



6. Gender-inclusive marketing and communication

Does your organization happen to have disparities in its customer acquisition funnel, e.g. in terms of more women vs. men aware of your product; or more men vs. women actually buying your product or services? Do you know how to authentically and effectively connect with diverse audiences?



What do we mean by gender-inclusive marketing and communication?

Gender-inclusive marketing and communication refers to the deliberate and conscious efforts made by organizations to ensure that (potential) clients/ users of all genders identify with their marketing messages and that these are reached through channels and promotional strategies that are equally effective for all. Gender-inclusive marketing does not only aim at ensuring a balanced representation of customers/ users but also at creating content that resonates with individuals regardless of their gender identity, challenging traditional stereotypes, and fostering a sense of belonging for all consumers.

Why does non-gender-inclusive marketing and communication happen?

Non-gender-inclusive marketing stems from a combination of unconscious gender bias [1] and targeted advertising strategies. With 98% of our thoughts happening subconsciously [2], these biases can influence decisions that reinforce stereotypes, often without people even realizing it. Companies frequently believe that gender-targeted ads drive better sales, which means the marketing industry is susceptible to biases and reinforces them. For instance, women are also more likely to be depicted as likeable, caring, and aspirational in ads. Research has found that 98% of advertisements for baby products, laundry detergents, and household cleaning items display and target women [3]. In contrast, ads for drinks and cars typically feature men. The impact of such practice is greatly highlighted by a strong association of pink with girls and blue with boys, a trend that emerged in the 1950s following intensive advertising campaigns [4]. Today, nearly 89% of toys marketed to girls are pink [5].

Why is gender-inclusive marketing and communication important?

Embracing gender diversity in marketing efforts not only fosters inclusivity but also aligns with consumer preferences, with studies showing that 38% of consumers (and 48% of Gen Z customers) value brands that do not classify products by gender [6]. It also has a positive effect on brand loyalty as 57% of consumers are more loyal to brands that address social inequities [7]. Another study highlighted that upon seeing an inclusive ad, 64% of consumers are more likely to consider, or even purchase the product [8]. Besides its impact on business performance, gender-inclusive marketing increasingly needs to reflect evolving societal shifts and consumer expectations. In fact, research indicates that gender-stereotyped messages often backfire as people react negatively to the stereotypical representation of gender roles in the ads [9]. As a result, such practices can lead to the alienation of potential customers. Hence, by adopting gender-inclusive marketing practices, companies can enhance brand loyalty, expand their customer base, and demonstrate their commitment to diversity and social progress.

[1] Unconscious gender bias is defined as unintentional and automatic mental associations based on gender, stemming from traditions, norms, values, culture, and/or experience.

[2] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/onmarketing/2016/05/09/to-foster-diversity-in-advertising-challenge-unconscious-bias/>

[3] <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/society/article/women-still-clean-up-in-the-world-of-advertising-cdmcsn3tq>

[4] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shelleyzalis/2019/09/05/busting-gender-stereotypes-the-pink-versus-blue-phenomenon/>

[5] <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-38250674>

[6] <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/true-gen-generation-z-and-its-implications-for-companies>

[7] <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/marketing-and-sales-operations/global-marketing-trends/2022/diversity-and-inclusion-in-marketing.html>

[8] <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/future-of-marketing/management-and-culture/diversity-and-inclusion/thought-leadership-marketing-diversity-inclusion/>

[9] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350468121_Gender_stereotypes_in_advertising_have_negative_cross-gender_effects

How does one implement gender-inclusive marketing and communication?

One of the easiest ways to rebalance one's clients/users' base, and hence boost acquisition with previously under-targeted segments, is to introduce gender-inclusive marketing. Fortunately, there are many easy steps that one can apply to adopt more inclusive and unbiased promotional approaches. These include:

1. **Diverse outreach channels:** Use a wide range of recruitment channels to reach a diverse pool of potential clients/ users, including platforms and approaches that e.g. have privileged access to the segments you overlooked so far (e.g. explore how to conduct promotional activities at typical work sites for men, if your advertising has been focusing on women and mothers).
2. **Gender-smart content:** Review all your promotional material, and possibly all your communication material (including e.g. your website) to remove any stereotyped or gendered language or visuals, and create content that reflects/would appeal to a variety of customer segments. Also, question what image do you project of your organization? At a deeper level, are the values and associations you seek to create with your audience gendered in some way (e.g. by picturing your company as a caring, soft enterprise, or on the contrary as an aggressive, powerful one)? Finally, if needed, consider conducting deeper customer research, to better understand diverse gender identities and preferences vis-à-vis your product or service, as this may inform your promotional messages.
3. **Campaigns' testing:** Try to test or pilot your campaigns with focus groups of different genders to spot any difference in how they access, receive, perceive and process the messages and information you are trying to convey. Correct accordingly, if there are unwanted disparities between the groups.
4. **Gender-sensitive and balanced marketing team:** Ensure that your marketing and sales team is diverse and balanced itself. Different perspectives can help reduce bias in their work. If you haven't done it yet, make sure to provide implicit bias training to all persons involved in the marketing process (including possibly also your service providers – e.g. for graphic design), to raise awareness about unconscious bias and how it can affect their choices. You can find our free training for this [here](#).
5. **Track, evaluate, report and adjust:** Implement a system to track and report on the gender diversity across your user/client's acquisition funnel. Regularly review this data to identify trends and areas for improvement (e.g. you could detect that, while you have a balanced social media following, women actually purchase less online than men, pointing at a specific issue at this time of the process). In the longer term, regularly evaluate and adjust your marketing practices based on feedback from users/ clients and employees.

How to measure progress and success?

Through our own, LeFil's [research](#), we identified a number of metrics that can be improved through gender-focused initiatives, and which are meaningful to track as you progress with the implementation of your efforts. For some of these metrics, we provide a benchmark value, which is the average that close to 100 ventures like yours recorded after having worked on this topic. These metrics are:

Metric	Benchmark
Annual growth rate in earned revenue	71%
Annual percentage increase in number of customers/ users/ end beneficiaries	81% [10]
Proportion of men/ women among customers/ users/ end beneficiaries	40% women
Effectiveness of your organisation's communication tools/ activities aimed at users	N/A
Customer/ user/ end beneficiary acquisition costs	N/A
Proportion of staff trained in gender mainstreaming	59%

[10] With outlier. without outlier 154%

Case studies



Designing gender-inclusive campaigns for solar power by Albedo Solar

Albedo Solar increased its reach among women clients and grew its sales by making its advertising more inclusive and diverse.

Albedo Solar facilitates access to solar power for Guatemalan SMEs. It connects them with qualified solar installers, provides quality assurance and performance monitoring services, and offers affordable financing repayment plans that allow SMEs to pay back the investment in 3-5 years through monthly instalments. Through its services, the venture allows SMEs to become more competitive by reducing their electricity costs while creating environmental benefits through reduced emissions.

Albedo Solar's team took part in our Gender Mainstreaming Workshop and realized that out of its 40 clients, only 5 were women-led SMEs. A key reason for this gender imbalance was identified in biased advertising, as the venture's marketing campaigns were mostly featuring men customers and installers, with only a few women and families depicted. Additionally, the language used was focused on men as decision-makers, which was likely alienating potential women customers. Albedo Solar decided to revamp its marketing strategy to achieve a better reach among women, thereby expanding its customer base and increasing sales while at the same time facilitating more equitable access to solar power across genders. To do so, Albedo Solar:

- reviewed its marketing materials with the help of a gender expert to identify possible biases and improvement opportunities, and developed guidelines to have an inclusive communication, such as using gender-neutral expressions and having an equal representation of both genders in photos, videos and other materials
- trained its team on gender mainstreaming
- designed a new digital marketing campaign following the guidelines developed with the consultant; this included recording video interviews with 3 clients, of which 2 women, showing how Albedo Solar's services can bring benefits in different contexts.

Following these efforts, Albedo Solar managed to increase the share of women clients by 18% (from 13% to 31%). Additionally, its overall client base tripled, while its revenue grew by over 300%. The team also benefited from improved marketing skills overall, since the support of the gender expert taught them not only to detect biases, but also to be generally more intentional and professional in communications, leading to a stronger value proposition and positioning for the company.

Increasing enrollment of women with disabilities in tech courses by Inclúyeme

Inclúyeme increased women's participation in its online tech courses by understanding their specific expectations and preferences, and adapting its communication content and approach to make it more enticing and relevant to them.

Inclúyeme is a social enterprise that works towards the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities across Latin America. Through its job portal, it connects leading companies in the region with people with disabilities, to help find a professional match. It also offers people with disabilities online IT courses, such as full-stack software development, software testing, and graphic design, to improve their employability.

Inclúyeme's team took part in our Gender Mainstreaming Workshop and realized that, while finding a job is a challenge for all people with disabilities (with their unemployment rate standing at 75%), women and girls faced extra difficulties due to the intersectionality of disability and gender bias, particularly in the technology sector. Therefore, despite already having a gender-balanced participation in its own courses, with 53% women participants, Inclúyeme decided to aim for a further increase in women's enrolment by adapting its promotion and communication efforts for its tech skills courses, with the objective of reducing the gap in employment for women with disabilities, as well as growing the demand for its services. To do so, Inclúyeme:

- conducted a large-scale survey on people with disabilities across Latin America, to understand their specific needs, interests and challenges regarding education and work, in a gender-disaggregated way. Over 4,000 people with disabilities across 17 countries answered the survey, 50% of whom were women. Results of the survey were publicized through press releases and newspaper articles
- designed new communication campaigns focused on women and girls with disabilities. More specifically, Inclúyeme created social media posts highlighting the disparity in unemployment between men and women with disabilities and encouraging women and girls to enrol in their tech courses; shared video testimonials from past women students and mentors; worked with women influencers to increase their reach among women with disabilities; conducted exclusive interviews with women with disabilities in the tech sector and disseminated them through media channels in Argentina, Colombia and Mexico
- created new services to better address women's needs and preferences. These included mentorship programs to offer support and role models for women with disabilities who were part of the training courses, women-focused talent days to connect candidates with employers, as well as workshops on disabilities and gender, to improve the understanding of the intersectionality between these two aspects.

Inclúyeme's new communication campaigns and strategies reached more than 2m users. Between 2021 and 2023, the venture saw a 20% increase in women applying to its courses (from 40% to 60%), and an 8% increase in women's participation in its tech courses (from 53% to 61%). Thanks to the visibility of its communication campaigns and its new commercial services, Inclúyeme was able to sign 15 new corporate customers, which represented a 20% increase in sales. However, Inclúyeme's gender journey did not stop there: the team is iterating its campaigns and making additional improvements to the course's structure, processes and content to further increase accessibility, with the goal to achieve 70% women's participation. It is also planning to repeat the survey every 2 years, to continue bring visibility to the topic.



Targeting fathers through promotional campaigns by Listo

Listo increased its share of sales to fathers by diversifying away from marketing to women caregivers only and targeting fathers directly through gender-inclusive ads which could be appealing for men too.

Listo is a social enterprise that fights infant malnutrition in Guatemala. It produces and distributes Nutrilisto, a nutritious milk and peanut paste fortified with all the micronutrients necessary for a healthy diet. It is a daily food supplement that complements meals and is ready to eat. It is mainly designed for infants (6 to 24 months old) and sold at a price point that is affordable for low-income populations. In addition, Listo also conducts educational campaigns promoting healthy diets at home, notably for infants and children.

Listo's team took part in our Gender Mainstreaming Workshop and realized that its communication strategy was not gender inclusive, as it was solely targeting women. For instance, the promotional materials would only depict mothers; colours and visuals were soft, feminine and motherly; and the slogans and positioning were specifically appealing and relevant to women caregivers. Listo's sales strategy was exclusively geared towards reaching mothers at home. By categorizing taking care of children's health as a woman's duty, Listo was reinforcing the stereotype that childcare and wellbeing is the sole responsibility of women. It was also alienating fathers, who often control the household finances, including the money to buy Listo's products. As a result, only an estimated less than 5% of sales came from men. Thus, Listo's gender initiative focused on including fathers in its advertising campaigns to diversify its customer basis, as well as discovering new channels to reach out to them such as selling Listo on e.g. construction sites. By changing the traditional narrative and including fathers in childcare-related decision-making, Listo aimed to increase its impact as well as its sales. To do so, Listo:

- learned about the fathers' perspectives on raising and taking care of their children and reflected their aspirations in Listo's communication and marketing material
- adapted Listo's campaigns to make them more inclusive and appealing to fathers by including visuals of children with their fathers, changing the colours, language, etc.

- shifted its narrative and positioning to “loving families taking care of their children”, instead of exclusively portraying Listo as a product for “loving and cuddling mothers”
- explored new sales channels more effective with fathers, such as holding promotional events in construction sites and branches of microfinance institutions.

As a result, Listo has been able to increase its share of men clients to 30%, as well as the proportion of men followers on its social media channels from an estimated 15% to 46%. In the long term, the team aims to reach 50% men buyers, and plans to develop campaigns to encourage more fathers to physically feed their children, an activity that in traditional Guatemalan families is usually undertaken by mothers. But the journey does not end here. Through this process, Listo started questioning the gender imbalance in its own women-dominated team. As a result, it reviewed its recruitment process, so as to make the company also more appealing to men talent.