

DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY AND EQUALITY

ISN'T IT ALL JUST ABOUT PLAIN
AND SIMPLE HUMANITY?

Diversity is a complex topic but at the heart of the issue is the need to achieve a cultural shift in which brands and media must play their part.

It is no longer appropriate for brands to avoid targeting diverse audiences because it is 'more difficult'. Especially as a lack of representation of diverse audiences in communications is adding to their cultural marginalisation. The world presented in communications plays a big part in the creation of the culture we all live in, and if audiences are absent from the collective consciousness it allows fear and discrimination to grow. Embracing diversity is ultimately about plain and simple humanity.

Not only do brands have a duty to embrace diversity, they also have a responsibility to offer a positive representation of the audience in a way that isn't tokenist. Brands can play a big role in normalising difficult subjects and helping to create social cohesion; if they get it right, the spirit of the brand can be reinforced through the representation of diverse audiences.

Our panel explored the different attitudes towards difference and the role brands can play in recognising and valuing it.

Ceri Rose (Director of Marketing & Communication, NHS Blood & Transplant) discussed the challenges NHSBT faces to recruit those with rarer blood types and to get BAME audiences to sign up for organ donation. NHS Blood and Transplant's mission is to 'save and improve lives' and to do so, they have to ensure they're reaching the right audiences in an inclusive manner. Ceri stressed the importance of being as inclusive as you can be and the need to keep testing through research; interestingly this included the importance of empowering people and teams, as often wonderful ideas can come from within. Ceri advised that diversity and inclusion are not just about campaigns, and that they need to extend to the actual business model and the whole customer experience.

Steven Lacey (Director, The Outsiders) shared a wealth of insights from his research on differing attitudes towards diversity by class, age, gender and race. Although he acknowledged that Britain's diversity agenda has improved, there's still many areas that need work. These being: Islamophobia, old people's prejudices, transgenderism, mental health, disability access, negativity towards the white working class and prejudice outside cities.

Steven had a similar view to Ceri in that he believes there's a role for brands, and in fact he believes that getting diversity and inclusion right can lead to a lot of brand warmth. He referenced Maltesers who took the responsibility to be inclusive and represent society in a really positive way and reminded the audience that the advert that featured disabled cast members was its most successful campaign in a decade. However, Steven also gave caution: brands need to tread carefully when entering into the diversity arena and ensure it feels natural and normal for that brand and their message. The key is often to look at the similarities and not the differences of an audience.

Patricia Macauley (Director, Multicultural Marketing Consultancy) shared her experiences of connecting with multicultural audiences. Using examples to show good and bad practice, Patricia began her talk by looking back 10 years to when she was the only person of colour sat in a meeting reviewing creative concepts to target people of colour; she highlighted the importance of diversity throughout the creative process, not just in creative testing (although also noted that brands need to make a genuine attempt to engage with their audience which means investment in research).

Patricia then gave examples of more recent campaigns that have proven that diversity in advertising has improved hugely, for example the recent Ikea campaign starring a black family (and their natural hair). When asked how agencies and brands can better their diversity representation and understanding of the audiences they're trying to reach, Patricia advised that mobilising communities and partnering with communities is key in working with hard to engage audiences. She also advised that brands should work with culturally intelligent partners and to be brave and bold in their approach.