

Are we doing enough to mainstream progressive media?

As more brands increase their internal efforts into DE&I, are they doing enough to ensure it remains at the forefront of their consumer facing strategy? Foundation's Tegan Conn explores the role media agencies play in increasing the impact and importance of progressive media in the mainstream.

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by **TEGAN CONN**

It can be easy to forget that the work we do day to day in media and advertising has the powerful ability to influence and shape society.

That's why it's important to be reminded that it's up to all of us to lead the changes we want to see reflected in the mainstream, by embracing and embedding progressive media within all strategies and plans to play our part. There's no reason for now not to be the moment we all embrace progressive media as mainstream – for the benefit of both brands, society, and our industry.



There is a lot of great conversation increasingly taking place in our industry around creating more inclusive and diverse workplace cultures. We can also do more to extend these same values to our media planning and buying which reaches far and wide, advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in our country more broadly.

One in five Australian households speak a language other than English at home; 18% of the population have a physical, mental, or behavioural disability; 11% of the population identify with diverse sexual orientation sex or gender identity. The breadth of minority groups and communities in Australia goes on, and they are not as niche as we may first think. This is our Australian target audience – It's time for progressive media to stop becoming a 'nice to have' when a specific brief or test budget comes our way, and to be the norm.

A recent Conscious Consumer Report from Cavill + Co shed some interesting light on the fast-shifting sentiment of Australians and the increasing importance they are placing on companies and brands delivering on corporate social responsibility. It's no longer just the 'activist' mindsets of Millennials and Gen Z looking more closely at corporate social responsibility, but now the prominent sentiment across all age groups.

There are many welcome benefits of improved ROI outcomes that progressive media can bring about for our clients by aligning to the shifting values of society and appealing to a broader base of potential customers. Recent industry awards have demonstrated the power of progressive media with a raft of campaigns centering on inclusivity taking out top honours with the brand results to back it up.

There is no denying the positive effects DE&I media spending can have on brands – 63% of people are more likely to buy from brands that make an effort to represent people like them. It also opens additional audience scale and targeting opportunities just by being more inclusive. But there are so many richer reasons beyond media effectiveness to start incorporating more DE&I opportunities within media plans.



Opportunities range from niche to more scalable; whether it be supporting minority owned & operated media partners or speaking directly to minority audiences on platforms that are regularly overlooked, to taking meaningful partnerships to mainstream media where we can drive greater representation and include more diverse talent.

One of the key takeouts from the Conscious Consumer Report that media planners and clients can be mindful of is that audiences respond better to companies forming long-term, meaningful partnerships. Australians can spot a PR stunt when they see it – 76% agree that when companies or brands jump on board an issue just for the headline it will backfire. Although giving a cause a voice is great, it needs to go beyond this and deliver a genuine commitment to that cause as well.

In a recent campaign I was lucky enough to work on for my client Diageo, we entered a multi-year partnership with Sydney Mardi Gras with the intention to celebrate and support societal progress. The campaign centred around an activation at Kinselas, revamping the iconic location to create a safe and inclusive space for all to celebrate. We also placed a focus on creating ever green content to amplify beyond Mardi Gras, dedicated to people who are pushing progressive boundaries. Many of the voices we platformed were from within the LGBTQIA+ community, demonstrating our allyship in an authentic way that hands over the mic. We ensured this campaign amplified the voices of our diverse talent to the mainstream as well as looked at opportunities to support LGBTQIA+ owned and operated media partners, which we are looking to expand on in 2024.

Whilst on the surface it just feels nice to do some good within the work we are putting out in the world, we have a genuine chance to play our part in positively shifting the media landscape to be more representative of society through media investment activism, whilst empowering and educating our clients to come along the journey with us.

This won't happen overnight, but it doesn't need to take a long time to make progressive media mainstream if we are all more mindful of the opportunities we have at our fingertips. To challenge your thinking next time you are putting together a media plan or strategy, I find it helpful to ask a few extra questions:

- What DE&I owned, operated or audience focused media partners can I work with?
- Are there additional progressive contextual environments or specific audiences I could expand in to?
- What new partnerships or sponsorships could I explore that champion underrepresented causes or communities?
- Is the content and talent I am amplifying or creating representing diverse voices?

We have the chance to be the generation of media planners that impactfully shifts the media landscape to better represent and support our diverse society through more mindful media investment. There is no denying the additional benefits for brands and positive impacts this would also have to our industry. Working to a common goal, now is the opportune time for us to ask the right questions and make progressive media mainstream