



MAY 2020

BUSINESS *UNUSUAL*: NAVIGATING LGBTQ ENGAGEMENT IN THE POST-COVID ERA

A vibrant rainbow graphic with curved lines, set against a background of graffiti. The graffiti includes words like 'LOVE', 'RIGHT', 'WAVE', and 'live'.

SUPPORTING THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY DURING COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered ripple effects around the world, with unprecedented consequences for all. With many in the LGBTQ community working in sectors largely affected by lockdowns, there have been disproportionate impacts to many.

In conversations with leading reporters across top-tier outlets including Fortune, Forbes, Business Insider, Bloomberg and many others ahead of Pride month, a tentpole moment for many organizations, BCW's PRide ERG uncovered key storylines unraveling as a result of the pandemic.

This document outlines these priority themes, as well as key considerations and best practices to keep in mind navigating communications, programs, and activations for the community in June and beyond.



A CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Given the sensitivities of COVID-19 on many minority groups, there are certain elements that companies and brands should account for when engaging during signature moments and throughout the year.

Humans First

With more than 26 million people in the U.S. having filed for unemployment in the first five weeks of the pandemic alone¹, outlets are looking to highlight the human stories behind corporations advocating for change or supporting the many Americans looking for work.

Show Real Support

For years, as brands have looked to engage during PRIDE month, many have received stark criticism labeling their campaigns as a form of "Rainbow Washing": capitalizing on PRIDE and other moments important to the LGBTQ community as a marketing exercise without pledging to create real change. While the traditional celebrations this year will change (i.e., Parades and Events), companies must stand up and prove their support in new ways. Organizations that engage with the cause should connect to the culture of today by making tangible commitments to support those impacted by the pandemic – particularly for those in the LGBTQ community.

Celebrate the Champions

Reporters are looking for companies that are finding ways to celebrate those within the LGBTQ community that are helping in the fight against the pandemic. No challenge is too small as many face the realities of returning home to unwelcoming situations or larger issues tied to mental health and loneliness, to name a few.

Showcase the Importance of Community

As the steady rise of Americans working from home continues to climb due to social distancing, many reporters are seeking stories of organizations finding innovative ways to create – and sustain – digital communities.

¹ U.S. Department of Labor



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Pride Has Gone Digital

For decades, the month of June has been synonymous with Pride Month, including parades, celebrations, and a reminder of progress that has been made for LGBTQ individuals.

In June 2019, New York City saw more than 2.5 million people from far and wide fill the streets to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots — the 1969 protest of an anti-gay police raid that catalyzed a movement for LGBTQ rights.²

This year, Pride celebrations around the world will look very different. For the first time in 50 years, New York's Pride parade is cancelled, as are most events. But that hasn't stopped this year's festivities. Event organizers across the globe have teamed up to organize a virtual 24-hour [Global Pride on June 27th](#).

The event will feature speeches, musical performances and other curated content every hour, with the hope of highlighting local initiatives in every major geographical region.

A Shift to Virtual Community Building

As social distancing continues in many parts of the world, many LGBTQ support groups and centers have turned to online platforms to continue their services, helping these organizations reimagine how they can connect with those they serve, including live streaming events to help provide resources and digital spaces to engage the community when most community centers are closed.

The Importance of Advocacy Groups

Advocacy and fundraising are critical components of LGBTQ activations. However, these important elements have already taken a massive hit due to cancellations of festivals and fundraisers worldwide in addition to donors who have lost jobs or taken salary cuts.

While small LGBTQ advocacy groups often depend on these fundraising dollars earned from Pride-related events to help serve their communities throughout the remainder of the year, the bigger issue remains for the vast amount of community members disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

² Vox - What will Pride mean this year?

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Financial Gaps and Disproportionate Impacts to the Community

While Pride 2020 should be about celebration as always, the more pressing matter at hand is rallying for community support and visibility. The pandemic has sparked many conversations around financial needs of key organizations and impacts to communities benefitting from related support.

[Recent research](#) by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) revealed that more than 5 million LGBTQ workers had jobs that were more likely to be impacted by COVID-19. These included jobs in the restaurant and food services industries, in hospitals, and retail industry, among others.

40%

of all LGBTQ people work in the five industries most affected by the pandemic. By comparison, only 22% of heterosexual people work in those industries.³

More than 160 LGBTQ community centers and organizations, including several based in New York, [sent a letter](#) to congressional leaders asking for funding boosts to help meet spikes in demand stemming from the coronavirus pandemic.



Loneliness and Mental Health are a Concern

Isolation is a problem for all people during the pandemic, but many LGBTQ people feel isolated even in the best of times. There are people trapped in homes with those who don't accept them, reliant on the media and the virtual platforms to give them access to community support.

According to [SAGE](#), LGBTQ retirees are twice as likely to be living alone and four times less likely to have children. They are also at a greater risk of having a lack of care and support from their families. As has been reported, COVID-19 has hit older Americans the hardest.

³ Human Rights Campaign



ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

Show Year-Round Engagement with the Community

There's a fine line between allyship and marketing we should be weary to cross. As you consider engaging the LGBTQ community around PRIDE - rainbow flags and "love is love" slogans aside - ask yourself:



What are the limitations of these symbolic gestures?

Is the brand/company/organization making a meaningful contribution to the cause?

Are we prepared to take a consistent position beyond one moment in time?

Showing a commitment to the community should start with a bigger stance around your organization's business strategy and its ties to diversity and inclusion. The most impactful campaigns are those rooted in long-term allyship, leveraging current product offerings/services as part of a larger force for good.

If your commitments are meaningful and real, it will be easy to show your accomplishments and ROI.

Highlight the Importance of Intersectional Voices

The Oxford dictionary defines *intersectionality* as the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

And while controversies by academics, activists and conservatives have interpreted the term differently throughout the years, what should be most important is understanding why these voices are integral to their engagements.

By championing those who live at the intersections of overlapping systems of privilege and oppression, companies and brands can ensure they are advocating for voices often disproportionately impacted by societal inequalities.



ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

Build Third-Party Credibility Through Strategic Partnerships

Understanding minority communities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, organizations thinking about engaging the LGBTQ community long-term should consider partnering with local or national organizations that are tangibly driving change.

Organizations to consider include:

- [Ali Forney Center](#)
- [Anti-Violence Project](#)
- [CenterLink](#)
- [COLAGE](#)
- [GLSEN](#)
- [GMHC](#)
- [Harlem United](#)
- [Hetrick-Martin Institute](#)
- [Matthew Shepard Foundation](#)
- [Movement Advancement Project](#)
- [Out & Equal](#)
- [Out Leadership](#)
- [Straight for Equality](#)
- [The Trevor Project](#)
- [The Williams Institute](#)

See [here](#) for a comprehensive resource list from GLAAD.



RELEVANT COVERAGE & RESOURCES

Resources

- Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Report – [The Lives and Livelihoods of Many in the LGBTQ Community are at Risk Amidst COVID-19 Crisis](#)
- Funders for LGBTQ Issues – [LGBTQ Funding Resources in the COVID-19 Response](#)

Media Coverage

- USA Today - [LGBTQ Americans are getting coronavirus, losing jobs. Anti-gay bias is making it worse for them](#)
- NBC - [LGBTQ support groups lend an ear — virtually](#)
- NBC - [LGBTQ activists join forces to reimagine Pride amid coronavirus pandemic](#)
- Vox - [What will Pride mean this year?](#)
- The Hill - [Re-imagining the first LGBTQ+ pride online in the age of coronavirus](#)
- Forbes - [Queer PR Icon Cathy Renna On Fighting For LGBTQ Voices To Be Heard During COVID-19](#)
- Forbes - [LGBTQ Finances Are At Risk Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- WIRED - [The Problem With the 'Rainbow-Washing' of LGBTQ+ Pride](#)