



How to make your
marketing communications

inclusive

“Across BT Group,
we are committed to
embedding diversity
and inclusion into
everything that we do.
It remains fundamental
to our purpose: we
connect for good.”

Philip Jansen
BT Group Chief Executive





We've created this guide to help you make *truly* inclusive marcomms.

We can't put everything into these pages, as the world of diversity and inclusion is always evolving, so it's important to stay tuned in to the cultural environment.

Here you'll find the fundamental (and non-negotiable) principles for inclusive marcomms. Use these to guide you, and remember that accessibility, inclusive language, and diverse representation are the key pillars of inclusive comms.



What inclusivity means

(and what it doesn't)

Inclusivity means helping everyone feel that they belong, anywhere they want to be. We can be inclusive by creating marketing communications that show respect for and embrace human diversity in every form.

While some inclusive campaigns try to break stereotypes, others simply aim to reflect different groups of people. It doesn't mean targeting audiences that have little interest in your product and it's not about choosing 'the right' stock image. It means consciously representing the breadth of humanity in your campaigns.

In Microsoft's 2018 'We All Win' campaign, we see a boy with real disabilities, playing and winning at a computer game, using Microsoft's adapted controller, which has larger touch pads and bright colours to help those with visual disabilities. The boy's able-bodied friends are seen running to celebrate the win alongside him.

The ad offers us a rarely-seen snapshot into the lives and challenges of children with disabilities, and also highlights the impact that inclusive design can have on people's lives.



“Despite 22% of the UK population being disabled, only 4% of UK TV ads featured disabled people in 2021.”

Campaign 2022: Why are disabled people still so poorly represented in ads?



Why is inclusivity in our marketing so important?

We are one of the UK's largest advertisers. The brands in our portfolio are valuable and widely recognised. Our colleagues and customers span every part of society. We have a responsibility to use our collective marketing communications platforms to create powerful messages that represent people and narratives authentically.

The way we portray society shapes society. Representation matters. Inclusive marketing means we reach a broader range of people, and it gives a voice to those who've been excluded or under-represented. It allows us to challenge – and sometimes even change – the status quo.

“65% of respondents said they would feel more favourable about a brand that tries to represent different parts of society.”

Reflecting Modern Britain:
A study into diversity and inclusion in advertising

“Put simply, inclusive marketing is good marketing.”

Sheree Atcheson
Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Leader

The dos

1. Ensure truly authentic representation

Representation is the visible presence of a variety of identities in a campaign. People want to see themselves reflected in media. It helps us to all feel empowered, inspired, and heard. Before signing off on a campaign, ask yourself: does this reflect society? Am I elevating diverse voices?

Always aim for authentic representation. Inauthentic representation can happen when inclusion is added part-way through, or towards the end of the creative process. For example, if your storyboard has a male doctor, you're unlikely to see past the unconscious bias that doctors tend to be male and cast a female.

From a marketer's point of view, diversity and inclusion must be considered from the outset, and at each stage of a campaign's development, planning, execution, and review.

2. Use inclusive language

Words matter. They can deepen understanding and strengthen relationships or confuse and even cause harm. Consider your word choice carefully, and watch out for hyperbolic language.

For example, have you ever referred to your day as 'insane' or chatted about how 'OCD' you are? Hyperbolic phrases like these can minimise very real experiences. Switch to descriptive language. Instead of saying something's 'insane', say 'busy' or 'intense'. Choose words like 'meticulous' and 'organised' in place of 'OCD'.

Here's a guide on what **not** to say.





The dos

3. Consider context

‘Context’ refers to the circumstances that inform an event or piece of content. This could mean historical or cultural influences, but also extends to the order and hierarchy of the subjects. For example, when you search ‘manager and employee’ in stock photography, you’ll often see a male employee standing over a female colleague, implying certain power dynamics. When choosing your imagery, make sure photos are not only diverse but that they also consider *order* and *hierarchy*.

4. Avoid appropriation

Appropriation is the act of taking over creative or artistic forms or practices by one cultural group from another, without recognising their true origins and meanings. Avoid appropriation by doing your research to gain a deep and thorough understanding of the culture you’re representing.

“My favourite example that opened my eyes to cultural appropriation was when I working with an older Black gentleman in our upper class. He opened my eyes to the difference between West African style and suiting versus West Indian suiting and styling, a beautiful little anecdote that means the character is more authentic for going to that level of detail.”

Alice McGinn
Senior Planner at Lucky Generals

When including a character from a minority group, make sure the depiction of the character is realistic and that protagonist and script lend themselves to the story.



The dos

5. Create counter-stereotypes

To 'counter-stereotype' means going against a standardised image that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment. An example of a stereotype in advertising might be, for example, an ad that suggests that all men like watching sport or that all little girls want to become ballerinas.

Imagine a world where the marketing images around us shattered these stereotypes rather than emboldened them. As marketers, we can use counter-stereotypes to influence and change the society around us. **This ad from the Royal Air Force** is an example of the power of advertising to create counter-stereotypes.

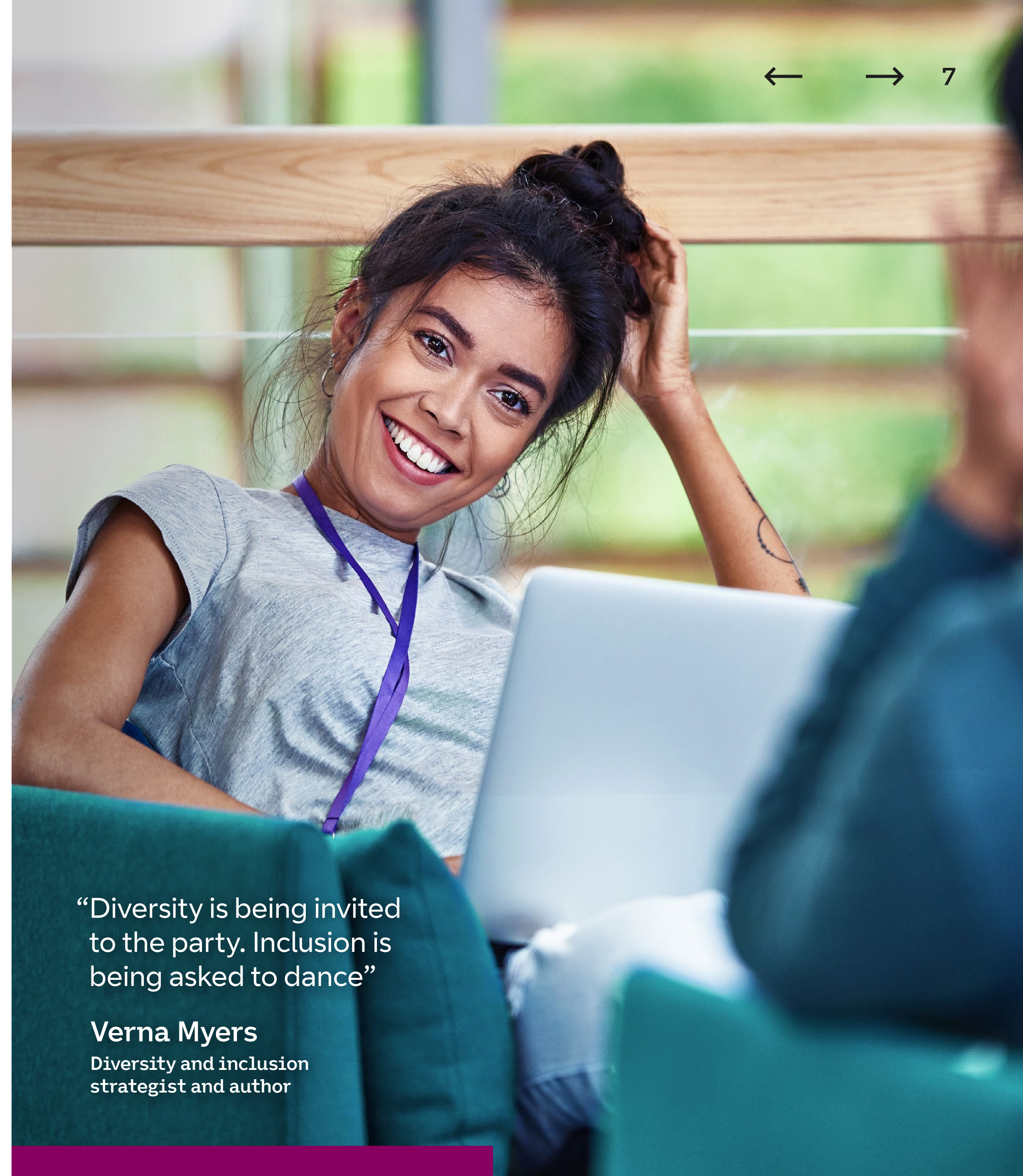
6. Understand the difference between diversity and inclusion

Diversity and inclusion are not the same thing. For example, a multicultural stock photo on an ad shows diversity. Interviewing an expert, who has a disability, for a promotional video shows inclusion. Put another way, diversity is the 'what', inclusion is the 'how'.

To be truly inclusive, our marketing campaigns must reflect diverse backgrounds and stories that audiences can relate to in a way that's meaningful and genuinely representative.

Ask yourself: **'does my marketing reflect the diversity in our society?'**

Think not only in terms of gender and race, but also about ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, social mobility and religion.



“Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance”

Verna Myers

Diversity and inclusion strategist and author



The dos

7. Seek perspectives outside of the room

Do you have a diverse team developing briefs, evaluating, and producing the work? If not, it's important to seek perspectives from people not in the room. Carry out focus groups or attend events, to better understand characteristics that aren't easily tracked. This might be a point of view, for example.

9. Make your content accessible

Make sure everyone can access your content by carrying out these important **accessibility checks**.

8. Incorporate inclusivity into your agency briefs

Don't let inclusivity be unintentionally overlooked – spell out that you're looking for an inclusive response to brief. When reviewing the media plan, ask if a diverse portfolio of media channels is being used, not just those with highest indexes.

The don'ts

10. Don't jump on the bandwagon unless you're walking the walk

Six big brands sponsoring the Women's Euros 2022 were criticised for affiliating themselves with the sporting event, when their organisations have sizeable gender pay gaps. Similarly, many brands face fierce criticism during Pride month for rainbow washing*. Analysis of Cannes-recognized work found only 1.8% of characters with a discernible sexual orientation in ads are LGBTQ+.

Casting LGBTQ+ community members solely for campaigns airing in June, or seeking a sponsorship opportunity that's at odds with your company's internal DNA will make your intentions, no matter how well meaning, appear disingenuous.

* What is rainbow washing?

Rainbow washing is the term used to call out organisations that use Pride branding for their own gain or to give themselves a deceptive air of liberalism and allyship.

11. Don't make the mistake of thinking 'photography is enough'

When you're representing an audience, photography alone isn't enough. Be authentic, by using real stories, features, user-generated content and case studies so your audience will feel truly understood. Watch out for stock photography that includes women dressed in clothing that shows more flesh than their male counterparts.

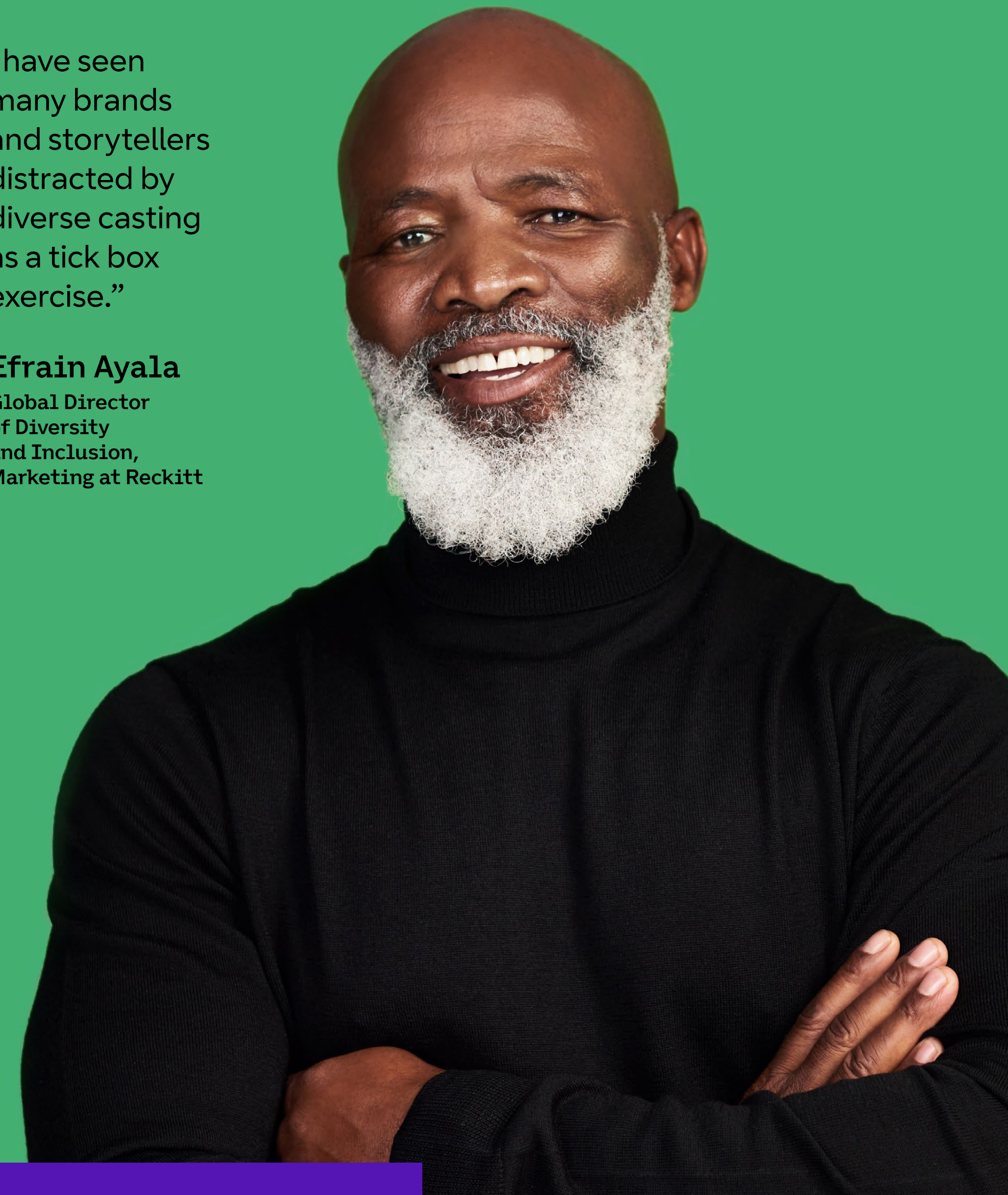
12. Don't think diverse casting is enough

Campaigns that rely solely on diverse casting aren't authentic. Our focus should be on the portrayal, rather than just the physical attributes.

"I have seen many brands and storytellers distracted by diverse casting as a tick box exercise."

Efrain Ayala

Global Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Marketing at Reckitt





“Be yourself; be yourself every day. When you can be yourself you bring your best self to work, embrace the diversity in others and lead to an inclusive environment where everyone feels like their unique perspective and contribution is valued.”

Annabelle Cordelli

Vice President Global Brand and Marketing at Virgin Atlantic

Action checklist

To build a creative campaign that represents your audience accurately, you must:

- ✔ Demonstrate inclusivity, not just diversity, by including a variety of people.
- ✔ Be sure that the depiction of all characters is authentic.
- ✔ Make sure both protagonist and script lend themselves to the story.

Three marketing campaigns that demonstrate inclusivity

1. Proctor & Gamble 'The Talk'

P&G aren't afraid to tell stories that spread powerful messages about equality, tackle controversial issues, and discuss topics related to diversity and identity.

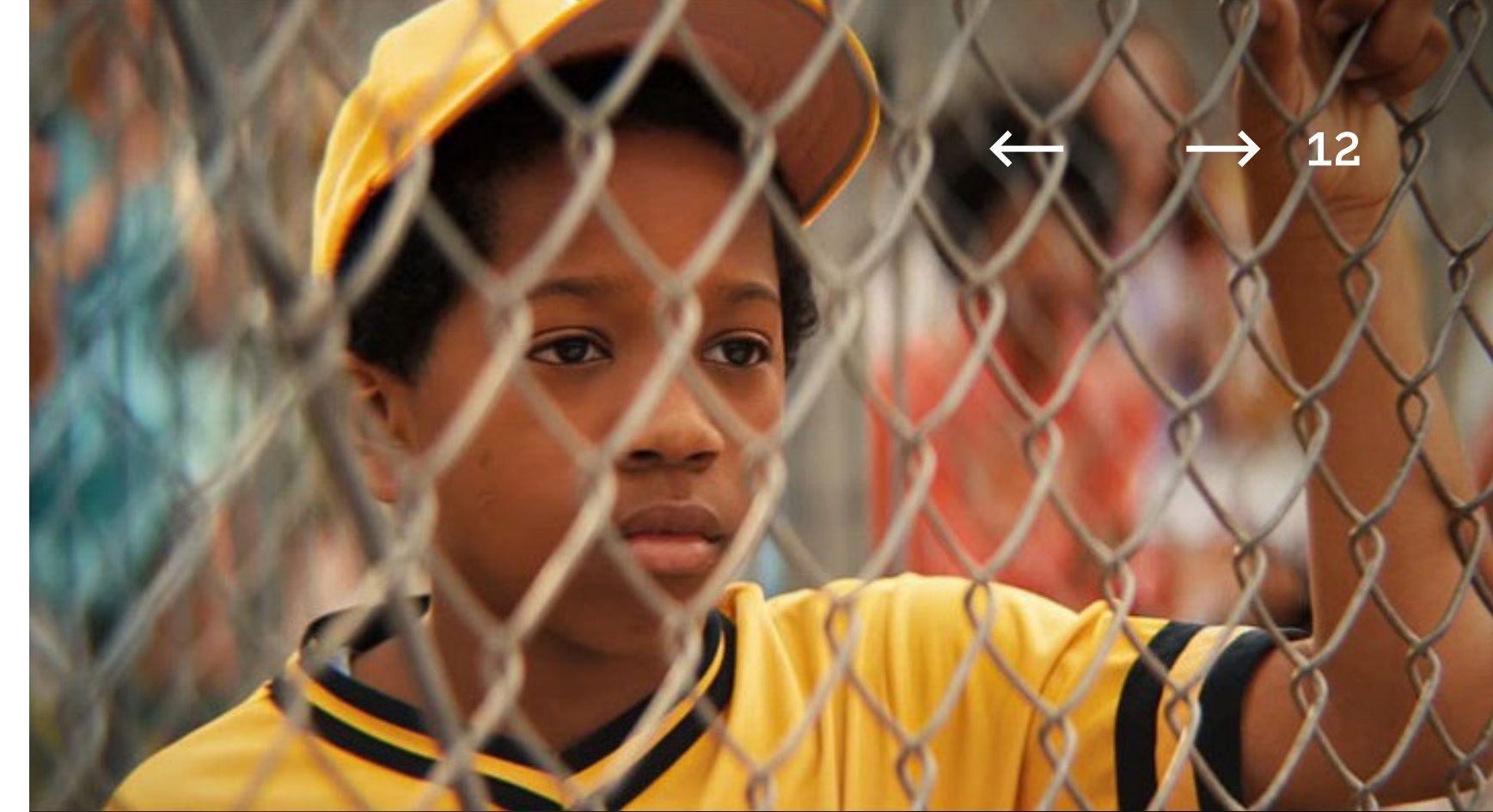
A mother brushing her daughter's hair says, "It's not a compliment."

As you wonder what she's referring to, you see scenes of other black mothers talking to their children about racism and judgement that they'll face in life. Then it's revealed that the daughter was told she was "beautiful for a black girl." Her mother tells her not to accept this compliment and concludes, "you are beautiful, period!"

What we can learn

To use our voice to call out societal issues and show our support for targeted communities.

P&G used their platform to expose the unthinkable closed-door conversations that African American mothers have with their children to keep them safe and strong in the face of racism. In doing so, the ad shone a light more broadly on bias. Encouraging conversations about a societal issue – in this case, bias – will promote understanding and send a clear message to those intentionally perpetrating it that we won't silently stand by while it happens.



2. Virgin Atlantic 'See the world differently'

Virgin Atlantic use their ad to champion the rich individuality of the airline's people and customers. To create authentic representations the team worked with organisations that put them in contact with people from each community. They set out to craft genuine characters through choice of wardrobe and by thinking how people might feel, to get nuanced understanding.

Virgin Atlantic went on to update their gender identity policy that allows cabin crew, pilots, and ground team to choose any of the iconic, Vivienne Westwood-designed uniforms that best represent them – no matter their gender, gender identity, or gender expression.

Watch the uniform ad

What we can learn

To walk the talk. Virgin Atlantic have created a series of ads under the 'See the world differently' campaign demonstrating how they are transforming their organisation into a more inclusive workplace. From being the first major airline to allow staff to display their tattoos, to adopting a new gender identity policy that allows cabin crew, pilots and ground teams to any of their uniform styles that represent them – no matter their gender, gender identity or gender expression. Virgin Atlantic are showing inclusivity from the inside, out.

Highlight real stories. Draw inspiration from the personal stories of our customers and colleagues, but casting based on physical characteristics alone is not enough. Do your research – **the details matter.**



3. Coca-Cola 'I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke'

Coca-Cola have been embracing diversity in their ads since the 1970s. At the time, this ad was considered ground-breaking as it united people from different races and ethnicities around the common interest of Coca-Cola and world peace. Showing that people can come from different backgrounds and have something in common.

Coca-Cola have continued to make campaigns that link diverse people together with a simple bottle of Coke. **'Share a Coke'** which replaced the company's iconic logo with names of people from all over the world went on to pick up seven Cannes Lions awards.

What we can learn

Use universal themes to bring people together. Our marketing should highlight how our brands connect all sorts of people from diverse backgrounds to the things that matter most to them.





Further reading and useful resources

- [Belonging site](#)
- [Diversity and inclusion: 'what not to say' guide](#)
- [Diversity and inclusion glossary of terms](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- [Diversity and inclusion \(D&I\) Academy site](#)



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