

How to Do Diverse and Inclusive Content Marketing That Matters

 contentmarketinginstitute.com/2020/06/diverse-inclusive-content-marketing/

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A content marketer searches for a stock image to accompany a blog post titled The Top 10 Business Lessons Every Young Professional in Our Industry Should Know.

The first result for “business” appears:



Knowing the importance of diversity, the marketer scans the image.

- Women? Check.
- Men? Yes.
- African Americans? Yes/probably.
- Whites? Yes/probably.
- Other minorities? Maybe.
- Young people? Yes.
- Middle-age or seniors? No.
- Office workers? Yes.
- Industrial workers? No.

Satisfied with the racial and gender mix and OK with the lack of age and worker-type diversity given the topic, the marketer includes the image with the article. Now, that’s an image that will appeal to the target audience and allow the post to demonstrate the brand’s commitment to diversity.

Not so fast. Truly diverse and inclusive content – the kind that resonates consciously and subconsciously with your audience – requires far more than an image. It requires thinking more deeply, from your [audience research](#) to your [team structure](#), from your [style guide](#) to your user experience.

Why content marketers should care

Your audience members want to see themselves in your content and no single image can convey that. More importantly, they want to know that you see them – physically, geographically, psychologically, etc. They want to make sure you get their needs, their pain points, their thoughts.

But your audiences aren't always thinking about themselves. They want to see more than one type of person or voice in your content. A 2019 consumer survey by [Google and The Female Quotient](#) revealed that 64% of all respondents took some action after seeing an ad they considered to be diverse or inclusive.

With some segments of consumers, that percentage was higher: millennials (77%), blacks (79%), Latinos (85%), and LGBTQ community (85%).

“We found that highly relevant ads go beyond winking and recognizing diversity and inclusion ... These ads enhance brand perception, increase brand effectiveness, and significantly lift purchase intent and loyalty,” Carlos Santiago, co-founder of [Alliance for Inclusive and Multicultural Marketing](#), says in the report.

As Michael P. Krone [explains](#) in his oft-quoted piece, Diversity Marketing & Cultural Awareness:

If your customers are different than you and they feel unrecognized, you will begin to lose them.

If your customers are different than you and they feel unrecognized, you will begin to lose them, says #MichaelKrone #Diversity Click To Tweet

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Diversity and inclusion are not synonymous

Rita Mitjans, ADP's chief diversity and social responsibility officer, [says](#): “Diversity is the ‘what’; inclusion is the ‘how’.”

#Diversity is the what. #Inclusion is the how, says @ADP chief diversity & social responsibility officer via @cmicontent. Click To Tweet

She continues: “Diversity focuses on the makeup of your workforce — demographics such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, veteran status, just to name a few, and inclusion is a measure of culture that enables diversity to thrive. Inclusion requires that everyone’s contributions be valued.”

Read Rita’s quote again and substitute “audience” for “workforce.” Then ask whether your content marketing demonstrates that your brand not only sees the importance of diversity but embraces inclusion?

Salesforce is a great example. It even created inclusion as a segment topic in its online learning system (Trailhead) for developers learning to code for its platform. In announcing the module, called 6 Principals of Inclusive Marketing, Salesforce offered a helpful definition of what inclusive marketing is:

We define inclusive marketing as creating content that truly reflects the diverse communities that our companies serve. It means that we are elevating diverse voices and role models, decreasing cultural bias, and leading positive social change through thoughtful and respectful content.

In the message, Salesforce says its marketers have the responsibility to create and promote messaging that resonates with people of all backgrounds, race, ethnicity, gender identity, age, religion, ability, sexual orientation, etc.

But Salesforce went even further: “(T)ruly inclusive marketing can elevate the stories and voices of people that have been typically marginalized or underrepresented, deepen connections with customers, and even influence positive social change.”

Imagine what a differentiator it would be if your content incorporated voices from people who haven’t seen their faces represented or been heard in your industry.

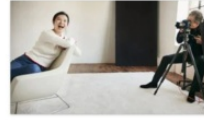
Imagine what a differentiator it would be if your #content included voices from people who haven’t seen their faces represented or been heard in your industry. @anngynn via @cmicontent #inclusion #diversity Click To Tweet

You need only look to Unilever’s Dove Real Beauty Pledge, launched in 2004, to understand the power of inclusion. Over 15 years, the campaign to appreciate women of all ages, races, sizes, etc. has evolved into a brand differentiator, one from which the company still garners positive media attention and customer praise.

The Dove Real Beauty Pledge

Today we are recommitting to real beauty with the Dove Real Beauty Pledge – three vows we promise to uphold for women everywhere:

- 1. We always feature real women, never models**
Models reflect a narrow view of beauty. Dove believes that beauty is for everyone and therefore features real women of different ages, sizes, ethnicities, hair colour, type or style.
 - Zero models in our campaigns
 - Real women introduced by their names
 - Our campaigns reflect the population's diversity
- 2. We portray women as they are in real life**
We never present the unachievable, manipulated, flawless images of perfect beauty which the use of retouching tools can promote.
 - Zero digital distortion of women
 - Images approved by the women we feature
- 3. We help girls build body confidence and self-esteem**
Globally 8 out of 10 girls opt out of key life activities when they don't feel good about the way they look. Dove has a mission to ensure the next generation grows up enjoying a positive relationship with the way they look – helping young people raise their self-esteem and realise their full potential.



[Related links](#)

How to achieve real diversity and inclusion

You don't need to view diversity and inclusion as a lofty goal or something you need to accomplish all at once. In fact, you should never be done with the topics – always keep an open and questioning mind to make sure your content reflects your evolving audience.

Dig into your audience

While you should respect everybody, inclusion in marketing doesn't mean you have to address groups that have no relevance or interest in your company's products or services. For example, women would not be the primary audience for a beard-care product company. And college students would not be the primary audience for AARP.

But research your audience. Look at the available data to understand representation that can be documented such as gender, income level, geography, race, etc. Then go deeper. Ask front-line team members, go to industry events, conduct focus groups in part to better understand those characteristics that are not easily tracked, such as a physical ability or a point of view.

Develop or update your audience personas to ensure that they reflect the diverse characteristics that are important to your audience and/or your business. Most importantly, ensure that you don't operate from a single, homogeneous persona.

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Look at your team

How well does your content marketing team reflect the diversity of your audience? If it doesn't, how can you make it more inclusive? I'm not suggesting you fire someone. But when you hire your next team member, first think about what characteristics and qualities

are missing from your team. For example, if you're hiring a new content creator, think about who can deliver a fresh voice or unrepresented perspective that will resonate with your audience.

But you don't have to wait for the next vacancy on your team. When you hire freelancers or contract with agencies, think about what voices they can provide that your team doesn't have. Or be more inclusive by creating (and listening to) a diverse editorial advisory board (internal or external members) who can share ideas, react to your team's plans, and inspire you to think differently.

As Del Johnson, a principal at Backstage Capital, says in the Google research report: "The more distance there is culturally between your team and the market, the less ability you will have to execute. We all fall into particular biases. That's why you need to have culturally competent people in the room who have the power to affect decisions. By bringing in the talents of those who have traditionally been overlooked, you unlock true creative expression — and build an organization able to check its biases."

Inclusive cultures make a difference, as detailed in this recent CMO.com article: "(A) Deloitte report noted that organizations with inclusive cultures were six times more likely to be innovative and agile, eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes, and twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets."

Inclusiveness also can help thwart potential cultural mistakes. One needs only look to Gucci in 2019. Shortly after apologizing that its balaclava-style top resembled blackface (the black turtleneck was designed to be pulled up on a person's face and had red fabric around the mouth), it had to atone for another cultural mistake — turning Sikh-like turbans into a fashion statement. The garment adorned their runway models and was sold as "Indy Full Turban."

Perhaps if its team had included people of color and/or the Sikh faith who knew their input would be welcomed, these scenarios would have turned out differently. At a minimum, a team should be sensitized and trained to ask tough diversity and inclusion questions and encouraged to consult with those communities where a possible problem or misunderstanding could arise.

.@gucci @Nordstrom The Sikh turban is not just a fashion accessory, but it's also a sacred religious article of faith. We hope more can be done to recognize this critical context. #appropriation <https://t.co/p1z3CYq0NT>

— Sikh Coalition (@sikh_coalition) May 15, 2019

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Edit for inclusion

Ensuring that your text reflects inclusion requires writers and editors to avoid assumptions and instead question what they know. And that often requires a major shift in thinking.

Prime your writers and editors to think critically when they write and to regularly use their style guides when in doubt on phrasing. Most professional style guides address diversity-related topics. For example, The Associated Press Style Guide added a new section in 2019 about [race-related coverage](#). It covers everything from how to reference people based on their racial identity to why you should question whether race is even relevant to include in the article.

The [National Center on Disability and Journalism](#) guide “covers general terms and words on physical disabilities, hearing and visual impairments, mental and cognitive disabilities and seizure disorders.” The guide also is helpful because it details the background of the topic, its recommendations, and what the AP Style Guide says about it.

The important thing is to ensure that your brand’s style guide addresses the language components used most frequently and that your team members proactively ask questions so they can make the most helpful and relevant edits.

HANDPICKED RELATED CONTENT: [Style Guide: How to Write One for Your Brand](#)

Incorporate in production

But don’t stop at text when you create inclusive content. Think about elements such as navigation for people who don’t see or hear as well as others in your audience. For example, use alt-text for every digital image published. Don’t distinguish options by color only. Use captions for all videos. Include transcripts for audio or video interviews.

[When creating inclusive #content, think about navigation for people who don’t see or hear as well as others, says @anngynn via @cmicontent. #inclusion Click To Tweet](#)
Hobo, a U.K.-based SEO service company, offers a detailed resource to help: [How to Design Websites for Blind/Visually Impaired, Deaf, Disabled, & Dyslexic Visitors](#).

You also should read Melissa Eggleston’s [practical guide to content accessibility](#) in the October issue of CCO magazine.

One-stop resource

The [Conscious Style Guide](#) is designed as a “helpful resource for better understanding and knowing what to say, how to phrase something, be sensitive to, etc.” It was created by Karen Yin as a resource for inclusive, empowering, and respectful language.

Through articles and links to resources (including topical style guides), it covers:

While you should bookmark the Conscious Style Guide as a reference document, it’s also extremely helpful in educating your team members about topics they don’t know around diversity and inclusion.

Don’t go overboard

On the other hand, your brand shouldn’t try so hard to communicate that it’s “diverse” that it offends a segment of your audience. (The result is the same for brands that are too ignorant about diversity to recognize a problem.)

A fairly new entry into the dictionary, cultural appropriation is “the act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture” ([Cambridge Dictionary](#)).

Remember Pepsi and Kendall Jenner in 2017. (The backlash was so bad, it even has its own [Wikipedia entry](#).) The beverage brand inserted itself into the #BlackLivesMatter movement saying it wanted to express a “global message of unity, peace and understanding.” The ad showed Kendall walking through a protest to give a Pepsi to a police officer who opens and drinks it to the cheers of the protesters.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/bTivpgMkGKA>

But Pepsi isn't known for its social consciousness and the idea that drinking a Pepsi could solve the conflict was absurd to many. The lesson? Make sure your content reflects a sincere commitment to diversity but in a way that's organic for your brand and your audience.

Open up the thinking

Diversity and inclusion are important. But they can't be incorporated into your content marketing with a checklist or an image.

They require embracing the opportunity to think differently and genuinely valuing the inclusion of diverse voices in your content marketing.

It's a never-ending opportunity to do good for your audience and your business.

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