

DIVERSITY IN CONTENT

Diverse teams = diverse work = inclusive of all audiences

It is our belief... that the content we create must be as diverse as the society we serve. Inclusion needs to underpin every single touchpoint of the way we shape creative work - including where and how it appears - to talk to all audiences.

Content needs to celebrate all forms of diversity, including all genders, multicultural backgrounds, ages, sexual orientations, people with disabilities, neurodiverse traits, class, all socio-economic groups, faiths, ideologies and more. We are all intersectional: we are never just one demographic. Identities combine in many ways. To live and breathe this ethos, we have to understand inclusion needs to be the red thread through the entire end-to-end process: research, strategy, teams, production, casting, media placement and measurement.

The leadership position

Every management team across the industry should lead by embedding the principles of diversity, inclusion and equality throughout their companies, teams and working practices. At board level, all leaders should be accountable for driving diversity throughout the DNA of their brand and business. On a practical level, this involves setting KPIs which are regularly reviewed against business objectives, and understanding the biases and barriers which come in the way of recruitment, career progression and retention. The focus shouldn't be on box-ticking by demographics, but on cognitive diversity. When inclusion is part of the DNA of the creative process and media landscape, this needs to be embedded throughout the entire process.

Commercial imperative

The internal benefits of diversity are well understood – ranging from increased morale and a widened pool for recruitment, through to diverse teams and companies performing better. However, the advertising industry may see additional benefits. In a setting where creativity, innovation and the ability to understand how consumers will interact with products and services are key, having a diverse and inclusive team helps tap into different perspectives and nimbly react to the latest trends. These teams safeguard against creating 'tone-deaf' or offensive content. We believe all organisations should make the following commitments and these should be included in all agency briefs:

For brands to ask their agencies:

1. Does the agency you're working with have a commitment to I&D? What is their vision/mission for this and how does it show up as part of their agency ethos?
2. What is representation like at board/C-suite/throughout the business?
3. What is your agency's gender pay gap? BAME pay gap? Disability pay gap?
4. Are they accredited with the Creative + Media Equality Standard from Creative Equals?
5. Have you considered your own bias in research and strategy?
6. Is the creative brief reflective of the audience you want to reach?
7. What is the representation of the teams working on the brief?
8. Is your agency aware of the ASA gender stereotyping standards set in 2019?
9. Have you outlined requirements for inclusive work (including accessibility)?
10. What will representation look like on screen and behind the screen?
11. What are the agency's supply chain commitments? Will the production chain be diverse and inclusive (are they signed up to [FreeTheWork](#))? How will the work be cast?
12. Where will your ads be served? Which sites are you supporting? Is your media play inclusive, whether this is online or OOH?

For agencies/teams shaping creative work:

1. Have you considered bias in the strategy? Where are the blindspots? Have you considered inclusion in the insights and how does this show up in the strategy?
2. At the brief stage, check your 'assumptions': are they rooted in stereotypes? As with brands, does your team fully understand the [ASA Guidelines on Gender Stereotyping](#)?
3. Are the team working on the brief the right 'narrators' for this work? Or how could you sense check ideas with authentic audiences?

4. Has your creative team undertaken [bias training](#)?
5. Learn how to identify any areas of concern, such as potentially tone-deaf and inappropriate content and poor web accessibility through adding a 'diversity lens'
6. Put a process in place that encourages ways of pushing back on inappropriate content – one that points to a business case and protects the individual making the case
7. Enable other audience groups to be a part of the feedback process for a wider representation of voice. How are you checking this work with the right focus/testing groups?
8. How will this work be produced/cast/measured? What roles will different demographics play?
9. What is your supply chain diversity policy?

For all media placement and ad serving:

To support diversity, we need to ensure keep funding diverse media titles representing voices which we want to see continue (this includes identifying these titles on programmatic site lists, direct deals and partnerships etc) and on the other hand making sure we're not accidentally excluding them with our brand safety settings ('lesbian' and 'Muslim' were both found to be on more keyword block lists than 'murder' for instance).

1. Consider your 'brand safety' settings, which can have the unintended consequence of excluding minority audiences, and minority titles. As much as 75% of brand safe LGBTQIA+ related content is deemed 'unsafe' by common keyword blockers for instance, meaning publishers are actively disincentivised from appearing on this content. This means that if minority publications do not receive critical ad funding to support them, they will cease to exist. Similarly, if companies are driving brand safety by creating 'safe' lists of websites not many will go the extra mile and ensure a range of diverse voices are included. Crucially, brands then miss out on appealing to diverse audiences, who don't see their brand messages.
2. There are huge opportunities to go far beyond 'not just excluding minority audiences' in terms of actively including relevant media titles in your campaigns, partnering with them to better understand this audience and shape content, even helping create unique and diverse campaigns which you can actually expand out to a much broader audience too.
3. Be careful how you use data in this space. Sexual **orientation** is a protected characteristic and while you may be able to infer this about people based on their browsing activity etc. it is relatively irresponsible to then retarget them with creative based on this fact as they browse the web.

For all in terms of recruiting:

1. Have all your teams trained in 'Inclusive recruitment', making sure they understand their biases are barriers to hiring for difference. Creative Equals' runs an 'Inclusive Recruiters' certification to train recruiters/hiring managers for this.
2. Hire from alternative websites, like [The Dots](#) (61% women, 33% BAME, 15% LGBTQIA+) and use blind hiring methods.
3. Evaluate candidates fairly using scorecards, structured questions and join the [Disability Confident Recruitment Scheme](#).
4. Support grassroots initiatives that foster entry talent like [The Ideas Foundation](#), [Brixton Finishing School](#), [IPA's Creative Pioneers](#), and [D&ADShift](#).

Other organisations to join:

[The Valuable500](#), a disability charter

[Outvertising](#) - representing LGBTQIA in advertising and media

[Stonewall](#) - LGBTQIA organisation

[The Future is ND](#) - a network for neurodiverse individuals

[Bloom](#) - for women in media

[SheSays](#) - for creative women