

# Meet the man who got told he couldn't so he did

Working in the startup industry means that you can sometimes become a bit jaded as to the real issues and problems that face society.

Luckily, Maddyness was able to interview Christopher Kenna founder and CEO of Brand Advance.

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There is a fundamental lack of diversity and inclusion used by AI Ad Blockers, and this means that in most cases certain members of minority communities are not being served ads due to keywords that help identify them but under the status quo may trigger ad blockers due to associated content that is not appropriate. In a world of ad blindness, I recognise why this might not be a big concern but if you look at this from an innovation perspective it really does show the need for this technology.

Christopher Kenna is CEO and Founder of [Brand Advance \(BA\)](#), which has pioneered the industry's first diversity driven global media ecosystem across online and offline media for agencies and in house marketing and brand teams. Brand advance has upwards of four hundred and fifty global publication partners across "Diversity Media" including BAME, LGBTQ+, Female Empowerment, Tech, Disabilities, Lifestyle, Queer, GenZ Fashion and many other specialists and hard to reach demographics.

Chris is no stranger to [the need for diversity](#), and this resonated with me personally as we both share the experience of being the first families of colour in our respective local communities and being the first children of colour in schools of all white faces. Something which in the '80s presented its own set of

challenges and stereotypes. Moving away from his home turf of the Isle of Man to enlist in the army, Chris was deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan where he suffered a major injury and found himself waking up in a Birmingham hospital.

Chris is a proud gay father of two who is a leading advocate of diverse content being coupled with contextual placement for the media owners that speak to these communities. Chris gained invaluable insights across media and advertising exiting his own business before working for the Millevers Prowler group on the popular publication Gay Times.

The problem that Chris found that led him to set up BA is that big-name brands are unable to target certain demographics through traditional methods of placing ads which for example would see Ad Blockers activate at words like “Black” or something as simple as the word “Cocktails” meaning ad placement had become something of a blunt instrument blocking roughly two-thirds of the world population from having a level of contextual information layering for the demographic or community they identify with.

Chris believes that the way brands have been looking at targeting different communities such as the LGBTQ+ are all wrong. Where for example big brands only spend a small ad budget during a regions “Pride” month, whereas BA work with clients to help them deploy more general campaigns that speak to all audiences but using BA’s data and products to target in granular detail.

Brand advance offers three very complimentary but as I see its essential tools for any marketer working with a brand that speaks to a diverse array of customers.

*Brand Advance SENTIMENT: Provides brands and agencies with data and sentiment analysis tool and insight into diverse demographics to help reach these communities, allowing us to ensure campaigns are aligned to real-time sentiment around particular issues or brand-related topics.*

*BA Diversity Network: BA’s custom-built global diversity is driven AdServer network across LGBTQ+, BAME, GenZ, Disability and Elderly alongside a media buying platform to give teams all the tools required to reach diverse demographics across the world at scale.*

The BA Diversity network is also connected to BIDSWITCH allowing access to DSP’s such as The Trade Desk, and MediaMath where brands and agencies can programmatically buy our reach across global diverse demographics in a brand safe environment.

BA’s advanced AI Brand Safety tools are deployed across the BA Diversity Network using MANTIS, IBM Watson Ai technology – allowing sentiment targeting around keywords rather than blunt blocking.

*BA CREATE: Brands' in-house Creative team and Creative Agency consultation – we work with brands and their agencies to ensure creative will authentically resonate with consumers within a contextual environment. We also run a creative checking service (7/10s Rule) where brand teams creative is checked with people from within communities to highlight any possible kickback or suggestions before going live – we are partners with the DSC (Diversity Standards Collective)*

The road to success as Chris comments hasn't always been a smoothed one when asked what mistakes he has made along the way and how did he get past them *"I have made many mistakes over the last few years. Spending too much time chasing dead leads through to hiring the wrong people. Things that are a small mistake to established companies are magnified when you are a start-up — but you realise and correct the mistakes and keep going! That's the upside to mistakes — you learn and don't do them again."*

To put the debate in context if you took LGBTQ+ consumer spend and aggregated it globally it would be the fourth richest country in the world at approximately 3.7T marry that to the need for big brands to reach these audiences in a meaningful way and it makes you wonder how this has not been addressed earlier.

But as we know the change has to come in at a senior management level and with many companies diversity initiatives being more a box-ticking exercise rather than addressing and pioneering new processes and tools to reach diverse communities.

However, the signs of change are evident with Brand Advance working with teams at L'Oréal and Uni Lever being a partner means that Chris is clearly making serious headway along with other campaigners and advocates working towards ultimate equality for all.

*Read also*

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[We could all run out of cash here, or worse, make a terrible exit](#)

