

Burger King's stale LGBTQ+ commitment

Burger King will donate to the Human Rights Campaign for every Ch'King sandwich it sells in the US during the Pride month of June, in a move that appears linked to rival restaurant chain Chick-fil-A whose CEO Dan Cathy is alleged to have made donations to groups opposing LGBTQ+ rights. The proposed Equality Act in the US would expand the country's civil rights protections to LGBTQ+ people but it is opposed by the National Christian Charitable Foundation, which Cathy supports.

A whopper of a brand strategy

Like many other brands, Burger King has used social media to cultivate a personality for its product, one it believes will appeal to its consumers. The company's recent campaigns, for example encouraging customers to order at McDonald's and hosting other brands' advertising on its social media in an effort to save restaurant workers' jobs across the industry during the pandemic, are designed to signal Burger King is a socially conscious business.

Chick-fil-A has also cultivated a reputation, however somewhat of a less-positive one, largely based on the actions and comments of its CEO – a staunch donor to anti-LGBTQ+ organisations. The company broke step with its head in 2019, pledging not to give money to anti-LGBTQ+ groups from the year 2020, but Cathy remains vocal on the issue and head of the company.

Game playing

Following Burger King's announcement, media outlets have jumped on the story of the two fast-food chains engaging in a political battle. Burger King has been described as "trolling", "shading", "taking a shot at" and "declaring war" on Chick-fil-A with this move – and that's only on the first page of Google results. The company also made a thinly-veiled reference to its competitor in a tweet about the initiative. Unfortunately, while the media's eye is trained on the companies' politics, the social focus of the initiative has failed to make the same headlines.

While Burger King's actions are seemingly a step towards funding improved social equality and LGBTQ+ rights, a key problem with the strategy that could be seen as tokenism is that scheme only lasts for a month and doesn't signal any long-term inclusive change at the company.

You've heard of greenwashing, now here's...

"Rainbow-washing". This is a term used to describe tokenistic actions by companies aiming to capitalise on consumers looking to participate in and support LGBTQ+ rights. In its worst form, rainbow-washing looks like a rainbow rebrand of a company's products during Pride month and complete silence on the issue afterwards.

Generally the terms are used to describe efforts by brands to *celebrate* Pride and LGBTQ+ people and virtue-signal to their customers that they care about social causes, without engaging and attempting to break down the barriers to equality that LGBTQ+ people face. Startlingly, 71 countries still criminalise same-sex relationships, and in 11 of those countries those convicted can face the death penalty. LGBTQ+ employees report lower work satisfaction, higher discrimination, and face poor representation in clinical trials and census data.

Rainbow-washing also poses a serious threat to the grassroots work being done at Pride itself. Major companies have come under fire for buying out space in Pride parades globally, pricing out charities and advocacy organisations that

support the community through crucial social work.

Taking pride in your work

What does working to support LGBTQ+ groups in a sustainable way look like? In November 2020, Daylight, an LGBTQ+-focused digital banking platform offered customers financial services using their preferred names – not necessarily those aligned with legal identification. Daylight also offers customers financial education support and personalised advice, and began campaigning for the banking industry to make similar changes to their services last month.

Yelp recently launched a map feature to improve LGBTQ+-owned businesses' visibility and help customers looking to support such businesses locate them more easily. Instagram has also changed its profile section for users to allow them to provide their pronouns to followers.

While these actions may not be an immediate cure for discrimination against gender and sexuality, they are focused on long-term improvements for equality of access to the kind of treatment, business, services and identity expression that LGBTQ+ groups have historically been denied. More importantly, they are specifically focused on improving products for LGBTQ+ people.

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