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Gay Consumers Strongly Favor Companies Known for Being “Out” about Diversity Initiatives

New Witeck-Combs Communications/Harris Interactive Survey Also Shows GLBT Consumers are More Comfortable when Approached by Openly GLBT Sales People

Rochester, NY— October 11, 2002—Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) consumers, more often than their non-gay counterparts, say that they choose to do business with companies they know exhibit a commitment toward diversity. GLBT consumers also said they respond positively to companies when they are served by representatives or salespersons who are openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

On the eve of *National Coming Out Day 2002*, the annual occasion when GLBT people are encouraged to be open and honest about their sexual orientation, these findings also highlight why companies like American Airlines, Coors Brewing Company and IBM designate GLBT employees to spearhead their strategies to expand market share among GLBT consumers.

This national research survey of 2,023 adults was conducted online between September 24 and October 2, 2002, by Harris Interactive®, a worldwide market research and consulting firm, in conjunction with Witeck-Combs Communications, Inc., a strategic public relations and marketing communications firm with special expertise in the GLBT market. Of those adults surveyed, almost six percent (6%) self-identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

GLBT and non-gay respondents contrasted sharply on the connection they make between their purchasing decisions and a company's diversity policies. GLBT consumers were far more likely than heterosexual consumers to make a purchasing decision based on their awareness of the company's diversity policies (47% GLBT versus 18% heterosexual).

GLBT respondents were also asked about the influence an openly GLBT salesperson or representative has in their purchasing decisions, and five different kinds of purchases were measured: everyday products such as grocery and drug store goods; legal and financial services; health care services; computers and information technology; and major purchases like homes or automobiles.

With all other factors being equal, such as price, quality, value and function, all GLBT respondents were asked whether their decisions to buy would be positively or negatively affected if they knew the sales representative was gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Fifty-six percent (56%) of the total GLBT sample reported a positive influence in legal and financial services; 51% agreed about health care; 49% agreed about large scale purchases such as homes and autos; 42% agreed on everyday purchases such as groceries and drug store goods; and finally, 42% felt it has a positive influence on their purchases of computers and information technology services.

The data suggests there are some GLBT consumers who feel greater comfort and confidence when speaking with GLBT sales staff particularly for more sensitive choices and purchases that are likely to reveal their own sexual orientation – such as legal advice and health care.

“Perceptions of fairness and openness consistently matter to GLBT consumers,” said Wesley Combs, president of Witeck-Combs Communications. “Clearly, any company that chooses to motivate and make its GLBT employees visible will stand to gain a great deal in terms of support from GLBT consumers. It’s a logical matter to match a company’s employee diversity policies with the needs and expectations of its diverse customers.”

"These data validate why IBM decided to form a team dedicated to the GLBT market two years ago," said Joseph Bertolotti, program director of GLBT Sales and Talent. "Our company understands that to fully engage the GLBT market, we must serve our customers with their business needs in mind. This is core to our diversity philosophy for every constituency group at IBM."

Notes on reading tables

GLBT refers to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender respondents. The percentage of respondents has been included for each item. An asterisk (*) signifies a value of less than one-half percent. A dash represents a value of zero. Percentages may not always add up to 100% because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple answers from respondents answering that question.

Table 1
VIEWS TOWARD DIVERSITY IN HIRING AND WORKPLACE PRACTICES

“Many companies promote diversity in their hiring and workplace practices. These include equal treatment of employees and customers from diverse backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion, and disabilities. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I choose to do business with companies that I know have a commitment to diversity.”

Base: All respondents

	GLBT	Heterosexual
	%	%
Strongly agree	47	18
Somewhat agree	28	20
Neither agree nor disagree	15	47
Somewhat disagree	2	6
Strongly disagree	8	9

Table 2
HOW A GLBT SALESPERSON WOULD IMPACT THE PURCHASING DECISIONS OF A GLBT CONSUMER

“All other factors being equal such as price, quality, value, and function, how would it impact your decision to purchase the following types of products or services if you knew that the representative or salesperson serving you were gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender?”

Base: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender respondents

	Very Positively	Somewhat Positively	Neither Positively Nor Negatively	Somewhat Negatively	Very Negatively
Legal and financial services such as accounting, legal or banking services	36	20	44	-	-
Health care services such as medical or dental care	32	19	48	2	-
Large scale purchases such as home or automobile	31	18	49	1	1
Computers and information technology	30	12	58	-	-
Everyday purchases such as grocery and drug store goods, hardware, or clothing	30	13	58	-	-

Methodology

This study was conducted online within the United States between September 24 and October 2, 2002, among a nationwide cross section of 2,023 adults. Figures for age, sex, race, education, region and income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. "Propensity score" weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

In theory, with a probability sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 2 percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. However, this is not a probability sample.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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About Witeck-Combs Communications, Inc.

Witeck-Combs Communications, Inc. (www.witeckcombs.com) is the nation's premier strategic marketing communications firm, specializing in reaching the gay and lesbian consumer market. With over nine years experience in this unique market, Witeck-Combs Communications has developed respected relationships throughout the community and serves as a bridge between corporate America and gay and lesbian consumers. The Gay Financial Network (gfn.com) has twice identified Bob Witeck and Wesley Combs as two of the nation's twenty-five most influential openly gay business executives.

About Harris Interactive®

Harris Interactive (www.harrisinteractive.com) is a worldwide market research and consulting firm best known for **The Harris Poll®**, and for pioneering the Internet method to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Headquartered in Rochester, New York, U.S.A., Harris Interactive combines proprietary methodologies and technology with expertise in predictive, custom and strategic research. The Company conducts international research through wholly owned subsidiaries—London-based **HI Europe** (www.hieurope.com) and Tokyo-based **Harris Interactive Japan**—as well as through the Harris Interactive Global Network of local market-and opinion-research firms, and various U.S. offices. **EOE M/F/D/V**

To become a member of the Harris Poll OnlineSM and be invited to participate in future online surveys, visit www.harrispollonline.com.

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