

COLUMNS

## Careful what data you ask for

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Marketers are now collecting thousands of terabytes of data with the purpose of compiling a more detailed description of their target persona. There is a common belief that the more data you have on an individual, the better the understanding, and therefore you will be better at serving and selling to them.

While this argument stands valid in most situations, it can lead to a habit of collecting data just for the sake of having it.

Who's who

Marketers should take a step back and assess what data they actually need because asking for certain data points that are irrelevant to the industry could be preventing further business opportunities.

I had the pleasure of speaking with Kyle Graden, director of community engagement and education at Open For Service, about marketing to the non-binary gender community.

One of the key points we discussed is how the notion of gender has expanded beyond male and female to a fluid spectrum, and how brands can cater to that. But before we dive into that, here are a few facts you should know about non-binary gender.

Non-binary gender identities, such as genderqueer, genderfluid or agender, fall under the transgender label in LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender], which means they do not identify with the label they were assigned at birth.

The binary gender definition of male and female is limiting, and there are many who choose not to associate with either male or female as these are social constructs.

Some people who do not identify as male or female use the singular pronoun "they," rather than "he" or "she." It has nothing to do with sexual orientation, but rather one's inherent sense of self.

Why should your business care?

As reported by LGBT Capital, the LGBT community accounts for \$3.7 trillion of annual spending across the globe.

During 2015, the combined buying power of the LGBT adult population in the United States alone is estimated at \$917 billion.

What is more, your brand could be excluding itself from this market entirely just by asking for an individual's gender in checkout or survey forms.

Technology, especially mobile, has enabled us as marketers to move beyond the traditional methods of segmenting our audience by demographic and to reach individuals on an individual level with offers specifically designed for them.

This methodology has led marketers to the mindset that we must ask for as much information as possible whenever we can.

Title tag

It is important to remember, that unless you are entirely certain of how a specific person wants to be addressed, it is better to err on the side of neutrality, by using gender-neutral language.

"We're moving to a world that is more fluid and all-inclusive," Graden said.

This applies to all aspects across everyone's customer journey from the marketing to the in-store experience.

For example, when writing emails, address each person by just their first name, nix the Mr., Ms., et cetera.

For surveys, do not include gender unless you must, and if you do, specify why.

For some industries, asking for gender is unnecessary, the music industry for example.

Other industries, particularly the health industry have necessary reasons to ask this, but even then, survey questions should ask for a person's sex, rather than gender.

"I'm only going to fill out gender forms if I know why you are asking for it, and when I do, I'd like to know how you're going to be using it so I can give the appropriate answer" Graden said.

Many brands are realizing that gender is playing less of a segmenting role with the millennial audience than it did with prior generations such as Generation X and Baby Boomers, and thus have made steps to be less binary themselves.

Target is doing a great job in its in-store experience by including all gender bathroom options as well as removing gender segmentation from the children's clothing section.

Facebook added a third option to its standard male and female ones: custom. From a drop-down menu, users can select from 58 different identities, including agender, androgynous, gender fluid, trans female, trans male, trans person, cisgender and two-spirit.

Eventbrite has included inclusive salutation options by adding the gender-neutral title "Mx." as well.

IT IS THE subtle little things that can really make a difference for your brand.

Seventy-one percent of LGBT people and 82 percent of allies say that they are more likely to purchase from a company that supports LGBT equality.

Brands should not go out of their way to try and prove their support, but rather be authentic about it.

In fact, "we're getting to the point where the rainbow flag is overused and has lost authenticity," Graden said. "People show the rainbow flag to try to show that they support, but other actions contradict their support."

There is this misconception that the more data you collect, the better, but that is not always the case. It is not about collecting more data, it is about collecting and using the right data.

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