

Survey says...

Put your money where your mouth is

A plurality of attitudes toward gays and lesbians showed itself again on both a national and local level this month. *USA Today* reported May 15 on a new survey from *The Boston Globe* indicating 50 percent of Americans disapprove of same-sex marriage. Furthermore, about the same number of people felt same-sex marriages from Massachusetts, where the practice has been legal for a year, should not have to be recognized by other states.

Americans are somewhat more generous in doling out rights when it comes to the topic of civil unions. According to this particular survey, a generous 46 percent of those questioned said they would support civil unions to provide gay couples with "some, but not all, of the rights of married couples." About 41 percent of those same people surveyed won't even loosen their grip at all and said they oppose civil unions.

These figures aren't new; they've been hovering in this same range for about the past year. It depends on whom you ask and where you ask them. In a wonderful example of stating the obvious, this poll concluded, "Americans older than age 65, Republicans, Protestants, regular churchgoers and Southerners were more likely to oppose gay marriage." You think? Our team consists of people who are younger than 35, vote Democratic and do not go to church. Sounds to me like even if we're behind in the game, we're still having more fun playing.

At about the same time the poll was released, a group of businesspeople—probably younger than 65 and not Republican—was meeting in Portland to discuss and strategize about how to make money off gays and lesbians. It seems the Portland Oregon Visitors Association has recognized the value of targeting the gay and lesbian market. It's having meetings and making plans, and it wants our money. I'm wondering if the wedding industry will be a key player in developing these marketing strategies?

Now businesspeople in Portland have been marketing their wares to gays and lesbians for years. This very paper would not exist if folks didn't see value in the buying power of our community. But most of these good people have been around for years, have joined our political battles and struggles and have been there when times were tough.

Here in Portland, the business community has been good to us. But now it's revving up to the next level. There are "specialists" with plans and guidelines and strategies on how to lure us to market.

There's even a Gay Market Guide 2005. This glossy "comprehensive guide" identifies opportunities for marketing to the gay and lesbian community. According to the publisher, Hyperion Interactive Media, there are 16.5 million gay Americans with a combined buying power, in 2004, of \$450 billion. (Yes, billion with a b.) That is indeed a lot of buying power.

Here are a few other nuggets of information I gleaned from the pages of the book:

- First, it was printed in Canada. If you're trying to market to gay Americans, how about finding a gay-owned American printer—perhaps Witham & Dickey of Portland?

- The world of gay personals online is one of the driving forces in today's online gay market. I'll get back to this topic in a few weeks as I wrestle with the decision of whether to try to keep the voice personal ads a part of *Just Out* or simply accept the obvious fact that this segment of our social lives is now exclusively Internet-driven. Sometimes you just can't fight progress.

- Portland's own Technodyke.com is listed as "additional lesbian sites worth noting."

- According to this guide, gay consumers are characterized by high income and education levels as well as above-average credit card ownership. Gay men and lesbians travel widely for business and pleasure, pursue sports and other leisure-time activities, attend theater, collect art and buy books and CDs at high level. Is this you? No mention is made of gays and lesbians who run for city commission and school boards, who raise children and maintain homes and pay taxes and live lives geared toward personal growth and happiness. But damn, we buy a lot of CDs.

- I LOVE this one. "Because of their prominent positions in the fields of fashion, design, media and the arts, gay men in particular occupy a special sphere of influence in shaping national consumer tastes and trends." We get blamed for everything.

- In the ranking of states with high gay and lesbian populations, Oregon is ranked No. 24. Our buddy to the north, Washington, comes in at 12. California is No. 1, and North Dakota and Wyoming bottom out, though apparently not often, at Nos. 51 and 52.


- In a list of the top 100 gay and lesbian direct mail ZIP codes, Oregon doesn't place. But neither do North Dakota and Wyoming.

- Portland is considered to be a "secondary market" along with cities such as Denver; Cleveland; Austin, Texas; Sacramento, Calif.; and Reno, Nev.

And finally, let it be noted, per Hyperion Interactive Media, "Bisexuals and transgender individuals have not yet been identified as distinct markets by marketers." Wow, who knew?

A closing statement is made to the effect that, for more and more business owners today, "gay" isn't lavender, pink or rainbow-colored—it's green.

I think that as others are capitalizing on the power of our buying ability, we should reflect and recognize the tremendous economic clout that we have in the \$450 billion attributed to us. We can, of course, spend our money, as projected, on Scissor Sisters CDs. But we can also use it to sustain local progressive causes and candidates. We can revitalize our communities and neighborhoods through the power of shopping locally. We can withhold money from the 50 percent of people who view us as credit cards and not as people deserving full and equal civil rights. We can, and should, refuse to patronize those businesses and institutions that don't support us. We have the power to put our money where the votes are.

We are \$450 billion strong. We are a force with which to be reckoned. Let's go shopping! 

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PUBLISHER & MANAGING EDITOR

Marty Davis

NEWS EDITOR

Sarah Dougher

ARTS AND CULTURE EDITOR

Jim Radosta

STAFF WRITER

Jaymee R. Cuti

ART DIRECTOR

Bonnie Barrett

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Katy Maehl

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

Larry Lewis

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES

Ashley Austin, Kari Tate, Cshea Walker

CONTRIBUTORS

Yvonne P. Behrens, Stephen Blair, Sarah Burgundy, Meryl Cohn, Jodi Darby, Timothy Krause, Karen Kudej, Patricia L. MacAodha, Andy Mangels, Gary Morris, Jenny Nguyen, Rebecca Ragain, Bob Roehr, Floyd Sklaver, Cori Taratoot, Rex Wockner

DISTRIBUTION

Kristine Ashton, Allison Benn, Lisa Benson, Pat Kilmer-Cramer

REFLECTIONS

- Affirmative action includes all measures necessary to make equal opportunity a reality for currently and historically excluded groups of people in the United States. Attacks against affirmative action assume that equal opportunity for women and people of color is already a reality. It's not.

- A gay man in the state of Tasmania, Australia, plans to open a sperm bank for lesbians, reported the Reuters news service. Lesbians are often denied access to regular sperm banks. Richard X, whose last name was withheld, said he will collect semen in glass jars and inseminate women with syringes.

- The British Broadcasting Corp. has commissioned its first show targeted exclusively at gay men and lesbians, reported London's *The Daily Telegraph*. The company said the "glossy magazine-style" program, which debuts on BBC2 in June, will be "camp, frothy and fun."

- A court in Romania approved April 19 the nation's first known sex-change operation, reported the newspaper *Tineretul Liber*. The court was concerned that the 19-year-old transsexual would commit suicide or an act of self-mutilation if denied the operation,

the report said. Officials opted to classify the individual as "handicapped" due to "mental disability," the newspaper said.



- Gay- and lesbian-owned businesses along Northeast Broadway in Portland have formed a new business association called Out on Broadway. One of its goals is to promote the diverse businesses located along Northeast Broadway to the gay and lesbian communities.

- The Metropolitan Human Rights Commission offers "Dynamic Differences" workshops to help individuals develop a basic understanding of how people are oppressed or oppress others and how to build alliances and network in their communities.

- Cascade Bears sponsor "Prowl Lite '95." Less filling, more fun and at a lower cost, this year's redesigned Prowl is meant to be more user-friendly.

- Attempting to view the world in a positive light gets easier with support. The Portland chapter of Brother to Brother invites African American gay and bisexual men to become involved in the direction of the group.

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