

Quantifying Pride

Marketers are finally getting solid data to explain the gay and lesbian consumer. by Sara Minogue

In 1994, America's first gay and lesbian news magazine published the findings of a comprehensive readership survey conducted with Simmons Market Research, then the gold standard for American print media. The Advocate was already an astounding success, largely thanks to speculation about the unique qualities of its target demographic.

The new data, indexed against the general market, confirmed the rumours and then some.

"Advertisers were astounded by the numbers they saw coming back," says Stephanie Blackwood, the magazine's associate publisher at the time. "That pretty much opened everything up."

The Vancouver Pride Society did an economic impact survey with westQuest in 2001 and got detailed information on attendee spending, demographics and gay tourism. Since 2000, Pride Toronto has worked with Toronto-based Enigma Research to conduct on-site surveys, designed as much to provide sponsors and potential sponsors with demographic and psychographic data as to monitor trends in the event itself. Last year, Enigma also produced its first competitive intelligence report on marketing efforts related to the event. Toronto-based **MYRIAD Marketing** has worked with Pride organizers to identify potential sponsors.

As social norms evolve, marketers hope questions like these will contribute to market research that encompasses all manner of gays and lesbians - not just hand-raisers. In the meantime, the ramifications of misperception in the gay and lesbian community can still have very serious effects.

Rodger Nevill Harding, current business director for The Fraternity, a loose association of mainly gay businessmen in Toronto, has been approached before about marketing to gays and lesbians. A beer company showed him some creative showing what he calls "pretty boys."

"I said right away that my feeling is that would be seen as exploitative," Harding says. "These guys were straight people out to make a killing with their beer. We took the beer into the community to see how it was received and we found two things: people were very fussy about quality and taste and they had ongoing loyalty to brands already. There was a definite resilience to this. Nobody wants to be seen drinking a gay beer."

"I actually walked away from this project. I saw them saying, 'No, no, no. We know what we're doing. We're marketers.' Marketing is very template driven. It doesn't bend to fit the individual. But general marketing is becoming more relationship driven and loyalty driven, and it needs to be that way in the gay community."