

INCLUSIVE VISUAL STORYTELLING:

Best Practices for More Diverse Marketing

Do you see people like yourself in advertising and marketing?

How you answer depends on a number of variables, but one thing that's certain is that inclusive imagery—imagery that portrays people of diverse races, ethnicities, abilities, and other often underrepresented communities—is increasingly important to consumers.

A 2020 study by Getty Images, a world leader in visual communication, shows that searches for diverse workplace, diverse group, and multicultural group grew by more than 160% from 2018 to 2019.¹ This boost is more proof that today's consumers are increasingly diverse, and our ability to connect in a way that shows that we understand and respect them as dynamic, authentic individuals, is more than socially responsible, it's good for business.

Searches for “**inclusivity**”
were up by



from 2018
to 2019²

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1, 2. Getty Images Top 1 Million Global Year over Year Searches, January 2020

Gain the Confidence to Be Inclusive.

Consumers want to interact with content that reflects who they are. The more you understand your growingly diverse audience, the more confidence you'll have to reach beyond your comfort zone, challenge preconceived notions, and benefit from new markets.

**SO MANY FACETS—
START WITH THE BASICS.**

Race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, body type, ability, religion—let's look at just a few factors you should consider to make your visual storytelling more inclusive...



Brands with the most representative ads saw **higher stock growth,**
44% average stock increase over the past 2 years.³

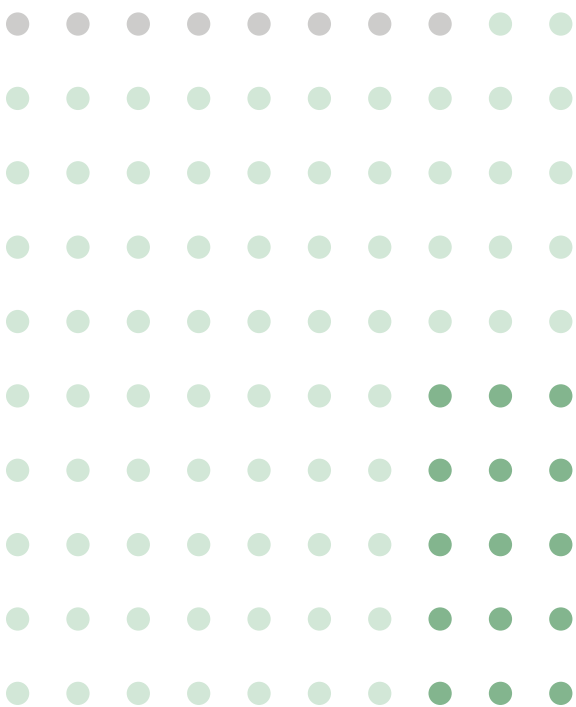
Race & Ethnicity

Step up your intersectionality.

More complex and varied than many of us take into account, race and ethnicity encompass a potentially limitless combination of skin colors, cultural traditions, and national origins.

Showcasing this vast diversity in a truly inclusive way, means featuring people from a wide range of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, including mixed race and multiple race origins, as well as indigenous people and others from under-represented groups.

Inclusive imagery goes beyond simply portraying people of different racial backgrounds, it should depict them in non-stereotypical ways and bring them into the spotlight.



92%
of brands showed people of color, but only

15%
were culturally represented by more than their skin color.⁴

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT: DIVERSITY OF RACE AND ETHNICITY.

- ❓ What role are different racial groups playing in your imagery? Are non-white people featured in a variety of roles and professions (e.g., employer AND employee, different industries), hobbies and interests?
- ❓ Are you using stereotypes to represent certain non-white ethnicities? (e.g. certain ethnicities have particular behavioral traits, wear certain clothing, do certain jobs, etc.)
- ❓ Are you showing a range of skin tones, facial features, and authentically reflecting intra-community diversity?
- ❓ How are you representing an individual's race/ethnicity alongside other intersections of their identity? (e.g., disabilities, gender identity or expression, age, etc.)
- ❓ How are you reflecting the cultural nuances and traditions of different races/ethnicities (around food, celebrations, activities, etc.)?
- ❓ Are you relying on "tokenism" to depict race?

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Gender

Jump into the spectrum.

More than just the sex that we're born, gender is a broad concept encompassing attitudes, feelings, roles, and behaviors.

Promoting gender diversity once meant incorporating images of strong, independent women. As our understanding of gender grows, so too has its definition. It helps to think of gender as two separate but intertwined concepts: gender identity, how you see yourself, and gender expression, how you outwardly express your gender identity.

Inclusive Gender identity and gender expression manifest in ways that are defined as masculine and feminine, but also androgynous, or in ways that don't match contemporary ideas of male or female. Gender is complex and fluid. Reflecting this in imagery is a step toward greater inclusivity.



Female characters are more likely than males to play personal life-oriented roles, such as wife and mother.



In contrast, male characters are more likely than females to play work-oriented roles, such as business executive.⁵

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT: GENDER DIVERSITY.

- ❓ Have you considered how imagery might be reinforcing gender stereotypes in your community?
- ❓ Are the roles and emotions being depicted equally attributable to men and women? (e.g. who is the caregiver, who is showing emotion, who has power in the image?)
- ❓ Have you considered the age and the role that the person is playing in your image? Is it reinforcing traditional gender roles and stereotypes?
- ❓ Are you restricting your imagery to a binary representation of gender?
- ❓ Are you representing trans people of all gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations? Are you only featuring trans women? Are you only showing straight trans people?
- ❓ What is the color palette of your image when focusing on children? Are the colors chosen stereotypically gendered (e.g., pinks and blues)?

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Sexual Orientation

Embrace individuality

Gay. Straight. Still figuring it out. Sexual orientation can be described in terms such as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and bisexual, but there are also those who describe themselves as asexual, pansexual, and more. The umbrella term LGBTQ+ encompasses a panoply of orientations outside of heterosexuality.

Portraying diverse sexual orientations means more than images of same sex couples and rainbow flags. Showcasing LGBTQ+ people in non-stereotypical careers, navigating real-life moments, living successful single lives, enjoying same sex parenthood—and doing all of it across races, genders, and ages—is a powerful way to demonstrate inclusivity in storytelling.

Sexual orientation



Gender identity

_____ and should be treated that way. _____

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT: SEXUAL ORIENTATION.

- ❓ Are you using real LGBTQ+ people to represent the LGBTQ+ community?
- ❓ Are you only showing LGBTQ+ individuals in romantic stories or as parents? What about single LGBTQ+ individuals living full lives? With friendship groups, parents or grandparents, at work, at home and beyond?
- ❓ Are you showing LGBTQ+ people of various races?
- ❓ Are you showing LGBTQ+ people living fulfilling, positive lives and having shared experiences within and outside of their communities?
- ❓ Are you representing LGBTQ+ elders? Are you doing it in a positive way?

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Body Type

Celebrate every bit of who you are.

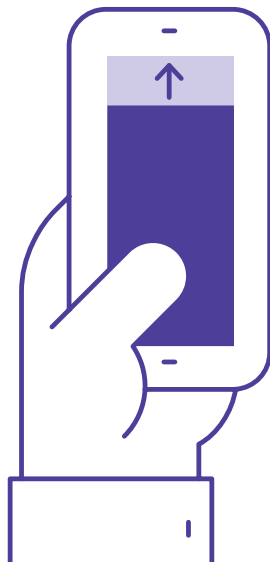
The media has traditionally promoted an idealized, often unrealistic body type—focusing on tall, thin, unblemished bodies from predominantly young, white models.

Imagery portraying people in all their natural shapes, sizes, and complexions can help establish new body image norms and connect with audiences in a way that feels more authentic—every brand's goal.

Showing people with more realistic and diverse bodies is a bold and very inclusive step that can help brands stand out and even boost brand perception.

83%

Brands with the most representative ads saw



higher preference in customer perceptions.⁶

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT: BODY TYPES.

- ? Have you considered showing people of all races and genders with a range of body types?
- ? How are you representing people with larger bodies? Shorter bodies? Are you selecting imagery that features them living full lives?
- ? Are you being conscious of the positioning of people with larger and shorter bodies? Do they look comfortable and proud?
- ? Have you considered the styling of people with larger and shorter bodies? Are they dressed in less sophisticated or ill-fitted clothing than their slimmer and taller counterparts?
- ? Have you considered the representation of people with different skin conditions?

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Ability

Empower change with authenticity.

For those living with physical and cognitive disabilities, inclusivity means shifting away from stereotypes and good intentions, and focusing on the richness and complexity of real life.

Imagery that depicts a range of disabilities in a way that highlights the individual rather than the physical or cognitive difference, allows you to focus on the positive and reflect the reality that millions of people live active, dynamic lives in spite of physical or cognitive challenges.

Abilities to consider when using inclusive imagery:

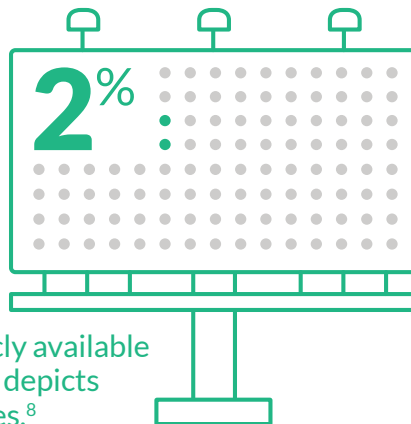
- Vision
- Hearing
- Communicating
- Movement
- Various cognitive differences—learning, memory, mental health

Promoting imagery of people with disabilities provides constructive affirmation and acknowledges that they are proud, productive members of our communities.

Nearly **1 in 4** people have a disability,



but just



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT: ABILITIES.

- ? Are you showing people with disabilities as active members of society?
- ? Are you only showing people with disabilities being helped, cared for, or trying to overcome their challenges?
- ? Are you only featuring people in wheelchairs or with other easily identifiable differences? What about people with cognitive challenges or an invisible disability?
- ? Are you conveying positive messages such as, love, friendship, or achievement?
- ? Have you considered the camera angle? Is the viewer looking down at the differently abled subject?
- ? Are you focusing on a person's disability rather than on their whole identity? Are you showing an intersectionality of experience rather than focusing simply on a person's disability?

8. <https://creativeinsights.gettyimages.com/en/repicture/our-partnerships/the-disability-collection>

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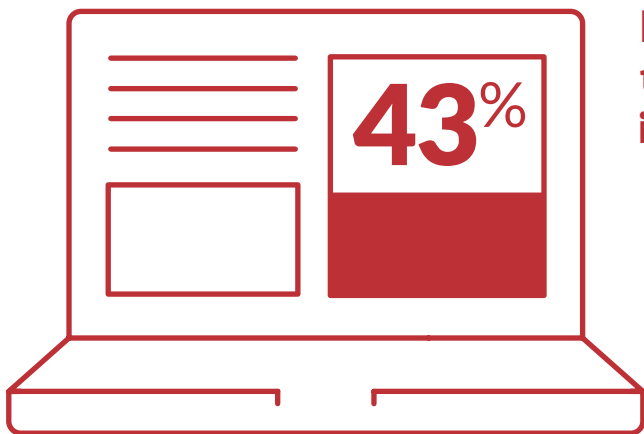
Age

Shine on people throughout their journey.

As different as we all are, one thing is universal—we all get older. Older consumers make up a powerful and growing block that should not be ignored. Despite this, a study by YouGov found that 79% of over-50s don't believe they are accurately portrayed in advertising.

Including older people from diverse backgrounds and lifestyles in imagery is a way to promote greater inclusivity, and provides a more realistic reflection of the varied and important roles older people play in our lives.

Though 43% of brands had **at least one occurrence of a senior citizen in their ads,**



hardly any put the characters in a position of power.*



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT: AGE.

- ❓ Are you showing a multi-dimensional experience of what it means to be an older person?
- ❓ Are you focusing on what older people can't do and not on what they can do?
- ❓ Have you considered that rather than being cared for, older people (seniors in particular) might be caring for their children and/or parents?
- ❓ Are you showing women over 40 as contented, active, and fulfilled?
- ❓ Are you taking an expansive view of the sort of relationships older people have? (e.g., LGBTQ+ spouses/partners, friend groups, platonic companions, etc.)

* The Diversity and Inclusion Revolution—Eight powerful truths, Juliet Bourke and Bernadette Dillon, Deloitte Review, Issue 22, January 2018

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Religion

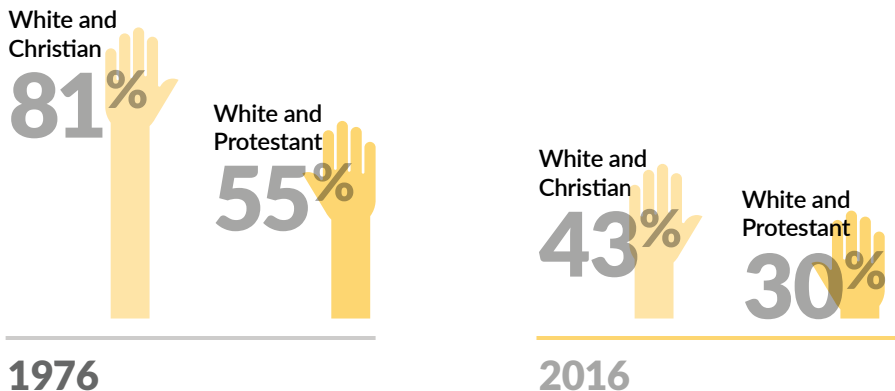
Turn a complex subject into an opportunity to stand out.

It's hard to be authentic and overlook something as foundational to the lives of so many people as religion. As our communities become more diverse, so to do our houses of worship. White Christians now account for fewer than half of the American public, and Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and communities are growing.⁸

Featuring religion in imagery does not require an obvious reference such as a cross, menorah, or hijab. A truly inclusive depiction of people of different religions means avoiding stereotypes and showing people outside of a religious context.

America's faith is changing.

43% of people in the US identify as white and Christian, and only 30% as white and Protestant. In 1976, 81% identified as white and Christian, and a majority 55% identified as white Protestants.⁸



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT: RELIGION.

- ? Have you researched people of different faiths in your own community (demographics, social norms, common practices, etc.)?
- ? Are you focusing on the individual or their faith?
- ? Are you showing a range of people from different religious backgrounds?
- ? Are you showing them with people from other religious or non-religious backgrounds?
- ? Are you using tokenistic iconography to visually speak to a faith (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism) or even a holiday like Hanukkah?

8. America's Changing Religious Identity: Findings from the 2016 American Values Atlas; Daniel Cox, Robert P. Jones; Public Religion Research Institute; September 6, 2017; <https://www.prii.org/research/american-religious-landscape-christian-religiously-unaffiliated/>

Inclusivity Should Always Be Authentic.

The power of inclusive imagery is in its ability to push beyond the expected, connect with underserved populations, and portray the diverse people you know or see in the world around you. The more authentic it feels, the more it will connect, resonate, and promote greater cultural awareness. This authenticity is key to building trust, and crucial to representing all people with humanity and dignity.

1, 2. Getty Images Top 1 Million Global Year over Year Searches, January 2020

3, 4, 6, 8. The Diversity and Inclusion Revolution—Eight powerful truths, Juliet Bourke and Bernadette Dillon, Deloitte Review, Issue 22, January 2018

5. Center for the Study of Women in Television & Film, San Diego State University

7. <https://creativeinsights.gettyimages.com/en/repicture/our-partnerships/the-disability-collection>

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Appendix

Important terms to know.

BODY IMAGE

A subjective picture of one's own physical appearance established both by self-observation and by noting the reactions of others

DISABILITY

Any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities and interact with the world around them [CDC]. There are many types of disabilities, such as those that affect a person's:

- Vision
- Movement
- Thinking
- Remembering
- Learning
- Communicating
- Hearing
- Mental health

ETHNICITY

An ethnic group or ethnicity is a category of people who identify with each other, usually on the basis of presumed similarities such as common language, ancestry, history, society, culture, nation or social treatment within their residing area.

GENDER

The behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex.

GENDER EXPRESSION

The physical and behavioral manifestations of one's gender identity. People vary greatly in the extent to which they hold and convey gendered thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Gender expression refers to the way people convey their gender through mannerisms, behaviors, or expressions

GENDER IDENTITY

A person's internal sense of being male, female, some combination of male and female, or neither male nor female

INCLUSIVE

Including everyone, especially allowing and accommodating people who have historically been excluded (as because of their race, gender, sexuality, or ability)

LGBTQ+

Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and the plus is designed to include other fluid or more abstract sexual orientations.

RACE

Race is defined as “a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits,” while the term ethnicity is more broadly defined as “large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background.” According to scientists, neither race nor ethnicity (see ethnicity) is detectable in the human genome; however, they are both widely accepted social constructs used to categorize seemingly distinct populations and continue to be critical points of representation in many parts of the world. Below are races/ethnicities that are commonly considered in casting:

- **White/Caucasian**
A person having origins in Europe.
- **Black**
A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Including for example direct descendants of Africa, as well as African American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino, and so forth.
- **Hispanic/Latinx**
A person having origins in any of the countries in Latin America and/or of Spanish descent, regardless of race.

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Appendix

Important terms to know.

RACE (CONTINUED)

- **Asian**

A person belonging to the pan-ethnic group that has origins in East Asia, South Asia or Southeast Asia.

- **East Asian**

A person deriving from the east Asian subregion of the continent which includes countries such as China, Japan, Taiwan, North and South Korea, etc.

- **South Asian**

A person deriving from the southern region of the Asian continent which includes countries such as India, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka.

- **Southeast Asian**

A person deriving from the region geographically south of China, east of India and Bangladesh, north of Australia, and west of New Guinea. This area includes countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, etc.

- **Middle Eastern or North African (MENA)**

A person having origins (regardless of religious affiliation) in countries comprising what's commonly referred to as the "Middle East" and/or North Africa.

- **Indigenous Peoples**

A person descending from ethnic communities that inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. These peoples are spread around the world but are particularly populated in the Americas, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

- **Multiracial/Biracial/Mixed Race**

A person who identifies with more than one racial/ethnic group.

RELIGION

Religion can be explained as a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. There are several religions and religious denominations around the world with varying customs that may affect the way people dress, what they eat, what activities they do, how they marry and raise children, and much more.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION:

A person's sexual identity or self-identification as bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, pansexual, etc.

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