



Equality for All

These major brands take a stand for LGBTQ communities. **BY AMANDA OGLE**

PREVIOUS PAGE,
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
LEFT: WorldPride NYC
2019; Rahab's Rope
offers after-school
programs for children in
India; Hawaii Rural Water
Association volunteers
clean up sludge; A grant
from the Community
Foundation for Southeast
Michigan helps fund
storytelling workshops
and community journalism.
THIS PAGE: Dan Reynolds
performs at LOVELOUD
Festival 2019 Powered by
AT&T in West Valley City,
Utah; Nordstrom's float at
WorldPride NYC 2019.

In a swirl of rainbow colors this June, the 2019 WorldPride event in New York City—part of a series of celebrations that promotes LGBTQ issues and pride in cities around the world—became the largest international Pride celebration in history. The New York City event, officially deemed Stonewall 50—WorldPride NYC 2019, drew about 150,000 marchers and more than 5 million people to the sidelines to watch the festivities.

This year marked the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, a series of violent protests and clashes with police that marked a turning point in the modern American gay rights movement. Over the ensuing decades, as LGBTQ equality increasingly has been championed through social change, it's become clear that Americans on the whole are committed to inclusivity, and major corporations are listening.

FIRST STEPS

As far back as 1994, nine years after the Swedish home

furnishings company entered the U.S. market, IKEA broke ground in LGBTQ representation. That year, IKEA became the first marketer in the United States to feature a same-sex couple in a commercial. The two men in the commercial are seen furniture shopping and talk about living together, which at the time still was not being discussed openly on TV.

Subaru also jumped on board with LGBTQ inclusivity in the mid-1990s, with an ad campaign aimed at lesbians. While promoting the company's all-wheel drive vehicles, the company used ad messages such as "It's not a choice. It's the way we're built," as both a way to describe their vehicles and to give a subtle nod to the LGBTQ community.

TEARS OF JOY

Today, brands continue to prioritize LGBTQ inclusivity. In 2017, Hallmark's Hallmark Employees Reaching Equality, or HERE, employee resource group helped influence a collection of gender-inclusive greeting cards that were distributed in 120 stores in

PREVIOUS PAGE: ENRIQUE SHORE/ALAMY (TOP LEFT); MOON REFLECTIONS PHOTOGRAPHY (BOTTOM LEFT); THIS PAGE: JEROD HARRIS/GETTY IMAGES FOR LOVELOUD FESTIVAL (LEFT)



ABOVE: Hallmark marks 19 years of supporting AIDS Walk Kansas City.

various markets. The cards feature messages such as “Closets are for clothes,” and “You were born this way,” to show encouragement for people coming out or transitioning.

“When the remodeled Castro store in the San Francisco market had its grand opening, I was able to attend and witnessed consumers in this LGBTQIA-centric neighborhood explore these cards for the first time,” says Sabrina Wiewel, executive VP and chief administrative officer of Hallmark. “There were literally tears of joy from people in the card aisle, so happy that they were seeing themselves and their relationships represented in our greeting cards. It was incredibly powerful.”

Behind the scenes, Hallmark strives for LGBTQ inclusion in the workplace and through community building. “We want all employees to feel that they belong,” says Bobbye Sweat, diversity and inclusion integration director at Hallmark. “We encourage our employees to bring their best, authentic self to work and we continue to build upon our inclusion journey.”

Last year, the company generated record support for the AIDS Walk Kansas City, with corporate and employee donations totaling nearly \$25,000, the largest in the company’s 19-year history with the event. Nearly 80 employees walked to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS in Hallmark’s hometown. Hallmark also has earned recognition as one of the best places to work by the Human Rights Campaign for the past four years, and was named one of America’s best employers for diversity by *Forbes* and Statista.

CRUCIAL CONNECTIONS

In 2018, telecommunications giant AT&T contributed more than \$1 million to The Trevor Project—the world’s largest organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ youth.

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among young people, and LGBT youth are more than four times more likely to attempt suicide than non-LGBT youth. The Trevor Text and Trevor Chat services—free, confidential text and online instant messaging methods for youth to communicate with a trained counselor—have been powered by AT&T since 2018.

“We’re proud to make millions of connections every day and those connections are never more important than in a time of need or crisis,” says Valerie Vargas, senior VP of consumer advertising and creative services at AT&T. “Providing resources and support—

whether it’s through our technology or our dedicated employees—to help save lives of LGBTQ young people is a crucial part of our mission.” The contribution by AT&T, the largest in The Trevor Project’s 21-year history, has helped modernize suicide prevention capabilities to serve more LGBTQ youth experiencing crisis and needing trained crisis counselors.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Through corporate grants and employee volunteer events, Nordstrom supports the Hetrick-Martin Institute, the nation’s largest and first LGBTQ youth services organization. Studies show that LGBTQ youth disproportionately experience homelessness, accounting for 40 percent of the total youth homeless population, even though they only make up 5 to 10 percent of the overall youth population.

Through HMI, at-risk LGBTQ youth who have left school due to bullying, lost their sense of community, run away from home or experienced other traumatic events receive education, housing referrals, job readiness training, counseling, health care and many other vital elements that youth need to thrive.

“Our employees really love supporting HMI. They will go and be a part of school activities, training sessions, dress-for-your-job interviews and fashion shows with the kids,” says Gigi Ganatra Duff, VP of corporate communications and public relations at Nordstrom.

The company also matches employee giving through dollars and hours. “It’s important for employees to give and for us to show our support for what’s important to them,” says Ganatra Duff.

Nordstrom has been a partner with MAC Cosmetics and its Viva Glam initiative for 25 years. In 1994, as HIV and AIDS continued to spread across the world and gripped the United States, MAC created the MAC AIDS Fund, now known as the MAC Viva Glam Fund. Viva Glam, part of this fund, gives every dollar earned from the MAC Viva Glam lipstick to helping adults and children affected by HIV/AIDS. Nordstrom has given millions of dollars since 1994 to the organization through its partnership.

“We’ve always really prided ourselves in being an integral part of the community we serve,” says Ganatra Duff. “It’s important to us to see our customers reflected in our giving initiatives.”

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—GIGI GANATRA DUFF, VICE PRESIDENT OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS, NORDSTROM

GIVE OR GET INVOLVED

- aidswalkkansascity.org
- thetrevorproject.org
- hmi.org
- macaidsfund.org