



## Stay Hilton Go Out - Hilton Targets LGBT Travelers with Pride

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Mitchell Communications Group and Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Jan 1,2013

**Summary:** 2013 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence Winner — Multicultural Public Relations — Business

In March 2012, Hilton launched “Stay Hilton. Go Out.”, its first marketing campaign targeting leisure business from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) travelers and improving its corporate reputation within the community. The program was anchored by a global LGBT-themed consumer package and included sponsorships and partnerships with many high-profile LGBT organizations, and efforts to maintain an authentic conversation with this highly valued consumer segment.

Multicultural public relations includes any type of program, such as institutional, marketing and community relations, specifically targeted to a cultural group.

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### SITUATION ANALYSIS

Hilton Hotels & Resorts, the flagship brand of Hilton Worldwide, promises to make each guest feel cared for, valued and respected, and to do so in a way that projects contemporary relevance. In March 2012, Hilton launched “Stay Hilton. Go Out.”, its first marketing campaign targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) travelers. The program was anchored by a global LGBT-themed consumer package and included sponsorships and partnerships with many high-profile LGBT organizations, and efforts to maintain an authentic conversation with this highly valued consumer segment and affirm Hilton’s support of the LGBT community. Supporting agencies for the “Stay Hilton. Go Out.” launch included Mitchell Communications Group, Murphy O'Brien and Golley Slater.

### RESEARCH

Research showed that earning long-term loyalty from this segment presented a significant opportunity for Hilton. In the United States and Canada alone, LGBT travelers generate \$65 billion of the \$1.3 trillion produced from travel and tourism annually. Not only do they have a high demand for leisure and international travel, but according to Greenfield Research & Kinsey Report, 94 percent of this audience will go out of their way to purchase products and services marketed directly to them.

The 16th Annual Gay & Lesbian Tourism Report (Community Marketing Inc., San Francisco, Calif.) provided valuable insights that helped Hilton create its communications strategy. Findings included:

- The most important hotel amenities for LGBT travelers include great location, free Wi-Fi, price and gay-friendly reputation.
- Attending LGBT events are key motivators within the LGBT community, generating a high number of hotel night stays. On average, gay men and lesbians spend three nights in a destination when traveling for an event.
- LGBT travelers are still spending, but are cost-conscious. High percentages of gay men said discount-laced LGBT hotel packages are motivating factors when choosing accommodations.
- 71 percent of gay men and 62 percent of lesbians own a smartphone, and 60 percent of LGBT smartphone owners use their devices during their trips to find local tourism resources.

## PLANNING

The goal of “Stay Hilton. Go Out.” is to position Hilton as a top-of-mind choice for LGBT travelers and to continue the legacy of developing innovative products and services to meet the needs of tomorrow’s savvy global traveler. Through research, Hilton identified segment trends and insights to ensure it was providing the services and amenities most important to its target audience of LGBT travelers and friends of the LGBT community.

In order to achieve its goal, Hilton aimed to make sure LGBT travelers knew they were welcome and wanted at Hilton. Three objectives were identified for the initiative:

- Enter the broader LGBT conversation and, ultimately, establish travel consideration among the audience
- Give reasons to believe that Hilton genuinely values this segment
- Build brand loyalty and lay the foundation for ongoing engagement with Hilton

In addition, driving revenue and gaining market share within the segment were set as long-term objectives.

Hilton Worldwide Corporate policy prohibits Hilton from disclosing its budget amounts; however, the total amount for the campaign has remained under budget.

## EXECUTION

Hilton chose to immediately focus on building a database of LGBT consumers and finding authentic ways to engage the segment. The first months of engagement consisted of global marketing activity supported by hotel participation. Since the campaign’s debut in March 2012, Hilton has launched a series of activations, including:

- Sensitivity training for team members to ensure LGBT guests feel comfortable and welcome
- A package for LGBT travelers – “Stay Hilton. Go Out.” – including:
  - 10 percent off the best available rate
  - Double base points for Hilton HHonors, the brand’s guest loyalty program
  - Free one-year digital subscription to *OUT*, the world’s most-read gay magazine
  - Free high-speed Internet
  - Late checkout when available
- Landing page promoting the program on hilton.com (hilton.com/GoOut)
- Sweepstakes awarding trips to major LGBT events
- Sponsorship of high-profile LGBT events, including The Advocate’s 45th anniversary party, Gay Days Orlando, WorldPride London, Atlanta Pride and OUT100
- Partnerships with LGBT organizations, including the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association and National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce
- Online marketing and advertisements
- Creation of opt-in LGBT traveler database

- Media relations and relationship building with LGBT media
- Direct mail campaign to tourism offices in markets home to Hilton properties and LGBT events
- Street teams and interactive photo booths at Gay Days Orlando, WorldPride London, Dallas Pride, Atlanta Pride and OUT100, all in key feeder markets for Hilton

## EVALUATION

The program has paid immediate dividends, with consumers naming Hilton the No. 1 hotel chain doing the best job reaching out to the LGBT community, according to the 17th Annual LGBT Travel Survey (Community Marketing Inc., San Francisco, Calif.). Parent company Hilton Worldwide saw its score on the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index, a leading benchmarking tool for U.S. businesses that measures LGBT equality in the workplace, jump 30 points from 2011 to 2012. In Europe, Hilton was shortlisted, alongside Apple, Facebook, MTV and others, in the Brand of the Year category of the *Out in the City & g3 Readers' Awards*, designed to showcase individuals and organizations demonstrating an outstanding commitment to the LGBT community.

Additionally, "Stay Hilton. Go Out." has received a plethora of media coverage since its launch in March, with articles and mentions in notable publications and websites, including leading LGBT magazines and blogs. This was a major success in meeting the objective of entering the LGBT conversation. Some of these outlets included *Los Angeles Times*, *OUT*, *USA Today*, *Toronto Star*, *Out Traveler*, *HotelChatter*, *The Global and Mail*, *TravelAge West*, *Instinct*, *Xtra Ottawa*, *Gay Travel Advice*, *Shermans Travel* and *Passport*.

In 2012, there were a total of 65 placements in publications and websites with a total reach of nearly 90 million. These placements helped to communicate the message that Hilton truly values this segment.

The number of participating hotels started at 53 and more than tripled over the first six months of the initiative. It also met its objective of raising revenue. To date, the "Stay Hilton. Go Out." package has generated more than \$200,000 in revenue and approximately 830 nights booked. The brand has also generated tens of thousands of dollars in additional revenue from guests accessing [hilton.com/GoOut](http://hilton.com/GoOut) and booking higher-priced accommodations.

The [hilton.com/GoOut](http://hilton.com/GoOut) landing page, sweepstakes and onsite activations have garnered 3,608 new Hilton HHonors members and 3,484 "opt-ins" to the Hilton LGBT email database, which will allow Hilton to target the LGBT segment with special offers in the future.

Throughout its launch year Hilton found the "Stay Hilton. Go Out." marketing campaign to be a great success in all aspects, and the brand looks forward to seeking out new and innovative ways to reach the LGBT segment in 2013.