

Inclusivity and social consciousness is smart marketing

 By [Gugulethu Khojane](#)

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Issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion have taken up a prominent position in brands and marketing over the last few years, but often as a reactive response to the modern zeitgeist and not a default setting.



Gugulethu Thojane, senior strategist at Wunderman Thompson.

The next wave of inclusion is purposefully conscious; it's rooted in the idea that meaningful action on inclusion is the new imperative for brand and business success. As shapers of culture, brands play an important role in creating true inclusivity for all while simultaneously enjoying the business benefits.

Equality is everyone's business

And as consumers increasingly value inclusion, the marketing industry broadens its efforts to serve a more diverse customer, this highlighting that inclusion is critical for brands. Consumers are paying careful attention to brands' commitment to inclusion and using this to inform purchasing decisions. This means that incorporating inclusion into advertising is now more significant than ever.

In a global survey for Wunderman Thompson, 90% of respondents say equality is now everyone's business; and 75% say companies and brands must play a role in solving big societal challenges such as equality and social justice – consumers now expect brands to do more than just make a profit.

A brand's story must accurately represent the customer's voice in today's multicultural and increasingly diverse markets. To ignore this is business suicide. To genuinely deliver on inclusion, brands must empathise with marginalized communities' real-world struggles and use their power to dismantle systemic discrimination and oppression. Today, 78% say it's good for brands to support marginalised communities; and 60% say brands that do not deliver on inclusion will become irrelevant.



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Exclusion has been deliberate; that means inclusion must also be deliberate as it will not happen by accident. Many brands attempt to simply jump on the inclusivity bandwagon through their marketing, often as a result of industry pressure or consumer backlash. But that approach simply isn't good enough. Brands need to be intentional and proactive with inclusion.

“To build inclusivity, one, understands that that's what you're trying to do from the beginning. And two, really centralise value and set as leaders the people who are probably most at risk of being excluded,” said Jenny Davis, senior lecturer in sociology at the Australian National University.

How can brands strive to be consciously inclusive?

1. Think inclusive first: Inclusion is now a core business value. And as a result, it must be a default included in campaigns from the onset, not just to tick a box or be treated as an afterthought. Planning and designing with inclusivity from the start can create a better future for everyone.

2. Start on the inside: To drive better representation in marketing, employ a diverse workforce and actively hire those with different perspectives. Actions on inclusion and equality mean nothing unless they are integrated throughout the entire business. Writer and social justice educator, DoctorJonPaul said, “You need authentic voices in the room. If Beyoncé can

find 41 Black horn players, you can find five or six people to come into the room to tell you how to make something authentic”. By intentionally hiring diverse employees and working with diverse creators, brands can drive inclusivity by supporting marginalised communities through better representation while ensuring all marketing efforts resonate.

3. Everyone must be welcome: This means not just broad-based inclusive representation but also proper provision of products and services for all audiences that embraces the full spectrum of diversity. According to Wunderman Thompson Data, 89% globally want businesses to design physical environments to be accessible to all. Even small steps, like better staff awareness training or quiet shopping times, could unlock growth opportunities. Accessibility isn't just about physical space. In response to the inequalities of internet use, web accessibility, also called e-accessibility, is gaining momentum. The process involves reviewing and testing websites and mobile applications for user accessibility.

4. Be always-on: Brand support for marginalised groups can often feel opportunistic and performative, especially if it only coincides with events like Black History Month or Pride. That's why it's important to consistently deliver authentic and meaningful support and unapologetically strive for change.

Diversity is smart business – marginalised communities and their allies control significant disposable income. Brands that dignify diverse groups by making them feel seen, acknowledged, welcomed and served will find audiences ready and willing to spend. But as Ant Jackson, creative head at Space, explained: “We shouldn't implement true inclusion because it's better for business; we should implement true inclusion because it's better for everyone”.

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