

COLUMNS

## Luxury brands missing LGBTQ opportunity

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There is much data showing that LGBTQ consumers love to travel and do plenty of it. So how can luxury brands appeal to this audience that is often receptive to the occasional splurge? The answer is simple: include them.

LGBTQ consumers spend more than \$5 trillion globally, with the United States alone accounting for \$965 billion in 2016, according to **LGBT Capital**.

This is a market that wants to spend on travel.

According to a recent survey we conducted among our Grindr audience, 40 percent of gay millennials travel for fun each quarter, and 24 percent take recreational trips each and every month.

Inclusion in the air

Airlines invest millions in building high-end, in-air experiences for passengers.

Brands including Virgin Australia, Korean Air and Emirates Airlines all have planes with in-flight bars serving up fresh mojitos or top-notch vino in the sky. Some offer chef-prepared meals and snacks, shower spas or private suites.

Even more airlines offer luxe amenities such as flat beds. And with those investments come marketing campaigns and branded content allowing consumers to envision what that once-dreaded flight over the Pacific is like with a little pampering to ease the way.

Yet, most airline brands are missing a big opportunity. They are not including LGBTQ consumers in their magazine ads, on their Web sites, in their branded videos. How is the LGBTQ community supposed to imagine ourselves in that experience if we do not see ourselves reflected in related advertising and marketing?

The fact is, when travel brands embrace LGBTQ consumers, they respond.

We found in a recent Grindr audience travel survey that 61 percent of gay millennials said when choosing a destination, airline or lodging, its reputation as gay-friendly was somewhat or very important.

Not only is this market likely to be planning their next vacation, they are likely to have overseas travel on their minds.

When we asked them to name the places they most want to visit, their top ten included seven destinations outside the United States: Italy, France, Australia, United Kingdom, Greece, Spain and Japan.

Moreover, compared to the general U.S. population, 40 percent of whom have valid passports, according to U.S. State Department data, more than half of gay millennials 54 percent have a valid passport.

When this market, and the more broad LGBTQ audience as a whole plans their next trip overseas, they are more likely to consider spending a little extra for a luxury flight experience if airlines take the time to include people like them in their branded content and messaging.

That video showing off the club-in-the-clouds ought to include a gay couple clinking wine glasses.

*Emirates Airlines' spot for new Airbus A380 onboard lounge*

Again, inclusion is not only the fair approach. It also reaps rewards for brands.

Earlier this year, brand agency **Ogilvy** conducted a survey finding that 64 percent of LGBTQ allies and 46 percent of all U.S. consumers said they were more likely to consider buying a brand after seeing its LGBTQ-inclusive advertising.

Inclusion on the ground

Hotel brands should also be thinking about featuring LGBTQ travelers in their marketing.

As important as it is for cities and other destinations to remind the LGBTQ community that they are welcome, the same goes for hotels. They, too, need to tell LGBTQ travelers they will feel at home at their properties, no matter where in the world they are.

This is a proven driver in the lodging decision-making process, particularly for millennials.

LGBTQ millennials ranked a hotel's LGBTQ-friendly reputation higher in their rankings of motivational factors for choosing lodging than in rankings given by any other sub-group, according to 2016 **Community Marketing Inc.** data.

Digital videos, Instagram images, mobile application content any messaging that reflects what a day-in-the-life at a large brand or boutique hotel is like should speak to these mobile-centric consumers.

Walk us through what it is like to stay at your hotel, show a lesbian couple chatting to the concierge, or a gay couple indulging in a couple's massage. Or, consider an LGBTQ-friendly wine tasting at a new property and capture it on video for a targeted marketing campaign.

EVERYBODY APPRECIATES a bit of decadence, especially when on vacation. LGBTQ consumers are no different.

When we see ourselves in luxury brand content and messaging, we are bound to dive in.

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## 1 thought on "Luxury brands missing LGBTQ opportunity"

1. **Paul Ferdinand** says:

November 20, 2017 at 7:03 am

Is this an accurate portrayal of the gay luxury segment of the travel market or a plug to advertise on Grindr? An ad with a gay couple at the bar of an Emirates plane is a laughable suggestion.