

# PRWEEK

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Media Analysis: Gay media joins the mainstream  
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For years the gay press was viewed unfavourably by advertisers and readers alike, but now it has earned its place on the middle shelf Patrick Dye investigates.

This weekend, Pride London hits the streets of the capital and upwards of half a million people will celebrate all things gay and lesbian. Over the last thirty-five years, Pride has grown from its humble and slightly militant origins to become a mainstay of the London summer scene. No less dramatic has been the movement of the gay and lesbian media from the margins to occupy a prominent place on the newsstands and airwaves.

As the market has grown, so the range of print titles has broadened to cater for diverse tastes. At the glossy end of the spectrum, titles such as GT (formerly Gay Times) and Diva have revamped their images to appeal to more a mature audience. Meanwhile, reaching the youth market, where the focus is on going out and looking good, demands a different approach. 'GT was seen as very dusty and worthy, now its emphasis is very much on style,' says Tris Reid-Smith, editor of PinkPaper and consultant editor on AXM. 'At AXM we have moved towards a younger and younger audience. The magazine had no clear positioning before, but has now found its niche'. GT, Diva, PinkPaper and AXM are all published by the Millivres Prowler Group, which holds considerable sway in this market.

The broadcast phenomenon in this sector has been the rise of Gaydar Radio over the last five years, on the back of the dating website of the same name. The DAB station currently attracts more than two million listeners a month and the brand encompasses the website RainbowNetwork.com, which is soon to be relaunched as Gaydarnation.com.

## Sector growth

Despite the explosion of titles in recent years, the sector is not without its pitfalls; advertising revenue has always been an issue. As magazines try to move upmarket, advertisers may not be willing to follow suit. 'Titles struggle with taking ads from sex lines because these alienate mainstream advertisers, but sex is where the money is,' says Steve Bustin, a consultant running Brighton-based Vada Media and a correspondent for the PinkPaper. Then there is the issue of actually defining the market that this media can deliver. 'I've had people say to me, 'we want to target gay men, not bisexuals' and I have to tell them that this is not a distinction they will be able to make,' says Bustin. 'No one even knows the real size of the gay market in the UK, because of issues such as people still being in the closet.'

Some PR agencies have attempted to interpret this market for clients by establishing specialist units. Back in 2000 Porter Novelli launched a practice called Scene, while in 2005 Fleishman-Hillard set up FH Out Front. Scene faded into obscurity, although FH Out Front quietly rolls on. One of Scene's founding fathers, Adrian Gillan, now a consultant, is sceptical about the need for specialist units. 'Any PRO with savvy can call the gay media and do this work. It doesn't require the sledgehammer of a dedicated gay and lesbian business unit; it's all become very normalised' says Gillan.

Specialist advice may no longer be necessary when targeting the gay and lesbian media, but the need for sensitivity and willingness to shelve stereotypes remains a necessity. 'I recently produced a Christmas gift guide and, despite being very specific about the sort of products I was interested in, I was sent things such as pink toasters,' says Bustin. 'People assume gay men are only interested in camp and sexy.'

Taking the time to understand the market and finding an appropriate angle can make all the difference when it comes to winning coverage. 'We get music from artists who have publicly declared their

homophobia, and PROs will still chase us and ask why we didn't feature them,' says Stephen Beeny, editor of RainbowNetwork.com. 'If PROs can take the time to highlight a gay subplot in a film they are promoting, for instance, that can help them a lot.'

Among the companies that consistently get it right is the broadcaster Channel 4: 'It is superb,' says Robin Crowley, programme controller of Gaydar Radio. 'For example, Channel 4 told us it is running programmes to mark the 40th anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality, including the drama Clapham Junction. We can use that as a talking point in the programmes and to arrange interviews with the cast.'

Above all, organisations seeking to make inroads must exercise patience: 'There's money to be made, but it's not easy money - it takes time,' says Reid-Smith.

#### Direct response

Is the specialist gay and lesbian media the best way to gain access to this audience? Not always, as dating website Parship recently found out the hard way. The site relies on psychometric profiling to match people, but this was not a concept that was met with enthusiasm, says PR Penny Lukats: 'The gay media initially thought the idea was ridiculous,' says Lukats. 'The gay and lesbian scene is still looks-orientated and the journalists thought this product was not relevant.'

To get around these objections, Parship tried a different tack; carrying out research into gay and lesbian attitudes to dating, which they then pitched back to the wider media with the help of the agency EP. This got an immediate response, but not from the gay and lesbian media: 'We did pieces for Parship in the gay magazine QX and The London Paper. The response from QX was virtually zero, from The London Paper it was massive,' says EP managing director, Murray Harkin. 'This begs the question: just how effective are some of these magazines?'

As Steve Bustin says: 'Affluent gay couples will read the Independent or the Guardian just like everyone else. To believe they can only be reached via the gay press is to ghettoise the market.'

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