CREATIVE BRAVERY BEYOND THE BACKLASH

#UNSTEREOTYPE ALLIANCE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all our Creative Bravery Beyond the Backlash interviewees who kindly donated their time and expertise to this guide:

KEITH WEED CBE
Chair, Unstereotype Alliance UK Chapter

HELEN JAMES
CEO of Forsman & Bodenfors London

SARA DENBY
Head of the Unstereotype Alliance Secretariat at UN Women

PIP HEYWOOD
Managing Director at Thortful

ALINE SANTOS
Former Chief Brand Officer and Chief Equity Diversity and Inclusion Officer at Unilever

FERNANDO DESOUCHES
Managing Director of New Macho at BBD Perfect Storm

CHLOË DAVIES
Founder of It Takes A Village

LAUREN WINTER
Global Managing Director of Consumer Culture at FleishmanHillard

ALI HANAN
CEO of Creative Equals

MARTY DAVIES
Joint CEO of Outvertising and the founder of Smarty Pants Consultancy

AUTHOR: Nicola Kemp
DESIGNER: Joanna Lawton
EDITORIAL SUPPORT: Melda Simon, UK Chapter Lead for the Unstereotype Alliance

The Unstereotype Alliance does not endorse or recommend any specific company, manufacturer, commercial product, process or service. This guide may contain references to third-party campaigns and opinions. These references are not under the control of the Unstereotype Alliance, and the Alliance is not responsible for the content of any individuals or companies referenced in this guide.

FOREWORD

Navigating a company's role in society is one of the great management challenges of our time. Businesses and brands are under pressure to clearly define their role and purpose in society and often to take a position on the big issues of the day.

At the same time we are seeing a pushback against DE&I initiatives where the very concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion are becoming a scapegoat for culture wars. For the creative industries, where we have such a unique opportunity to drive culture, the stakes are getting higher.

Our industry is driven by the talent and commitment of its people. Many of those people want to leverage creativity to engage more people, as well as advance progressive and inclusive portrayals of all people. Yet we must acknowledge they are at times also nervous and even scared of 'getting it wrong'. As you read this guide and learn from the expert voices within, a clear sentiment shines through: Don't let a few noisy voices keep you from doing the right thing for your business.

Never has it been so important to ensure that our workplaces, creative teams, advertising content and marketing communications are representative and inclusive of the diverse communities we serve. The moral case is clear, but this makes fiscal sense too. Inclusive advertising is proven to drive better engagement and effectiveness.

> ***"The biggest risk is not a backlash from a vocal minority, it is falling behind as a brand and becoming less relevant"***

Let's be clear, standing still has never been an option. The risks are too great, from alienating a generation of talent, to producing ineffective and culturally irrelevant advertising. As an industry we must not press pause on progress because of concerns and fear.

Our hope is that the wisdom shared in this guide will help you to develop the courage to brave the risk of a backlash and continue on your journey to Unstereotype.

KEITH WEED CBE
Chair, Unstereotype Alliance UK Chapter.

BACKLASH RISKS STIFLING CREATIVE BRAVERY

SARA DENBY, Head of the Unstereotype Alliance Secretariat at UN Women, on navigating a polarising media ecosystem, collaboration and driving growth through inclusion.

There is an evidence gulf between the 'go woke and go broke' media narrative and the factual reality of inclusive advertising's positive impact on business outcomes and commercial performance.

Data from the Gender Unstereotype Metric (GUM) shows a strong correlation between high GUM scores - a score derived from consumer testing that evaluates how progressive the portrayals of people are - and purchase intent. This trend is found in both an increased likelihood of short-term sales and in brand equity measures like Brand Power.

These trends have been ratified by the Unstereotype Alliance's Business Case for Inclusive Advertising in partnership with the Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford. The results from a large first-of-its-kind global scientific study, featuring analysis of the impacts of inclusive advertising on commercial performance and brand equity, demonstrates that this purchase intent does in fact convert into sales, and that inclusion equals income. It revealed that inclusive advertising helps brands to grow and commercially prosper.

Brands with more inclusive advertising practices sell more (3.46% higher shorter-term sales and 16.26% higher longer-term sales) and are considered and trialled more (33% higher strong consideration, 62% higher likelihood of being a consumer's first choice, and 8% higher incidence of being trialled). They also enjoy higher customer loyalty (23% lower chance of being abandoned after trial and 15% higher loyalty), are valued greater by consumers (54% higher pricing power), and have higher brand equity (8.3% more meaningful, 12.1% more different, and 9.4% higher salience).

INCLUSION = INCOME

Evidence from the Unstereotype Alliance's Business Case for Inclusive Advertising found that inclusive advertising:

- **Improves direct short-term sales with uplift of 3.46%**
- **Drives 16.26% greater direct long-term sales than less progressive advertising**
- **Loyalty (intent to repurchase) is 1.29 times higher for more inclusive advertising than less progressive advertising**
- **Strong purchase consideration is 1.43 times higher, and pricing power is 1.52 times higher**

Image credit: Claudio Schwarz/Unsplash

> ***"The Unstereotype Alliance was created to drive positive social change through more inclusive advertising and positive representations of our communities. We believe that inclusive advertising can act as a force for good and now, we can definitively prove that it is also good for business."***
>
> **SARA DENBY**
> Head of the Unstereotype Alliance Secretariat at UN Women

Collaboration drives creative bravery

Despite the strong business case for inclusive advertising, the Unstereotype Alliance's 2023 State of the Industry report identified a deacceleration of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts across the global advertising industry. Yet, we know that consumers expect brands to be inclusive and will support those brands with their purchasing power. Marketers must be laser-focused on how their creative approach aligns with their consumers' expectations.

Navigating an inclusive creative development process has been made more challenging due to a marginal number of naysayers who have stirred up a fear of commercial backlash in response to inclusive advertising content. Brands must have the courage to stand firm in the face of this harmful rhetoric - and while that bravery must come from inside the house, collaboration with experts and partners is critical to success.

In an increasingly polarised media ecosystem and digital environment, industry collaboration is vital. When brands and agencies share lived experiences, learnings and best practice, they are better equipped to brave any backlash with knowledge, data and proof points. Membership of the Unstereotype Alliance is an excellent example of this. Competition is left at the door in place of sharing candid experiences, practical guidance, and a commitment to driving positive social change.

Our media landscape is changing so fast and influencing our culture in unprecedented ways – the proliferation of social media platforms alone requires constant education and an agile strategic marketing approach. Policies for navigating backlash across all communication channels now must not only consider protecting brands but upholding a duty of care to staff. The good news is that - like any other robust business practice – anticipation, preparation and planning are key to achieving a timely and progressive response.

Image credits: See the World Differently' Virgin Atlantic/Lucky Generals

10 POINT GUIDE TO PROGRESSIVE MARKETING IN AN AGE OF POLARISATION

After extensive interviews with experts and brands that have successfully 'braved the backlash', this guide focuses on how marketers can proactively prepare and embrace the commercial and creative opportunities of inclusive marketing.

LEAD WITH PURPOSE

Decide what it is you stand for and stay true to your commitments. When brands are clear on their values and purpose they can better withstand a backlash.

1

Lay strong foundations for your brand to speak out externally

Authenticity is not just a marketing buzzword. Marketing leaders agree that the foundational work of inclusion must begin and extend beyond an individual campaign cycle. Investing in DE&I as a vital marketing skill set and KPI like any other is core to success.

2

Ensure leadership and employee alignment

Marketing leaders must ensure their leadership teams are aware and on board with every campaign and prepared to stand by their work. Experts agree that backlash and negative feedback doesn't have to mean that your brand will get 'cancelled'. However, how you respond as an organisation, rather than just a marketing team operating in isolation, is a crucial part of your campaign planning. To emerge from the storm stronger, having your leadership team aligned is vital.

3

Avoid a 'double backlash' by holding true to your values

When marketing leaders decide what their brands stand for they must stay true to that commitment. Responding with facts and considered reflections of brand values, rather than a knee-jerk response is key to long-term success.

LEAD WITH PROGRESSIVE LISTENING

Active listening is key to unlocking the power of creative bravery beyond the backlash. In our always-on marketing ecosystem it's important to recognise the difference between a vocal minority and a company's core customer base.

4

Embrace active listening

In a polarising media environment marketing leaders need to know where their 'noisy voices' are, as well as ensuring that they are utilising social listening tools to track campaign responses in real time. This commitment to active listening must extend internally into workplace culture. A red thread runs between DE&I in the boardroom and behind the camera to what we see on-screen.

5

Apologise quickly for culturally insensitive work

Marketers need to be acutely aware of the fast moving sensitivities of a world in conflict. This is particularly vital for campaigns which aren't standing by a community, but have inadvertently offended consumers. Apologies for inadvertent offence must be both swift and respond to the impact on people, not focus on the brand's intention.

6

Recognise the power of the pause

While pace and agility are top of the marketing agenda when it comes to responding to a backlash, pausing a campaign can be both a brave and important step for growth.

LEAD WITH A PEOPLE-FIRST APPROACH

In an age of instant online judgement brands need to step up to their duty of care to staff and talent. Marketers recognise that backlash is often unavoidable, therefore, having processes in place to safeguard staff and talent is vital.

7

Create KPIs for staff and talent wellbeing

Social media staff are a brand's first line of defence in a backlash, but they are also the first to encounter abuse. In a polarised media ecosystem brands must take steps to protect their wellbeing with clear processes that ensure staff are well-supported. This duty of care should also extend to talent that appear in campaigns i.e. actors, influencers, celebrities. Brands need to invest in clear processes.

8

Prove a genuine commitment to the communities you represent

The era of surface level representation is over. Consumers increasingly expect brands to have the proof points of meaningfully investing in charities, causes and communities. These commitments should extend beyond an individual campaign cycle.

9

Cultural context is everything

Campaign planning cycles are not always in sync with cultural context. Progressive brands and agencies are now placing the role of cultural strategist at the heart of campaign planning. Brands need to sense-check their work at every stage of the planning cycle.

10

Tools, frameworks and measurement lead to consistency

For brands to embrace creative bravery they must provide the appropriate tools, guidance and measurement frameworks for their teams. The Gender Unstereotype Metric (GUM) and the Progressive Unstereotype Metric (PUM), designed by the Unstereotype Alliance with Kantar, test creative work to ensure it is positive and devoid of stereotypes. The 3Ps Marketing Communications Framework provides a powerful tool for creating inclusive communications, while the 3Bs Inclusive Media playbook ensures media buy reaches a diverse audience. All tools are available to Unstereotype Alliance members globally.

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.

We must continue to navigate the evolving dynamics of progressive marketing and counter the growing rhetoric and nervousness that DE&I and inclusive advertising is eroding the bottom line. But it does not have to be done alone.

We hope this guide has provided you with insights, tools, and guidance on how to manage backlash. The full version of the Creative Bravery Beyond the Backlash guide is available to Allies and Members of the Unstereotype Alliance only. **If you are interested in becoming a member of the Unstereotype Alliance please contact melda.simon@unwomen.org.**

The Unstereotype Alliance seeks to eradicate harmful stereotypes from advertising and media to help create a more equal world. Convened by UN Women, the Alliance collectively acts to empower people in all their diversity (including gender, race, class, age, ability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and more) by using advertising as a force for good to drive positive change all over the world. (http://www.unstereotypealliance.org).

#UNSTEREOTYPE ALLIANCE