



CMOs & Chief DE&I Officers: Joined at the Hip for a DE&I Revolution

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My career began in the early 1990s in government, a stepping stone into a diverse and enriching professional pathway characterized by strong foundations in marketing, communications, and employee engagement. As the years progressed, I ventured into various sectors, including the gas and electric industry, financial services, and insurance. This progression allowed me to absorb a wealth of knowledge and hone a multifaceted skill set, particularly in crafting potent marketing strategies and fostering robust employee engagement frameworks.

Eventually, I found my niche in high-tech, a field renowned not only for its rapid advancements but also for its deep-seated issues of gender disparity. My background in communications played a pivotal role here, offering a lens to discern and navigate the complex narratives surrounding gender biases prevalent in the industry.

Throughout my journey, I have remained a keen observer of the gender dynamics at play in different organizational contexts. While I have been fortunate not to face personal setbacks due to my gender, the awareness of the subtle yet persistent prejudices prevalent in the workplace became a constant companion. This experience gave me firsthand insights into women's barriers, especially when breaking away from traditional molds.

Years later, this multifaceted journey led me to Televerde, an example of inclusivity and authenticity in the corporate world. Here, my comprehensive background in marketing and communications found resonance with Televerde's earnest commitment to fostering a workplace where diversity isn't just a buzzword but a deeply ingrained value. Televerde stands as a testament to what a purpose-driven organization should embody, seamlessly marrying words with actions in its pursuit of genuine inclusivity.

Televerde is a company with a mission of providing second chances, and here I have seen firsthand how misguided societal perceptions can limit the human experience and impact people's livelihoods.

Here, I see talented women full of potential who get sidelined not because of their gender but because of their

past. The more boxes these women check—female, criminal record, minority race, identifying with certain sexual orientations, lack of formal education, employment gaps—the fewer opportunities they seem to have.

As someone immersed in this environment—one that requires breaking harmful societal misconceptions every day—I became deeply engrossed in the rapid emergence of DE&I as a nationwide priority in 2020.

Initiatives to transform how diversity, equity, and inclusion are embodied in corporate settings have been electrifying the business world for months.

DE&I hiring skyrocketed. Companies with innovative ideas about inclusion were given attention and seen as industry leaders. It seemed like we were entering a new era in which a commitment to DE&I would be as foundational to company success as effective marketing and sales.

Instead, the movement has steadily lost momentum. DE&I hiring is dropping, and positions created just a few short years ago (or less) are already being eliminated. Those hired to drive change struggle to make the kind of impact they once envisioned.

At the highest levels, company leaders seem confused about how to make DE&I an authentic, permanent part of their organizations.

From my perspective, it's not that leaders don't care about DE&I or want it to be part of their mission, but that they don't know how to weave it into the fabric of their company culture rather than filling in a box on a diversity hiring checklist.

To understand why this is happening, it's essential to go back to corporate DE&I's roots in the 1960s. It started with President John F. Kennedy's call for affirmative action and the passing of the Civil Rights Act. This made DE&I, as writer Kim Tran aptly put it in her [Harper's Bazaar article](#) on the subject, an industry dominated by "personnel managers."



As I ruminated on this idea, I began to wonder: Could the root of our country's DE&I struggles be that it lives in the wrong place on the org chart?

In other words, is DE&I really an HR initiative, or does it belong elsewhere? After all, shouldn't DE&I be collaboratively shaped by those who resonate most closely with the brand's core values and messaging and who maintain a deep connection with its customers and stakeholders?

If your answer is yes (mine was!), then the responsibility of leading DE&I should be shared by the Chief Marketing Officer and the Chief DE&I Officer, working in lockstep to drive transformative change.

This belief is what inspired me to write this whitepaper, which will explore the current corporate DE&I disconnect in greater detail. Why is it happening? How have recent events influenced it? What's on the horizon ahead?

Most importantly, we'll explore how CMOs and their marketing teams can be the key to unlocking a fresh approach and new potential for DE&I to make a lasting and meaningful impact.

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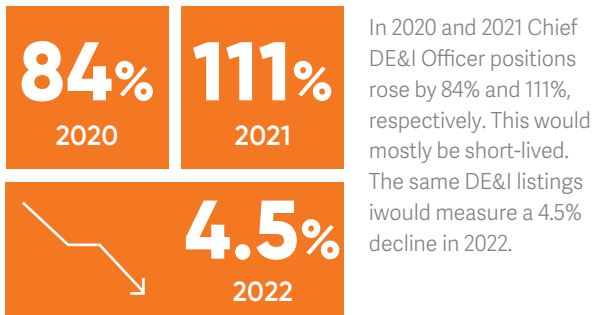
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The Current Landscape of DE&I in Corporate America

DE&I has been on a years-long rollercoaster in corporate America. In 2020, the death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer sparked nationwide outcries for social justice reform, prompting companies in every industry to prioritize the Chief DE&I officer as a key strategic role in the C-suite.

For many organizations, it was their first time hiring for this position. DE&I job postings exploded. [Indeed reported](#) that DE&I listings on its site grew by a staggering 123% just between May and September of that year—the five months immediately following Floyd's killing.

LinkedIn reports a similar experience. In [2020](#) and [2021](#), listings for open Chief DE&I Officer positions rose by 84% and 111%, respectively.

It seemed that corporate America was experiencing a real transformation—a universal up-leveling of the active commitment from companies to make DE&I a top organizational objective, reflected in both hiring practices and overall business missions.

But this would all mostly be short-lived. By 2022, the same LinkedIn metric measuring 111% growth in DE&I listings in 2021 would measure a [4.5% decline](#) in 2022.

The *Wall Street Journal's* [comprehensive recap](#) of recent DE&I trends reports that Chief Diversity Officers (CDO) are

experiencing 40% higher turnover than HR counterparts in 2023, and CDO searches are down 75 percent.

Earlier this year, three Hollywood studios and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts all [laid off or lost their top diversity executives](#) in less than two weeks in a show of what one top exec coined “diversity fatigue.” If Hollywood—a collective public champion for social justice through their media—is willing to toss DE&I hires to the wayside, what does that suggest about the nationwide trajectory of the role?

Equally alarming is the number of active DE&I executives feeling disheartened by the shortage of real change they've been able to impact within their organizations—not for lack of trying, but rather because they were missing support from C-suite peers and/or resources to implement effective strategies.

Fast Company recently published a piece titled “Former DE&I Executive Speaks Out About How the Role Failed at Her Company.” It reported on the experience of Tia Williams, a Black woman who headed DE&I for a large tech company.

In the interview, Tia recalled being stonewalled by unclear strategies, lack of internal resources, and the discomfort of other C-suite peers with some of the DE&I programs she proposed (for example: a training to educate employees on implicit bias).

Further, she was left out of important meetings and decisions related to DE&I, which made it impossible for her to effect real change.

But *Fast Company* removed the story after receiving backlash about its inclusion of stereotypes, a further indication of the struggle in corporate culture to successfully hold DE&I-related discourse.

What we're left with now is the question of whether DE&I has really gained momentum in the business world at all or if—as *The Nation* reporter Elie Mystal put it sharply—corporate America has only been [pretending to care](#) all along.

Implications of the Supreme Court Ruling on Affirmative Action

While corporate DE&I struggled to maintain its footing in recent months, the Supreme Court added fuel to the fire by **effectively ending race-conscious admission programs**—familarly referred to as affirmative action—at colleges and universities across the United States.

It's a decision that both sides of an increasingly polarized DE&I discussion began to leverage to their advantage. Supporters of the decision claim that it ends decades of unfair policies that disproportionately admitted minority students using non-merit-based criteria.

Detractors say the decision erases decades of progress and eliminates an institutionalized commitment to diversity and inclusion, especially at historically white schools (which most colleges and universities are).

No matter where you stand on the issue, it's undeniable that the timing and impact of the decision add a layer of volatility to an already sensitive DE&I landscape in our country.

But it could also indicate demand for a more sophisticated and nuanced approach to DE&I that doesn't allow decision-makers to rely on pre-built frameworks or arbitrary checkboxes.

For higher education institutions, this demand is already becoming apparent. In California, six community college professors **filed a lawsuit** against the state's public two-year college system to end a rule requiring them to incorporate DE&I principles into their curricular coursework. At the same time, those who launched the SCOTUS affirmative action case say **they'll be "vigilant"** in ensuring institutions abide by changing rules.

All the while, institutions, especially admissions departments, are left to figure out how they'll ensure diversity remains alive in their student bodies without the built-in frameworks affirmative action provided for decades.

Like their corporate counterparts, higher education institutions will need to put forth a more meaningful and nuanced effort to maintain diverse admissions as a top priority.

The Business Case for DE&I

There is one important stakeholder group not at odds over how DE&I should be implemented or whether or not it belongs in the corporate world, and that's the consumer.

A **2022 study by McKinsey** outlined the rise of the inclusive consumer—one who shapes their shopping and brand loyalty habits around the level of DE&I commitment shown by the businesses with which they interact.

A separate study by Amazon found that **45% of consumers** go out of their way to find brands that have corporate commitments to DE&I and will pay more for products that promote it.

But winning over inclusive consumers isn't as easy as just saying your company cares about DE&I. The same study by Amazon also reports that three-quarters of consumers expect brands to act in support of important social issues, and 80% want to buy from brands whose values align with their own.

The takeaway? To be successful going forward, brands need to know more about their customers than just their pain points, solution needs, and buying habits. They also need to know their values, the issues they care about, and how to message a shared commitment to those issues to foster connection.

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Further, it means their internal commitment to DE&I must be matched by inclusive external messaging tapping into the organization's key stakeholder audiences. Today's consumers won't be fooled by cookie-cutter DE&I statements or blanket attempts to checkbox diversity in an organization.

They do their homework and hold organizations accountable for living up to the DE&I promises, values, and standards they claim to uphold. Further, they want to work with companies whose values are aligned with their own, meaning authenticity is imperative in DE&I-related messaging.



The CMO's Crucial Role in Championing DE&I

A company's Chief Marketing Officer is typically the point person for defining and communicating core brand values and beliefs. What could be more value-driven than diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Yet somehow, DE&I is decidedly disconnected from marketing in many companies, instead headed mostly by CEOs and HR executives and implemented alongside more general hiring and personnel policies.

When considering the disconnect many organizations feel right now between their desire to implement effective DE&I strategies and their success in doing so, it's clear that this is a likely root of the problem.

CMOs have the ability to bridge this critical gap. Here's how:

1 CMOs Know How to Lead Value-Driven Strategies

CMOs are experts when it comes to knowing the customer and what they care about. With a deep understanding of the market, they dive into the psyche of customers, unraveling the vibrant tapestry of their needs, preferences, and motivations for engaging and buying. Their expertise lies not just in identifying the problems that need solving but in crafting solutions that resonate on a personal level, fostering a deeper connection and engagement.

CMOs also excel in navigating the multifaceted channels of interaction that customers frequent, creating meaningful and impactful touchpoints. They are skilled at creating narratives that speak to their audience's core values and spark a dialogue that fosters a sense of community and belonging.

Moreover, they are experienced in building audience-focused outreach and communication strategies. This is the approach companies must take if they want to implement DE&I initiatives that resonate with target audiences and drive greater alignment with customers. It is no longer only about representation; it's about weaving DE&I into the very fabric of the brand's narrative, creating a blueprint that reflects the rich diversity of the customer base.

2 CMOs Can Ensure Authenticity in Brand Representation Related to DE&I

Authenticity is at the center of connecting with customers. Forrester put it aptly when they said that customers crave authenticity—and that **CMOs can deliver**. The article reports that 70% of consumers say they relate better to and have greater confidence in authentic brands.

Further, it says CMOs are the most strategically

positioned members of the C-suite to lead the charge around brand authenticity. They have the most direct, holistic understanding of brand perception and how to impact it via public, smartly-branded efforts.

When it comes to DEI, total authenticity is absolutely critical. Missing the mark can lead to disastrous consequences amidst cancel culture and the hyper-shareable world of the Internet. Customers are ready and willing to call brands out when DE&I messages don't align with their authentic brand and actions.

3 Marketing Must Happen Internally to Effect Change

Authentic DE&I strategies require buy-in from internal stakeholders—executive leaders, employees, boards of directors, and investors, to name a few. Not only do internal audiences need to buy into public-facing DE&I efforts, they play a central role in infusing DE&I into the fabric of an organization.

This extends to employee advocacy, talent acquisition strategies, hiring practices, customer service, risk management processes and outcomes, and procurement decisions, among others. Essentially, it requires steadfast intentionality and synergy from every quadrant of an organization—an inside-out approach that embodies values alignment and inclusive excellence in every facet of interaction and transaction. Without this internal buy-in and partnership, executing authentic DE&I initiatives is impossible.

The CMO possesses the essential expertise to craft marketing strategies that align with the values and priorities of internal teams. This alignment is strengthened when CMOs collaborate closely with DE&I officers. By working together, they can craft DE&I strategies that not only fit seamlessly within the broader organizational ethos but also mobilize employees to become vocal advocates for these principles. Such a unified approach ensures that DE&I values are consistently represented in both internal actions and external brand narratives.



Real-World Examples of Successful Marketing-Led DE&I

In today’s dynamic marketing landscape, the role of DE&I has transcended beyond mere buzzwords to become a cornerstone of successful brand narratives. The following case studies show how leading brands have embraced DE&I in their marketing strategies and woven it into their organizational fabric.

These campaigns resonate with audiences because they’re rooted in authenticity, showcasing real stories and fostering genuine connections. By aligning their offerings with inclusive narratives, these brands have managed to strike a chord with a diverse customer base, redefining the paradigms of effective marketing.



Let’s explore these exemplary campaigns to understand why they worked and how they are paving the way for a more inclusive marketing future.

Sephora CMO Leads the Way on DE&I Initiatives

In a 2021 [interview with Business Insider](#), Sephora CMO Deborah Yeh demonstrated how the brand was ahead of the curve on its DE&I initiatives—and how she was leading the effort.

Yeh not only talks about the business opportunity that exists in marketing to the inclusive customer, but she also shares how Sephora does it authentically through product development, inclusive user-generated content (UGC) campaigns, hiring practices, employee training, and more. Some examples:

↑3%	Their percentage of African-American store directors increased by 3% in one year.
79%	79% of their UGC creators identify as POC.

	They launched employee training programs on inclusive leadership and cultural allyship.
	They updated their product technology to be more skin-tone-inclusive.

Under Yeh's leadership, the company has implemented authentic and tangible actions that set Sephora apart. The brand has managed to foster a genuine connection with its audience by showcasing a deep understanding and respect for diversity through its inclusive UGC and hiring practices.

Moreover, by actively enhancing employee training and updating product technology to be more inclusive, Sephora has demonstrated a commitment to DE&I that creates a ripple effect that encourages both inclusivity and innovation within the industry.

Gillette Embraces Diversity Through Inclusive Marketing

In 2019—years before transgender rights became the hot-button issue it is today—Gillette featured a [video ad](#) on its Facebook page of a young man who had recently transitioned and was learning to shave from his father.

The ad featured a real customer sharing his testimony and experience about his transition and the idea of shaving his face for the first time.

Gillette’s approach here works because it aligns with its product offerings. They don’t just slap a buzzword on their content to check a box—they show their brand support for an issue by sharing a real, relevant customer experience that’s universal for their customers (their first time shaving).

In fact, Gillette doesn’t even explicitly mention the issue of transgender rights in the ad at all. They let the customer’s story speak for itself.

Despite the divisiveness that exists around transgender rights, Gillette’s authentic approach allowed them to reach more than [100,000 social media mentions](#) and 600,000

engagements while maintaining a 60% positive sentiment overall.




This and similarly inclusive ads boosted the percentage of consumers who felt the brand “shared their values” from just 42% to 71%, with notable support from younger consumers.

Dove Pledges Commitment to Real Beauty

One of the most well-known examples of marketing-led DE&I is Dove’s real beauty campaign, which aims to celebrate all body types—colors, shapes, ages, etc. The campaign features a diverse group of customers in each ad and aims to redefine traditional stereotypes about what it means to be beautiful.

Dove’s Real Beauty Pledge is included alongside the campaign, outlining its commitment to making “a positive experience of beauty” accessible to all women.

The pledge shares specific, concrete actions that Dove takes to do this, including:

	Portraying real women as they are in real life.
	Portraying women with diversity, honesty, and respect.
	Helping girls build body confidence and self-esteem.

Dove's campaign resonated profoundly with global audiences because it boldly challenged the narrow definitions of beauty that the media have perpetuated for years. It catered to a yearning for authenticity and representation by showcasing a diverse and realistic portrayal of women.

The campaign also went beyond mere advertisements—it was a pledge to foster more positive experiences of beauty for all women, a commitment that was both empowering and inspiring.

Further, the campaign’s success stemmed from its

alignment with the universal values of self-acceptance and confidence. By actively helping girls build body confidence and self-esteem, Dove created a powerful emotional connection with its audience, transcending the typical consumer-brand relationship.

This approach not only celebrated the diversity of beauty but also sparked a broader societal shift towards inclusivity and acceptance, establishing Dove as a brand that genuinely walks the walk when it comes to promoting diversity, honesty, and respect.

As a result, Dove also experienced massive benefits from a marketing and sales perspective—its annual revenue **grew 60%** over the campaign’s first decade, from \$2.5B to \$4B. It continues to earn hundreds of millions of social media impressions from campaign-related hashtags.

Google CMO Spearheads Honest Look at DEI Strategies

In 2018, Google CMO Lorraine Twohill recognized that Google’s creative work didn’t have the level and quality of diversity the brand wanted in its campaigns. She shared this concern with her public online platforms and announced that she’d lead an initiative to further analyze and solve the problem.

And, true to her word, she **published the findings** of the effort in a post later that year. She called out specific areas where Google recognized they needed to improve, including more diverse hiring on their creative teams (to beat a poor industry average of 6%) and increased inclusion as it relates to age and race in their brand imagery.

Twohill also outlined ways in which Google was taking steps to remediate these problems, including by reshooting ad campaigns, implementing employee DE&I training programs, diversifying representation across Google’s internal teams and agency partners, and using AI to measure campaign representation.

What’s notable here is that Google is already known as an inclusive brand—and was in 2018, too. But Twohill

recognized and publicly admitted that this wasn't enough. Google wanted and needed to back up its commitment with action, which is what her efforts did.

Authenticity Helps Nike's Marketing Risk Pay Off

If you remember Nike's 2018 [ad featuring Colin Kaepernick](#), you'll remember there was no shortage of controversy around its message. Kaepernick was then at the center of a national debate on whether kneeling during the national anthem was right, wrong, or should even be allowed, and had recently been released by the San Francisco 49ers.

As predicted, there was a backlash in response to the ad. But it became apparent after a few days that the positive publicity outweighed the detractor outcry—in the form of [\\$43 million](#) in media exposure. Their stock also reached an [all-time high](#) and saw a [36% increase](#) in digital sales that quarter. The ad is now a hallmark case study of a brand successfully executing purpose-driven marketing.

Despite some unavoidable backlash, Nike's core audience—young people ages 15-45, a large number of them athletes—stood in alignment with the values represented in the campaign.

What We Can Learn From These Case Studies

Lesson #1: DE&I Isn't Trendy

Inevitably, the most talked-about issues on the news fluctuate alongside current events and other trends. But your DE&I commitments shouldn't be dictated by those changes.

Authentic, effective DE&I isn't trendy. It's built around issues that are relevant to an organization and its customer base, and it needs to be long-lasting to effect real change. Continually chasing after the issue of the moment will leave

you spending more time crafting PR statements than actually making an impact

And while it is sometimes important to comment on timely issues and show where your brand stands on them, your DE&I strategy must be rooted in more permanent, organizationally relevant commitments.

Case in point: the recent Bud Light and Dylan Mulvaney [debacle](#) led to nearly immediate backlash from loyal customers and a [20% drop in sales](#).

The company's marketing department actually led this initiative, but the leaders at its helm failed to think critically about how loyal customer audiences would receive it. This mistake has cost Bud Light millions of dollars and a seemingly endless stream of poor PR.

The problem at the root of Bud Light's major mishap here wasn't the issue itself—plenty of companies actively and publicly support transgender rights and have been for several years. Rather, it was the campaign's lack of alignment with Bud Light's core audience and overall brand.

In short, Bud Light latched onto the issue when it began to trend on the news and social media without really thinking about whether their brand truly embodied the values they were supporting.

Lesson #2: Customer Focus Is Paramount

Every DE&I story we've covered in this guide drives home the fundamental importance of aligning DE&I initiatives with customer values. In the case of Bud Light and Dylan Mulvaney, the brand experienced a huge miss by not considering their customer base first.

Bud Light took a misaligned stance on a trending issue. As a result, they were accused of trying too hard and came off as inauthentic. Five months later, the brand is still [struggling to recover](#).

Brands should not have to be slaves to their customer bases regarding DE&I—especially when a real need for change exists in the world. In fact, brands are in a prime position to promote positive change, alter harmful narratives, and widen audience perspectives. But when it's not authentic, it won't work.

On the other hand, Nike addressed an equally timely and complex issue head-on but navigated through the backlash to experience overwhelmingly positive results. The difference? Nike's values, previous public stances, and target audiences aligned with their take.

CMOs are in-house experts on this kind of brand/audience alignment, and yours can be your go-to guide for building DE&I strategies that make a positive impact while representing your brand honestly.

Lesson #3: Words Alone Aren't Enough

Consumers expect brands to follow through regarding vocal DE&I commitments and to be able to substantiate them with tangible actions and results. And in the Internet age, it's easier than ever for consumers to confirm that you do. That's what made the efforts by Google's and Sephora's CMOs successful—they backed up their DE&I goals with real action and then shared that action in the form of measurable results.

Every DE&I commitment you make must be accompanied by a comprehensive approach encompassing a well-thought-out strategy, actionable plans, and robust measurement mechanisms. In this way, brands can ensure that their DE&I commitments are not just words but translate into meaningful actions that foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

Lesson #4: DE&I Shouldn't be Homogenous

Today, it's easy for companies to flock to the same issues when they hit the top of the news cycle, trend on X, formerly Twitter, or otherwise garner public attention.

This can be good in some ways—it harnesses collective influence to create positive change. But it can also limit DE&I perspectives.

So many important and meaningful DE&I issues deserve attention and action. Companies worldwide also have diverse expertise, skills, resources, and availability to address these issues. What if brands focused on their own immediate ecosystems instead of gravitating toward the most publicized issue at any given time?

We see the power of this approach in the case studies we've covered—for example, Dove changing the narrative on beauty standards using their industry platform.

What if every company and DE&I team took a similar look at their own industry, geographic community, customer base, and internal resources to ask: Where can we make the most impact?

We would see more issues being addressed in more significant ways. Equally importantly, people would believe brands about their DE&I commitments and be compelled to jump on board. DE&I strategy would be a means for making the world a better place, not a corporate compliance checkbox or a launching point for argumentative discourse.





BRIDGING THE GAP: Why CMOs Should Influence DE&I

By now, we've identified a trifecta of sorts for effective DE&I strategies for the future: brand authenticity, an audience-focused approach, and direct influence from the CMO. The last of these is particularly important as DE&I officers diminish and existing DE&I teams look for greater support from other parts of their organizations.

Here are some of the key ways CMOs can fill DE&I gaps, provide meaningful support, and enhance DE&I strategies for greater impact:

1. Diverse Hiring Practices

Brand Messaging

Just like customers, potential employees look for organizations whose values align with their own. More specifically, **80% of employees** in the workforce want to work for companies that value and prioritize DE&I—and they're likely turning to your outward-facing brand messaging to determine if you do.

Your brand messaging transcends being a mere marketing strategy; it reflects your company's ethos and is a determinant factor in creating a magnetic pull for skilled professionals in your industry. A thoughtful integration of DE&I in your branding narratives, marketing campaigns, and talent acquisition content can significantly influence the caliber and diversity of applicants aspiring to join your team. It sets the tone, indicating that your organization is not just a workplace but a space where varied perspectives are embraced, fostering innovation and collective growth.

With your CMO heavily involved in the strategizing and execution of DE&I initiatives, you'll ensure that the messaging resonates well across diverse audiences, maintaining a fine balance between brand integrity and audience expectations. This concerted effort can propel your brand to be perceived as a leader in fostering DE&I, thereby enhancing both your market position and the richness of your organization.

Unbiased Descriptions and Language

Your CMOs are your go-to experts for language and messaging, pivotal in instilling a more pronounced presence of DE&I in your hiring processes. They hold the keys to developing not only job descriptions but also recruitment advertising campaigns and other vital communications that reach potential employees, such as enriched company descriptions or authentic mission statements.

Going beyond the surface, they have the skills to scrutinize and refine the language used, ensuring it is unbiased and inclusive. This initiative is more than just a strategy; it's a commitment to fostering a culture that resonates with diverse potential employees. It's about creating welcoming narratives and fostering a sense of belonging and recognition from the first interaction. This careful approach to language amplifies your organization's appeal and lays the groundwork for a workforce enriched with varied perspectives and experiences.

Pipeline Development

Pipeline development is a critical strategy when it comes to building a more diverse workforce within your organization. It involves more than just advertising job vacancies and hoping for various applicants. The process should be proactive and intentional, focusing on identifying and recruiting a pool of candidates that brings your team a rich array of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

CMOs can play a pivotal role in helping to reshape the recruitment process, making it resemble a lead generation process. This approach means extending your reach far beyond traditional hiring channels. It's about establishing connections with recruitment partners who have a knack for tapping into diverse talent groups, and utilizing platforms where you can reach a broader spectrum of potential candidates.

By actively seeking out and engaging with a variety of candidate groups, you not only diversify the representation across your workforce but also foster a culture that values inclusivity and different viewpoints. This proactive approach ensures a steady flow of fresh perspectives that can drive innovation and adaptability in your organization. It transforms your hiring pipeline into a dynamic tool that fuels diversity and inclusivity in the workplace, enriching your team in the long run.

Collect and Act on Feedback

Collecting and responding to employee feedback is a cornerstone in refining your DE&I initiatives. It provides invaluable insights into the nuances of employee experiences, unveiling areas that require enhancement and fostering a pathway for deeper collaboration with team members to amplify the DE&I presence across your organization.

Drawing upon their expertise in gathering insightful feedback from prospects and customers, CMOs can be your strategic allies in this effort. They can implement tried and tested strategies to keep a finger on the pulse of employee sentiments, fostering a responsive and adaptive approach to your company's DE&I efforts, thus ensuring a workplace that not only listens but acts with empathy and foresight.

Develop DE&I Training Programs

Despite the buzz around DE&I and the fact that almost every business is touting a commitment to it in some capacity, **only 38% of workers** say they've participated in DE&I training over the past year, and 40% say their workplace doesn't offer them.

This disconnect in employee engagement makes it impossible to build a company culture around DE&I or make it a prominent part of the work experience.

DE&I training is critical even for those tasked with leading it, as demonstrated by the recent **backlash Target received** after their Chief DE&I Officer, Kiera Fernandez, called on white women to lead the charge in speaking up against racial transgressions.

Fernandez said:

“ I think the No. 1 thing that I would encourage white women to do is take the [Diversity, equity, and Inclusion] learnings and use your voice, so the woman of color in the room doesn't always have to be the woman that calls out the transgression. ”

2. Fostering an Inclusive Work Environment

Build a DE&I Culture

Authentic DE&I in any culture doesn't happen strictly through branding and marketing—it also requires an internal culture that embraces its principles. And that requires buy-in and participation from employees. CMOs can enhance your internal DE&I efforts by helping you build strong employee communication plans that educate workers on company values, set behavior standards, and share ways to get involved.

It's easy to see why the statement has been controversial. I'm inclined to give Fernandez the benefit of the doubt here, assuming she did not intend to be divisive. Instead, she wanted to encourage everyone to use their unique positions of influence to speak out against prejudice.

Of course, she missed the mark when it came to choosing the right words, highlighting another place where CMOs can provide much-needed expertise.

CMOs are masters of messaging and can help develop training programs that not only educate employees about DE&I but teach them how to communicate ideas effectively and in ways that will make the most positive impact.



3. Injecting DE&I Into Your Marketing Strategy

Ensure Representation

Your marketing content should mirror the diverse society in which we operate, a responsibility that your CMO should passionately uphold in every campaign crafted. The potential impact of such representation is evident in [Microsoft's acclaimed "Changing the Game" campaign for their Xbox brand](#). The campaign was launched in support of the Xbox Adaptive Controller, a device designed to meet the needs of gamers with limited mobility. Not only did it generate a substantial surge in earned media and social voice, but it also resonated profoundly, winning prestigious awards such as the Grand Prix in Brand Experience & Activation at the 2019 Cannes Lions Festival.

By fostering a deep connection with the DE&I strategy, your CMO can expertly create campaigns that echo this level of success, authentically and inclusively showcasing your organization's culture.

Make Public Commitments to DE&I

In today's dynamic business landscape, directly addressing DE&I is commendable and essential. Your

creating and endorsing these critical messages. The genuine commitment to inclusivity showcased by brands like Microsoft reflected in their sustained efforts to enhance accessibility through technology, stands as a testament to the depth of impact these commitments can have.

Your CMO can help ensure that your commitments to DE&I are both authentic and resonate powerfully with your target audiences, safeguarding your brand's image and fostering a deeper connection with consumers.

Thread DE&I Into Regular Campaigns

As evidenced by successful campaigns from renowned brands like Gillette, Nike, and Dove, integrating DE&I into regular campaigns often has a more profound impact when organically woven into the narrative rather than explicitly mentioned.

Following the footsteps of companies like Microsoft that have consistently championed inclusivity — from developing tools that assist individuals with disabilities to creating inclusive educational materials — your CMO can steer your marketing team towards a path where DE&I is a natural and frequent aspect of the campaigns, enhancing both reach and impact.

4. Educating Key Decision Makers

Understanding Genuine vs. Perceived Risk

As we've seen in the brand and campaign examples in earlier sections, DE&I initiatives—like any involving public messaging—come with a certain degree of risk.

However, the complex nature of navigating the DE&I landscape can skew how we view risk across several internal and external workplace scenarios, from hiring and promoting employees to developing marketing campaigns to taking a public stance on particular issues and more.

Safety and similarity biases can naturally hold decision-makers back from making DE&I-related decisions they know are right in favor of those that feel easier or safer for the brand (and often, for themselves).

It's critical for key decision makers to clearly analyze risk scenarios as they relate to DE&I to position their brand intentionally, develop confident and aligned DE&I messaging, and make decisions that generally enhance DE&I across their organization.

Recognizing and Minimizing Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias, by its literal definition, impacts decisions without the decision maker realizing it at all. For DE&I, this has significant implications—even leaders who consider themselves to be unprejudiced and committed to equitable action may be making decisions that are unconsciously biased toward certain groups or individuals.

These biases are deeply ingrained, automatic prejudices shaped by societal stereotypes and personal experiences. They can result in hiring, promotion, and compensation disparities that disproportionately affect underrepresented groups, perpetuating inequalities.

To foster a more inclusive environment and eliminate these unconscious biases, leaders must lean on more data-driven approaches—ones that CMOs and marketers have already mastered through analyzing audience and user demographics.

The example of Google's self-study perfectly demonstrates how data can make an impact. The brand was considered internally and externally to be inclusive and diverse, but objective data demonstrated they lacked in certain areas. Armed with this information, they were able to hold themselves accountable and take action that drove real change.

This type of intentional bias prevention will become even more critical as artificial intelligence (AI) advances, and companies can create their own large language models. Without the right education and controls in place, biases left unchecked will be at risk of getting passed on

Maintaining Proactive Accountability Measures

Speaking of accountability—it's one of the most essential components of your DE&I efforts. We know by now that customers and public audiences can and do hold brands accountable for being good stewards of their DE&I promises and upholding DE&I principles in their marketing campaigns and brand messages.

CMOs and marketers can help decision-makers put accountability frameworks in place similar to those used to track and monitor ongoing campaign performance. They can help identify important KPIs and set benchmark goals to reach over specific periods.

These types of frameworks can be enhanced by data intelligence and automation tools but should be reviewed regularly by key stakeholders to understand where the brand stands in comparison to its own DE&I goals and external expectations and how to continually improve and enhance its efforts.



MOVING AHEAD: **DE&I In 2024 and Beyond**

In the wake of the transformative DE&I movements that have swept across industries in recent years, the dialogue among forward-thinking organizations, visionary CEOs, and dedicated DE&I professionals has evolved profoundly. The discourse no longer centers on integrating DE&I into the business landscape—its place is unequivocally affirmed.

The pressing question today is not how to prioritize DE&I but how to embed it deeply and meaningfully into the very fabric of your organization. It's about orchestrating a shift that fosters tangible progress, resonates authentically with your brand's philosophy, sparks stakeholder engagement, and propels you to the forefront as a trailblazer in DE&I leadership.

At this critical juncture, your CMO is the key that can connect these dots for you.

They can work with your Chief DE&I Officer and other important DE&I influencers like your CEO, HR team, employees, and even customers to create a strategy that's

not only well-rounded but deeply ingrained in your brand's identity, thereby amplifying its impact.

As a CMO, the call to action is clear and urgent. The moment has arrived to fully immerse yourself in the DE&I sphere, broaden your understanding, and spearhead initiatives that align with your brand's values.

It's imperative to scrutinize your organization's current DE&I efforts. You must be certain they align with your brand's intrinsic values and meet the expectations of your clients and employees.

Ask yourself and other executive leaders: Who is leading our organization's DE&I efforts, and how can we build stronger alliances to foster a collaborative and impactful approach?

Looking ahead, organizations where marketing emerges as a potent force in driving DE&I initiatives will solidify their brand position on critical issues and pave the way for a legacy of enduring, transformative impact.