



Advertising Age

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MCI rings up gays via direct marketing

By Kate Fitzgerald

MCI is finally getting on the bandwagon in marketing to gays and lesbians with the first-ever long-distance telephone campaign targeting the lucrative gay business market.

Although it waited more than a year after AT&T made a splash by targeting gay consumers, MCI is trying to make up for lost time.

In a direct mailpiece that began hitting the mailboxes of gay-owned businesses last week, MCI linked up with the new National Gay & Lesbian Business Alliance, which will help cross-promote its gay-targeted efforts. MCI is helping launch the recently founded group.

In the mailing, MCI is offering gay business owners who sign up before June 30 a free six-month alliance membership worth \$39; also included is an offer for a new MCI-NGLBA Calling card, plus a 5% discount on volume calling and one free month of MCI long-distance calling for businesses that sign up before June 30.

"Research shows gays are a very loyal and sensitive audience, and we want to do everything we can

to support them in business," said Mark Pettit, senior VP-public relations, MCI Business Markets, Atlanta.

Industry experts say MCI has a built-in database-generation system in the alliance, and supporting such an organization automatically helps build good will among

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gay business owners.

MCI's mailing consists of a straightforward letter from an openly gay MCI employee named Mark Millsaps describing MCI as a workplace that's "free from discrimination," with a description of various discounts and special offers for gay business owners.

The company used a consortium of openly gay freelancers to conceive and design the color direct

mail piece, which includes photos of gays and descriptions of the benefits of alliance membership.

"Research showed that gays are very appreciative of true support of their community in the creation and management of gay-targeted efforts," Mr. Pettit said.

Even Sprint, by re-selling of long-distance services through third parties in recent months, beat MCI to the gay market. MCI said it took more than nine months to hatch its plan in order to sidestep problems other companies have encountered.

"We've seen too many companies go about this the wrong way and we wanted to make sure we did it right," Mr. Pettit said.

What MCI hopes to avoid is mailing gay-targeted materials to non-gay businesses and homes, say industry insiders. Some of AT&T's mailings were initially mishandled, which offended some customers, but AT&T said there has been no backlash.

MCI said it's considering the effort "a test," which will be expanded to include print ads in gay publications if it proves successful. □

SPECIAL NOTE!!

MCI & TELECOM *USA ARE THE SAME CORPORATION.

IN 1990, MCI BOUGHT TELECOM*/USA WHICH HAD SLIGHTLY MORE THAN 1% OF THE LONG DISTANCE MARKET AND AGREED TO BUILD A TRANSATLANTIC FIBER-OPTIC CABLE WITH BRITISH TELECOM.

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