LGBT community, Price says.

"In these times, the name of the game is increasing sales, and the way you do that is by targeting segments," Buford says. "A marketing communications program directed at the gay and lesbian audience can be a significant opportunity for brands to build awareness."

While there was benefit within the community for targeting gays and lesbians, there was little downside, according to the survey. Only 14% of straight consumers said having a gay-friendly brand had an adverse affect on their purchase decisions. For the most part, straight consumers barely noticed LGBT-targeted efforts, Buford says.

"They're only perceived as gay-friendly by gay people. For the general population, it didn't register," he says. "[The marketing efforts] are either done in ways that cross over--as in American Express and Ellen DeGeneres--or in ways that are very targeted."