

# A Fierce Fix For LGBTQ+ Representation in Advertising

## Contents

- 10. Why this matters
- 13. Why the gap exists
- 18. What brands can do
- 25. How to execute with impact
- 39. What you can do today
- 45. Resources



Brands that exclude don't just lose revenue—they lose relevance.



**Consumers are  
shifting, fast.**



**56%**  
of Gen Z don't  
identify as 100%  
heterosexual.<sup>1</sup>

Compared to 49% in 2015—we're getting queerer.



# These are your kids, your mates, your whānau, colleagues, loved ones... you?

LGBTQ+ consumers and their allies are among the most brand-loyal demographics, yet **81% of them feel misrepresented in advertising<sup>2</sup>**. This isn't just an inclusion issue, it's a business **growth opportunity**.

Inclusive campaigns consistently outperform generic ones—they drive **62% higher first-choice preference, and deliver stronger loyalty and sales<sup>3</sup>**. Brands that lead with authentic inclusion are shaping culture... and those that lag behind risk irrelevance. Because this “rainbow generation” of consumers isn't niche, it's the future.



<sup>2</sup> Young Folks and Queer Town, *Beyond Rainbows*, 2024  
<sup>3</sup> Unstereotype Alliance, *Inclusion = Income: The Business Case for Inclusive Advertising*, 2024

**So why wait? LGBTQ+  
people buy toothpaste too.**





What do we want? LGBTQ+  
people in advertising. Authentic,  
everyday, everywhere. When do  
we want it? *Now.*



This playbook is your no–BS guide to inclusive advertising that actually works. We’re moving beyond tokenism and rainbow–washing. This is about normalising and improving representation that engages without feeling forced.

## This is

A best practice, though non-exhaustive guide for LGBTQ+-inclusive marketing **aimed at mainstream audiences**, with a focus on casting in Aotearoa New Zealand. Lovingly created with support from the best in the biz: LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ experts, casting directors, producers, agencies, directors, and actors. We’re here to help with guidance, resources, and connections to make your campaigns authentically inclusive.

## This is not

LGBTQ+ 101. But we’ve included links to some terrific resources!



When we say LGBTQ+\*

We're talking about everyone under the rainbow: Takatapui, MVPFAFF+, and all the diverse queer communities across Aotearoa.

## Chapter 1: The Business Case

# WHY THIS MATTERS





# \$4.7T

LGBTQ+ consumers wield US\$4.7 trillion in global spending power<sup>4</sup>

LGBTQ+ consumers pack serious economic punch, globally rivalling the GDP of entire nations. Here in Aotearoa, they wield an estimated **NZ\$21 billion in annual spending power<sup>4</sup>**. That's not niche, that's nation-shaping. With 172,000+ LGBTQ+ Kiwis<sup>5</sup>, this is a powerful, loyal, and growing consumer base—one that expects to see itself reflected in the brands it backs.

<sup>4</sup> LGBT Capital, 2023; <sup>5</sup> Stats NZ Census, 2023

# 47%

Inclusive ads are 47% more effective at delivering lasting results<sup>6</sup>

With LGBTQ+ and progressive campaigns consistently smashing generic ones, the case for inclusive advertising is undeniable. Progressive ads aren't just popular. They're **25% more engaging<sup>6</sup>** and drive **16% higher long-term sales<sup>3</sup>**. The numbers don't lie.

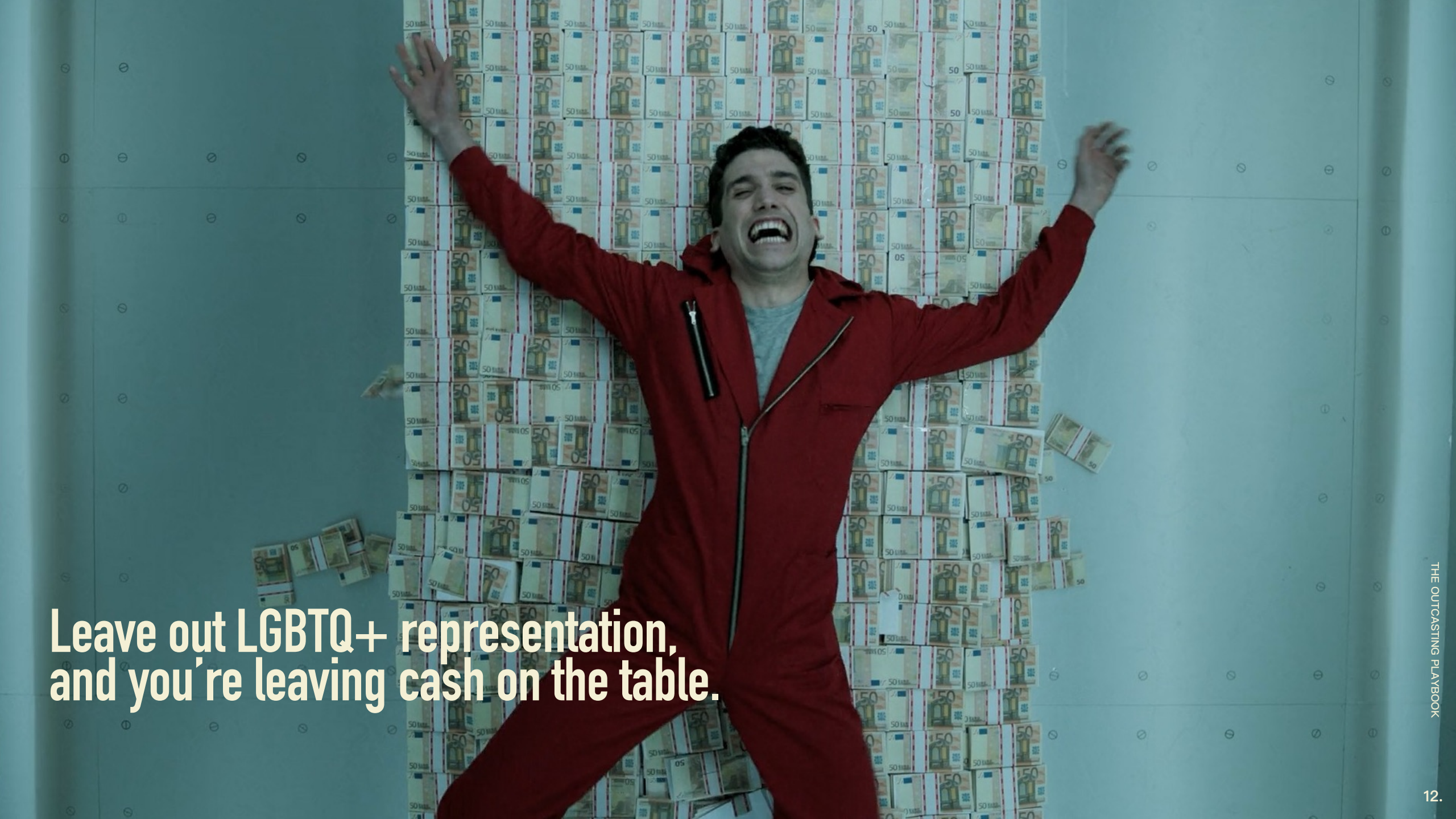
<sup>6</sup> Kantar Millward Brown (cited in Unruly blog and Outvertising report, 2020)

# 75%

Of consumers say diversity sways their purchase decisions<sup>7</sup>

As gender and identity evolve, brands must keep up or be left behind. **40% of consumers would drop brands that don't promote inclusion and diversity<sup>8</sup>**. Millennials and Gen Z don't just expect inclusion, they demand it. And as their influence grows, so does the cost of ignoring them.

<sup>7</sup> Kantar Brand Inclusion Index, 2024; <sup>8</sup> Kantar, *How Diversity In Advertising Can Unlock Brand Growth*, 2023

A man in a red jumpsuit stands with his arms raised in a celebratory gesture, his mouth open in a shout or laugh. He is positioned in front of a wall that is almost entirely covered by a dense grid of 50 Euro banknotes. The banknotes are arranged in a way that they appear to be stuck to the wall, with some loose notes scattered on the floor around his feet. The background is a plain, light-colored wall with a grid of small, dark circular marks.

Leave out LGBTQ+ representation,  
and you're leaving cash on the table.



## Chapter 2: The Problem

# WHY THE GAP EXISTS



**FEAR  
OF  
BACK-  
LASH**

**PERCEIVED  
MARKETABILITY  
& “MAINSTREAM  
APPEAL”**

**INDUSTRY  
INERTIA**

**LACK  
OF  
LGBTQ  
+  
DECISION-  
MAKERS  
AT THE  
TOP**



# FEAR OF BACK-LASH

Brands worry about potential backlash from both conservative groups and LGBTQ+ communities, which can escalate into boycotts or PR crises.

## Data/Insight:

- In 2021, **50% of advertisers saw “getting it wrong”** as the biggest barrier to inclusion. By 2023, **that fear halved to just 25%<sup>9</sup>**—proof that confidence is growing, fast.
- While high-profile missteps (like the 2023 Bud Light x Dylan Mulvaney case) grab headlines, brands that stand firm in their values gain loyalty from LGBTQ+ consumers and allies.
- Brands that collaborate with LGBTQ+ organisations and voices show genuine allyship, create inclusive campaigns, and build trust with the communities and wider audiences.

<sup>9</sup> ANA LGBTQ+ Marketing Inclusion Report, 2024

# INDUSTRY INERTIA

Decades of heteronormative casting have made it the industry default, with “traditional” advertising equating heteronormativity to safety and relatability. Breaking these habits requires active effort and advocacy.

## Data/Insight:

- While comprehensive New Zealand-specific data is limited, global trends highlight the scale of underrepresentation. Despite making up roughly 7.1% of the U.S. population, **LGBTQ+ people receive only 1.4% of screen time in ads<sup>10</sup>**.
- Many ad professionals report progressive campaigns face more internal review and hesitation than standard ads, indicating systemic bias in approval processes. However, **inclusive campaigns drive 25% more engagement<sup>6</sup> and 16% higher sales<sup>3</sup>**. Brands that push boundaries don’t just lead—they win.

<sup>10</sup> GLAAD Advertising Visibility Index, 2023

# LACK OF LGBTQ+ DECISION-MAKERS AT THE TOP

A lack of diversity in leadership often leads to unconscious bias—and conventional thinking by default.

## Data/Insight:

- We’re still flying blind. Fewer than 1 in 5 Kiwi organisations track sexual orientation, and under 10% collect gender identity data—so bias stays invisible and unchecked. Even fewer are doing the work: only 21.9% review policies for LGBTQ+ inclusion, and just 29% support internal networks<sup>11</sup>.
- Only 47% of trans and gender-diverse employees feel safe being out. And **31% have considered quitting due to bullying or harassment<sup>12</sup>**. When visibility feels risky, leadership stays out of reach.

<sup>11</sup> Diversity Works NZ, *Workplace Diversity Survey*, 2024; <sup>12</sup> NZ Workplace Rainbow Inclusion Survey, 2020

# PERCEIVED MARKETABILITY & “MAINSTREAM APPEAL”

Advertisers often default to 'safe' casting, fearing LGBTQ+ representation will polarise. But the idea that queer stories are niche—or only resonate with LGBTQ+ audiences—is outdated.

## Data/Insight:

- Ads featuring LGBTQ+ people have zero negative impact on non-LGBTQ+ viewers. In fact, **70% of non-LGBTQ+ adults say brands should back LGBTQ+ communities** through advertising, hiring, and sponsorships<sup>13</sup>.
- Diverse ads stick. They're more liked, more remembered, and deliver **90% higher recall**<sup>14</sup>, especially with younger, digital-first audiences.
- Older and proud: sexual diversity isn't just a Gen Z thing. **7.4% of Aotearoa's LGBTIQ+ population is 65+**<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> GLAAD Accelerating Acceptance, 2023

<sup>14</sup> Facebook Advertising Diversity Research, 2021



# THE ETHICAL CASE

Despite some progress, LGBTQ+ Kiwis still face violence, family rejection, and social exclusion. The harsh reality? This fuels higher rates of mental distress, suicidality, homelessness, and addiction. Brands can no longer stay silent. It's crucial to speak up and represent the LGBTQ+ experience in ways that are real, meaningful, and positive.

83%

83% of LGB people worldwide remain in the 'global closet,' hiding their sexuality from most people in their lives.

Yale School of Public Health Study, 2019

77%

77% of trans and non-binary individuals experience high or very high psychological distress—over six times the rate of the general population (12%).

Aotearoa Trans & Non-binary Health Survey, 2022

1.7X

LGB Kiwis face more crime, but report it less. Bisexual people are 70% more likely to be victims than straight peers, and gay and lesbian rates are nearly 40% higher. Yet they're less likely to go to the Police.

Te Tāhū o te Ture Ministry of Justice Crime and Victims Survey (NZCVS), 2019

16%

Public servants of another or multiple genders reported a 16% disability rate, much higher than females (6%) and males (5%).

Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission, Gender Deep Dive, 2023

61%

Only 61% of public servants of another or multiple genders felt comfortable being themselves at work, significantly lower than 82% of females and 83% of males.

Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission, Gender Deep Dive, 2023

## Chapter 3: The Opportunity

# WHAT BRANDS CAN DO







Brands marketing to LGBTQ+: '



Me and my LGBTQ+ friends: '



Inclusivity isn't about perfection,  
it's about progress.





Curious?

Here's what  
meaningful LGBTQ+  
representation  
actually looks and  
feels like...

## Beyond Visibility

Representation isn't a favour—it's the bare minimum. Seeing LGBTQ+ people in advertising drives acceptance, busts stereotypes, and validates identity. Real representation means a queer tradie who isn't the punchline. A same-sex couple buying a home—no fanfare, just life. Trans and non-binary people with full, rich stories beyond coming-out tropes. It's dialogue that doesn't feel like a straight person wrote it, stories told *by* LGBTQ+ people, and brands speaking *with*, not just *about*, queer communities. It's bold, messy, joyful, and *real*. LGBTQ+ people are Māori, Pasifika, disabled, Muslim, and old too.

This isn't about making every ad an LGBTQ+ ad. It's about reflecting the world as it is: diverse, dynamic, and full of possibility. So why not reflect reality? These brands did it well...

# ABSOLUT VODKA



## “Kiss with Pride” 2017

**What It Did:** This campaign featured same-sex couples from countries where LGBTQ+ relationships are criminalised.

**Why It Worked:** Absolut combined bold visuals with a strong message of advocacy, aligning with its long history of LGBTQ+ allyship.

**Impact:** The campaign received widespread acclaim and reinforced Absolut’s reputation as an authentic inclusive brand.

# OKCUPID



## “DTF” 2018

**What It Did:** Redefined "DTF" (Down To F\*ck) beyond its heteronormative connotations, like "Down to Feel Fabulous" and "Down to Forget the Binary."

**Why It Worked:** It challenged dating norms, empowered LGBTQ+ users, and positioned OkCupid as a champion of self-expression.

**Impact:** The award-winning campaign gained massive attention, boosted brand loyalty, and increased social mentions and engagement by 50%.

# GILLETTE



## “First Shave” 2019

**What It Did:** Featured a trans man learning to shave for the first time with guidance from his father: an experience most of the audience could already relate to.

**Why It Worked:** The ad told an authentic story of love and support, linking a universal experience to a trans-specific one. It was more than an exclusively trans story.

**Impact:** Widely praised for its authenticity and inclusivity, it solidified Gillette’s modernised approach to branding and masculinity.



# 2DEGREES



## “Switch to Real Mode” 2022

**What It Did:** The campaign featured a diverse mix of Kiwis—including real queer talent—captured in everyday moments, all glued to their phones and needing more meaningful “face time”.

**Why It Worked:** LGBTQ+ inclusion felt authentic and effortless, reflecting real, relatable home life without pretence.

**Impact:** It strengthened 2degrees’ image as a modern, honest, and inclusive challenger brand, lifting consideration by 30% and cementing its status as the fairest telco.

Help us fill this  
space with your  
success stories...



To realise a world of equality and dignity for all, we have to change more than laws and policies; we have to change hearts and minds.

—Rick Parnell



Chapter 4: Best Practice

# HOW TO EXECUTE WITH IMPACT



# 01. ALIGN REPRESENTATION WITH YOUR BRAND VALUES





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**Audit your brand.**  
Are you walking the talk, or just sprinkling in diversity when it suits?

**Use it with purpose.**  
Representation isn't a prop—make it add meaning to your stories.

**Play the long game.**  
Ditch one-off gestures and build inclusion into your brand's DNA.



# 02. COMMIT FROM THE START



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Ask ‘Why not LGBTQ+?’  
If a cishet character is a given, why is an LGBTQ+ one a question? Interrogate your rationale. Reimagine family. Break heteronorms.

Create *with* us. If LGBTQ+ and diverse voices aren’t involved in shaping the work, it’s not *for* us. Make advisors sidekicks, not roadblocks.

Avoid tokenism. Include authentic LGBTQ+ characters with real depth, not just to win diversity points.

# 03. NORMALISE, DON'T SENSATIONALISE





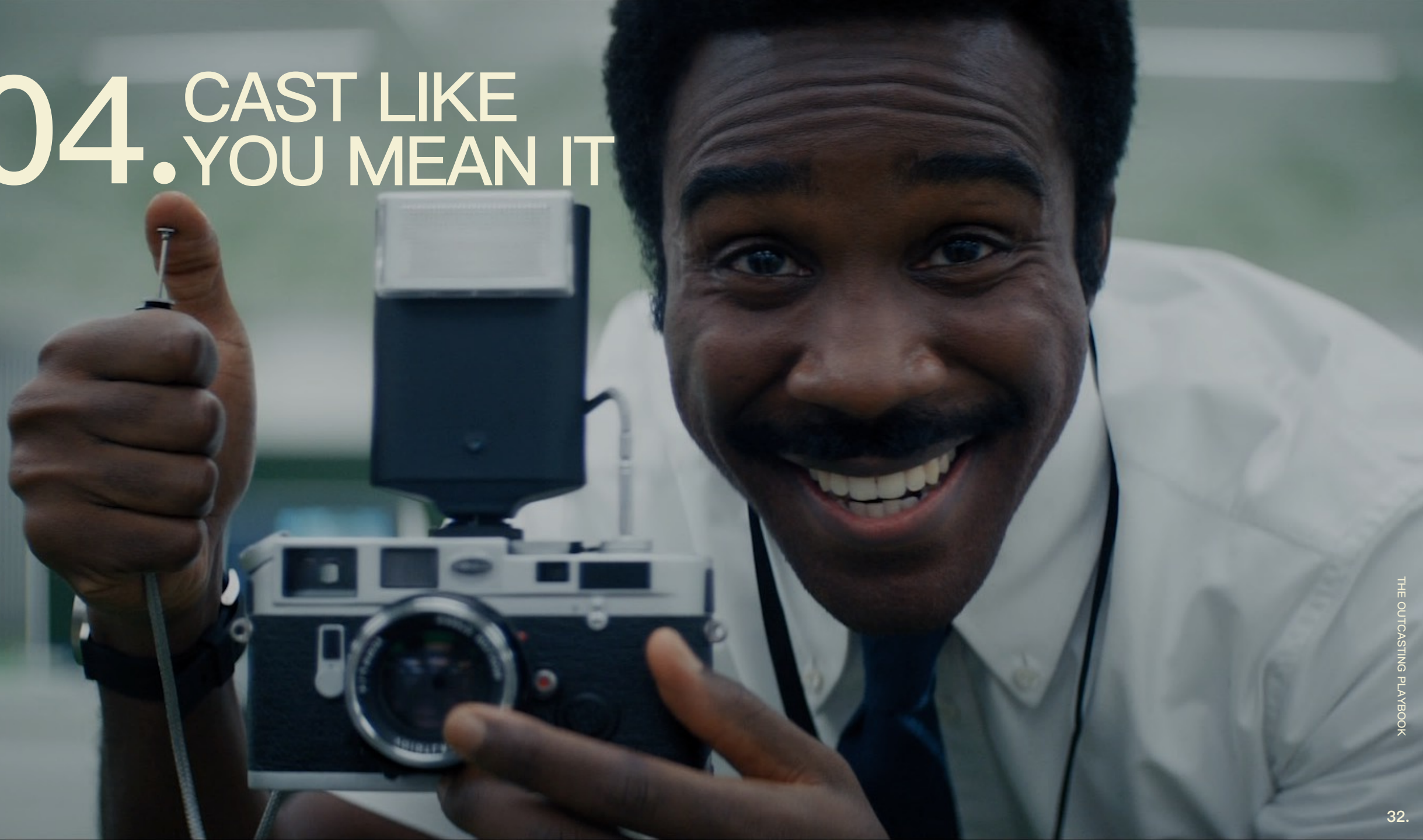
# 03. NORMALISE, DON'T SENSATIONALISE

**Incorporate naturally.**  
Let LGBTQ+ characters shine as the focus or blend into the story without fanfare. Think beyond glitter and gloom.

**Check your language.**  
Avoid assumptions. Gender-neutral terms keep things open, inclusive, and real.

**The details matter.**  
A rainbow pin, gender-neutral clothing, partner references, a pronoun badge—small touches make a big difference.

# 04. CAST LIKE YOU MEAN IT





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Stop playing ‘Are They or Aren’t They?’ Be bold. Show characters who defy expectations and reflect reality.

Make it safe to show up. No one should feel forced to disclose their identity—create an environment where they *want to*.

Hire LGBTQ+ actors for LGBTQ+ roles when possible. Authenticity brings depth. But remember, it’s their choice to disclose.

Ditch clichés. LGBTQ+ people come in all ethnicities, genders, ages, and abilities. Show the full picture.

# 05. TEST IT. REFINE IT. OWN IT.





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**Engage focus groups.**  
Run it by LGBTQ+ audiences and allies before going live.

**Track success.** System1 proves diverse ads spark reactions but still score above average, 3+ stars, driving long-term growth. Authenticity resonates, even with those who don't directly relate.

**Be open to criticism.**  
No brand is perfect. If you slip up, own it. Learn, adapt, and show you're serious about getting it right. Transparency builds trust.

# TOP TIPS



## Dodge the Rainbow-Washing Trap

'Rainbow-washing' or 'pink-washing' occurs when brands throw a rainbow on their products or ads during Pride Month without truly supporting LGBTQ+ communities. Real allyship goes beyond the glitter—support LGBTQ+ organisations, create inclusive workplaces, and amplify LGBTQ+ voices year-round. Sustainable inclusion takes consistent effort. Don't just wear the rainbow, live it! 🌈

## Start Big or Start Small

Embracing LGBTQ+ diversity might feel overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. Whether you're weaving LGBTQ+ characters seamlessly into your ads or backing Pride events, there's a spectrum of ways to align with your brand's goals. Look to the brands getting it right for inspiration. Inclusive advertising isn't just ethical, it's smart business.



## Share Pronouns

When working with LGBTQ+ talent, sharing your own pronouns first can make others feel comfortable. You won't know someone's pronouns unless you ask, and most people appreciate genuine curiosity. It's okay to make mistakes. Just correct yourself, apologise, and move on. Inclusivity isn't about perfection, it's about progress.

## Sometimes Clients Need Challenging

Agencies and clients both share the responsibility of driving inclusivity. Sometimes, we need to challenge you to embrace new approaches, helping you authentically address key aspects of diversity and craft the right language. This isn't about superficial gestures—it's about making thoughtful, meaningful decisions.



# TOP TIPS



## Celebrate Hidden Representation

Hidden representation can be powerful, especially when casting LGBTQ+ talent who may be perceived as cisgender or straight. If your cast includes someone who doesn't visibly present as LGBTQ+, consider—with their permission—sharing their story to normalise diverse representation. Acknowledging their inclusion reinforces support, celebrates both visible and less obvious representation, and strengthens the authenticity of your message.

## Strike the Right Balance

Striking the right balance between subtlety and visibility in LGBTQ+ representation is crucial. Subtlety can capture the complexity of identity and invite audiences to connect on their own terms. But if it's too subtle, it risks erasure. Be intentional—consider context, platform, and audience when showcasing LGBTQ+ talent. Thoughtful cues like non-gendered language or symbolic colours can make an impact without feeling forced. Collaborate with LGBTQ+ creatives to ensure authenticity and care.



## Do Do Duty of Care

Casting LGBTQ+ talent isn't just about visibility; it's about responsibility. With larger campaign exposure comes a duty of care that must not be overlooked.

- **Learn from Bud Light x Dylan Mulvaney:** While the collaboration spotlighted a trans influencer and resonated with many, backlash highlighted the need for better support.
- **Support Talent, Always:** Provide PR guidance, mental health resources, and a game plan for handling public response. Your talent shouldn't be left to weather the storm alone.
- **Foster Inclusive Film Sets:** Support your production partner to create a safe, accessible, welcoming environment. Simple steps—pronoun badges, gender-neutral facilities, crew inclusivity training—send a clear message: this is a space where everyone belongs.

# TOP TIPS



## Contracts & Consent

Prioritise talent's safety and clearly explain how the campaign will be used. Discuss concerns, especially when sharing personal stories. For transgender, gender-diverse, and non-binary talent, appearance may evolve, so offer flexibility with contracts, allowing expiration dates if needed. This ensures respect and control over their representation.

## Don't Overlook Intersex

Ira Tangata (intersex) isn't always part of the LGBTQIA+ crew. While some intersex people proudly rock the rainbow, others don't, and that's perfectly fine! Intersex protections are missing from most diversity policies; brands should explicitly differentiate intersex from gender identity protections. Consult with experts like Intersex Aotearoa to level up your representation game, and keep it authentic.

## Match Voiceover

Keep it real. A trans man gets a male voiceover; non-binary talent gets their own voice. It's about ensuring the representation *feels* as authentic as it sounds.



## Rise Above the Backlash

- **Acknowledge the Risk:** Plan ahead. Show decision-makers how you'll manage risks while protecting your brand and talent. Proactive beats reactive every time.
- **Play the Long Game:** Short-term noise fades. Long-term impact lasts. Nike's Kaepernick ad stirred controversy—but also drove a **31% sales spike, record stock prices, and lifelong loyalty**. Bold brands win.
- **Appeal to Your Biggest Fans:** Gen Z and Millennials don't just prefer inclusive brands—they demand them. Their support drowns out the critics.
- **Own Your Message:** Have a sharp, unwavering PR strategy. Say it, mean it, stand by it. Waffling weakens credibility... consistency builds an unshakable brand.





## Chapter 5: Action Plan

# WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY



# 01.


## Kick things off with a creative audit

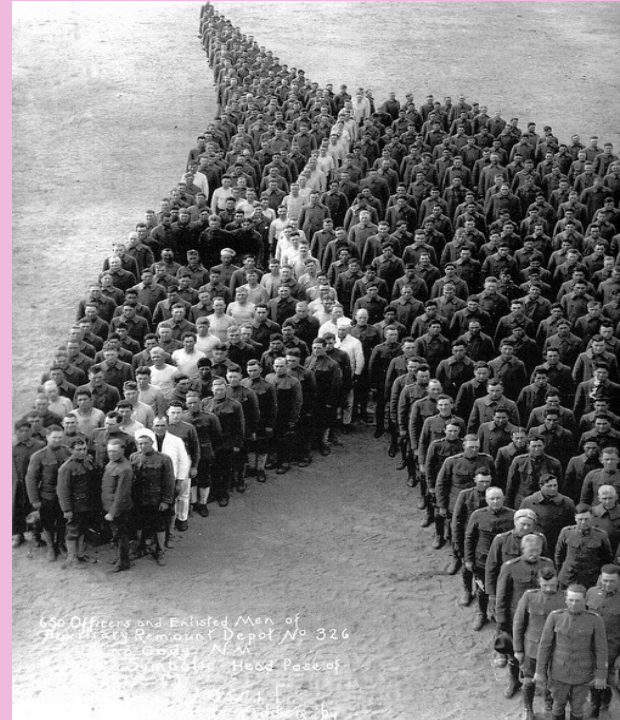
- ❑ Review your current campaigns and casting calls. Ask: **“Are we really showcasing LGBTQ+ talent authentically, or are we just playing it safe?”**
- ❑ Set clear, measurable goals—**“let’s boost authentic LGBTQ+ representation by X% over the next year”**—using the playbook as one of your secret weapons.



# 02.

## Rally the troops

- ❑ Reach out to LGBTQ+ creatives, consultants, and community organisations—think Pride Pledge or TheyConnect (pg 46)—to help your work. 
- ❑ Host a focused roundtable or brainstorming session to discuss how to enhance inclusivity, and include a line in your briefs like, **“We’re actively seeking LGBTQ+ input to ensure genuine representation.”**



USO Officers and Enlisted Men of  
the 100th Central Postal Directory  
Camp, N.M.  
1945-1946. Head Pose of



# 03.

## Refresh your creative approach

- ❑ Update your creative briefs and casting calls to consider all the people who engage with your brand. Try: **“Inclusivity isn’t just for certain stories, it’s a standard we bring to every campaign.”**
- ❑ Encourage your team to challenge norms by asking, **“Why not LGBTQ+ characters?”** when traditional choices feel too safe.
- ❑ Use inclusive, non-gendered language (like ‘parent,’ ‘partner,’ or ‘child’) and subtle yet clear markers, i.e. different pronouns or culturally resonant symbols. Swap assumptions for openness.



# 04.

## Test drive your new approach

- ❑ Launch a pilot project that features authentic LGBTQ+ representation. Use focus groups or A/B testing to see what resonates and fine-tune your approach based on feedback.
- ❑ Include a step for feedback in your process: **“After the campaign, we’ll review audience feedback and metrics to refine our approach for even better inclusivity next time.”**
- ❑ Remember, every campaign is a learning opportunity. If things don’t go perfectly, adjust and move forward.



# 05.

## Communicate internally & externally

- ❑ Internally, set a clear mandate: **“Inclusive casting isn’t just a checkbox... it’s our commitment to authentic, creative excellence.”**
- ❑ When discussing with clients, tie inclusivity to business brilliance: **“Research shows authentic LGBTQ+ representation drives engagement and builds long-term brand loyalty. We’re not only doing the right thing, it’s smart business.”**
- ❑ Prepare a concise PR statement that reaffirms your commitment, ensuring your team feels confident in your strategy even if challenges arise.



# 06.

## Keep the momentum going

- ❑ Schedule regular check-ins to celebrate wins, learn from the journey, and adjust your strategy based on new insights and fresh data.
- ❑ Keep the conversation alive with ongoing training and creative workshops that let everyone contribute their unique flair.
- ❑ Stay curious, keep testing new ideas, and remember... every standout campaign starts with a single bold move.





Final Words

# IT'S TIME TO LEAD



Representation isn't just a responsibility—it's an opportunity to lead the future of advertising. The brands that embrace diversity today will be the ones shaping consumer culture tomorrow. Will you be ahead of the curve or left behind?

Create advertising where everyone sees themselves and close the gap. Let's go.



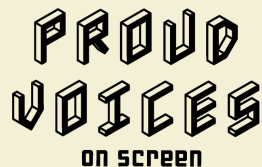
Also, some handy

# RESOURCES





Pride Pledge provides specialist consulting, training, policy and other support services to help improve Rainbow Inclusion within organisations. Ask about their **Navigating the Rainbow** resource.



Proud Voices On Screen supports and celebrates queer screen creators in Aotearoa. Check out their Queer Filmmaker Directory to find queer filmmakers, cast and crew to hire or collaborate with.



BEINGS is an online directory to explore, discover, and cast Aotearoa's POC, Rainbow, and Disabled talent.



InsideOUT Kōaro is a national charity providing education, resources, consultation and support for anything concerning rainbow and takatāpui communities.



Intersex Aotearoa is committed to providing affirmation and referral for people with intersex variations/ira tangata. By intersex people, for intersex people.



Te Ngākau Kahukura circulate rainbow expertise to key decision makers and systems, and share resources and connections with rainbow communities.



**Project Implicit**

Project Implicit helps people understand how hidden thought patterns shape what they do. Take the test! It's not a pass-or-fail test; it's a tool to help people think about unconscious biases they might not realise they have.



Toitū Takatāpui work to advance the safety and inclusion of LGBTTTQIA+ people in workplaces across Aotearoa by evaluating existing cultures and supporting workplaces to create safe and inclusive environments.



Australia-based, TheyConnect offers inclusion and marketing strategy services equipping businesses, media, and government to authentically connect with LGBTQ+ audiences.



## ARTICLE

### Queer representation: the good, the bad, and the ugly

**Tessa Kaur | Heckin' Unicorn**

Singapore-based, Heckin' Unicorn is a queer brand that's queer-owned and queer-run.

## REPORT

### Examining LGBTQ+ representation in media and advertising

**Neilsen**

Nielsen's 2023 report shows growing LGBTQ+ representation but highlights challenges ahead, stressing the need for audience data to create resonant content.

## GUIDE

### Better Practice Guide for Trans & Gender Diverse Talent Inclusion

**Victoria State Government**

State of Victoria Australia created the Better Practice Guide For Including Trans and Gender Diverse Talent in your campaigns.

## BOOK

### Honouring Our Ancestors

**Editors: Leonie Pihama & Alison Green**

In these rigorous and challenging essays, writers from Aotearoa and Turtle Island explore the well-being of takatāpui, two-spirit, and Maori and Indigenous LGBTQI+ communities.

## REPORT

### LGBTQ Inclusion in Advertising & Media

**GLAAD**

GLAAD and Procter & Gamble's study measures non-LGBTQ Americans' attitudes toward LGBTQ representation in media, quantifying its impact on acceptance and understanding.

## REPORT

### Honour Project Aotearoa

**Various Researchers**

Honour Project Aotearoa (2016–2019) explored takatāpui life experiences and their impact on health and wellbeing. It aimed to improve healthcare access, amplify takatāpui voices, and reinforce their sense of belonging within whānau, hapū, and iwi.

# Do Ask. Do Tell. FAQ

## CAN WE FEATURE AN LGBTQ+ CHARACTER WITHOUT LGBTQ+ INVOLVEMENT?

Authentic representation comes from involving LGBTQ+ individuals. Their input ensures accuracy, avoids tokenism, and fosters inclusivity, leading to richer, more respectful storytelling.

## WILL NON-LGBTQ+ AUDIENCES CONNECT WITH LGBTQ+ REPRESENTATION?

Yes. Inclusive storytelling resonates widely. Diverse ads deliver 90% higher recall<sup>14</sup>, while inclusive campaigns boost short-term sales by 3.5% and long-term sales by 16%<sup>3</sup>. Diversity isn't just ethical—it's effective.

## OUR BRAND HAS NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE—WILL IT FEEL AUTHENTIC?

Authenticity comes from collaboration. Partnering with LGBTQ+ creatives ensures your approach aligns with your brand's values. Audiences welcome brands that evolve, especially when they do so with care and intention.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CAMPAIGN INCLUDES LGBTQ+ CONTENT?

Does it feature LGBTQ+ people, relationships, or themes? Is inclusive language used without stereotypes? Were LGBTQ+ voices involved? If unsure, consult LGBTQ+ creators to ensure authentic representation.

## HOW WILL AUDIENCES RECOGNISE THAT THE CHARACTERS ARE LGBTQ+?

LGBTQ+ representation isn't about stereotypes—it's about authentic experiences. Subtle cues, relationships, and storytelling choices can create resonance without being heavy-handed.

## CAN WE TEST HOW LGBTQ+ CHARACTERS WILL RESONATE WITH OUR AUDIENCE?

Yes. Focus groups and A/B testing provide insights, but involving LGBTQ+ individuals ensures authenticity. Brands that approach inclusivity thoughtfully often see positive audience responses.

## WHAT IF WE UNINTENTIONALLY OFFEND THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY?

Mistakes happen, but early involvement of LGBTQ+ creatives helps prevent missteps. If concerns arise post-launch, listening, owning the mistake, and taking action can turn it into an opportunity to build trust.

## WHAT ABOUT INTERSEX REPRESENTATION?

Intersex people are one of the most underrepresented and often erased groups in media. By including intersex individuals authentically, without focusing solely on medicalisation, you help normalise diverse bodies and experiences.

## WILL LGBTQ+ CHARACTERS MAKE THE STORY MORE COMPLEX THAN NECESSARY?

LGBTQ+ characters are as varied as any others. Their inclusion doesn't add unnecessary complexity—it adds depth and relatability. A well-written LGBTQ+ character can seamlessly enhance any story.

## WHAT IF MY HIGHER-UPS AREN'T ON BOARD?

Build a case with data and success stories. Show how inclusivity strengthens brand loyalty, consumer perception, and financial performance. Highlight brands that have embraced LGBTQ+ representation and seen real benefits.

## I'M NOT SURE IT ALIGNS WITH OUR BRAND RIGHT NOW.

Inclusion isn't a trend, it's the future. Inclusive advertising boosts loyalty (+15%), first-choice likelihood (+62%), and equity scores (meaningfulness +8.3%, differentiation +12.1%, salience +9.4%)<sup>3</sup>. Start finding authentic ways to reflect your audience's world.



## Sources

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# Ngā mihi nui

Catch Casting  
Lighthouse Casting

Stats NZ  
APA  
ANA  
Comms Council  
Special  
ABEL  
Colenso  
Scoundrel  
Finch

Proud Voices On Screen  
TheyConnect  
Intersex Aotearoa  
Pride Pledge

Eloise Veber (she/they)  
Hank Paul (they/them)  
Lisa Fedyszyn (she/her)  
Mick Stalker (he/him)  
Abigail Greenwood (she/they)  
Paul Kennedy (he/him)  
Léon Bristow (he/him)

CATCH®

L I G H T H O U S E  
C A S T I N G

## A Living Resource

**The Outcasting Playbook** is built on the strongest insights available today—but representation and language keep evolving. This is a living resource that will grow with new research, community feedback, and cultural shifts. Got feedback? Let us know!

## Get in touch

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# Ngā Manaakitanga