



Politicians, corporations hop on rainbow ad bandwagon

By **DEAN CALBREATH**, The Daily Transcript
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Republican congressional candidate Carl DeMaio drew some national headlines last week for airing what is said to be the first ad from either political party showing a major candidate with his gay partner.

But while the ad may mark a revolutionary step for political campaigns, it reflects a growing trend in advertising, with companies ranging from **McDonald's** (NYSE: MCD) to **Urban Outfitters** (Nasdaq: URBN) airing ads featuring gay couples or themes.

Within the past month alone, an ad for **Coca-Cola** (NYSE: KO) during the Super Bowl showed a brief clip of two gay dads ice-skating with their daughter as "America the Beautiful" played in the background.

And **Chevrolet** marked the opening ceremonies of the Winter Olympics in Sochi with one ad featuring a gay wedding and another featuring two gay dads taking care of their kids, in an apparent response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's crackdown on gay "propaganda."

"While what it means to be a family hasn't changed, what a family looks like has," an off-camera narrator said. "This is the new us."

Such ads now represent a growing part of the media landscape, aimed at a gay and lesbian marketplace with a buying power estimated at approaching \$800 billion by MarketResearch.com, a website that monitors marketing trends.

But the ads have often led to sharp backlashes from conservative groups opposed to gay marriage, such as the American Family Association, or Family Research Center, ActRight and National Organization for Marriage, or NOM.

Just last week, NOM announced it would buy ads in favor of DeMaio's challengers in the June 3 Republican primary, vying to unseat Democrat Rep. Scott Peters.

Over the past couple years, such groups have mounted boycotts or protests against corporations as well, including ActRight's unsuccessful petition drive against **Starbucks'** (Nasdaq: SBUX) support of gay marriage as well as a more successful effort last year by the AFA's One Million Moms Campaign against **J.C. Penney** (NYSE: JCP), which dropped its ads showing gay couples and fired the CEO who approved them.

"Recently, JCPenney's changed," read an apology to customers. "Some changes you liked and some you didn't, but what matters from mistakes is what we learn."

But the CEO's departure was linked to other issues as well, which had nothing to do with the advertising, such as moving away from Penney's "bargain basement" concept. And despite the protests, Penney's has kept gay talk-show host Ellen DeGeneres as its spokeswoman after her fans launched a counterprotest.

In general, most companies seem to feel that the ad campaigns have more potential benefits than risks, by opening a new market as well as proving to the Millennial Generation — which is more open to the concept of gay marriage than its older counterparts — that they are not stuck in the past.

In 2012, for instance, **Target** (NYSE: TGT) launched an advertising campaign for gay wedding registries at its stores, under the slogan "Be yourself, together." And last year, **Amazon** (Nasdaq: AMZN) featured a straight

woman convincing a gay man of the merits of the Kindle reading platform, as their husbands were getting them drinks.

"It's a very desirable market," said Miro Copic, marketing professor at San Diego State University. "In general, gay couples tend to be middle class or upper-middle class on average. Although some have children, the majority don't, which gives them more spending money on things like apparel, fine dining and luxury automobiles."

A recent report by the Mintel International Group, a global market research firm, suggested that companies should expand their ad campaigns to include more "non-traditional" families and parents.

"Nontraditional parents face the same challenges as traditional parents in providing for their kids and doing so in the most cost-effective ways possible," wrote Mintel analyst Gretchen Grabowski. "Marketers can acknowledge nontraditional families and the fact that their family settings have become more common by including them in advertising."

While that may work for multinational corporations, it is arguably more risky in a Republican primary for Congress, addressing an audience that is far more conservative than the general public.

The ad shows a montage of diverse San Diegans, including DeMaio and longtime partner Johnathan Hale holding hands as they march in Hillcrest's Gay Pride Parade and also showing DeMaio waving the rainbow flag that symbolizes gay rights.

"We don't have to accept the tired faces of the past. This is the present," a female narrator says. "There's a new way, a new approach for a new time. A problem solver who dares to be different."

DeMaio, who has never made a secret of his sexual orientation, told *The Wall Street Journal* on Thursday that he had considered running a similar ad during his 2012 mayoral race against then-Rep. Bob Filner, but that his campaign consultants had warned against it, saying that it might alienate conservative and older voters. He has since dropped those consultants and decided to take a risk by running the ad.

Matt Skallerud, who tracks gay-targeted advertising at New York's Pink Banana Media, said he is not aware of any other politician who has taken a similar step.

DeMaio, one of four openly gay Republicans running for Congress, insists that most Republicans support gay rights, but that is not reflected in public opinion polls. An NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll last year, for instance, found that while Americans support gay marriage with a 53-42 percent majority, Republicans oppose it by 66 percent. But Copic said that DeMaio's sexuality is so well-known in local political circles that there is little downside risk to his ad.

"For Carl DeMaio, it's important. It's part of who he is," Copic said. "To hide it might make him more vulnerable. And his ad is done in a relatively innocuous tasteful way, the same way that a straight candidate, such as Kevin Faulconer, might trot out his wife and kids."

Judging from campaign contributions, DeMaio is the clear favorite in the Republican primary June 3, with \$1.2 million, and heavy funding from Republican elected officials, such as House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, whose political action committee donated more than \$10,000.

DeMaio's local corporate donors include more than \$100,000 from local real estate and construction interests, including \$5,600 from hotel developer Doug Manchester, who angered gays in 2008 by raising \$125,000 to support the Proposition 8 ban on gay marriage, which has since been overturned.

His war chest compares to \$415,000 for fellow Republican Fred J. Simon, a doctor at Scripps Memorial Hospital campaigning to change the health care system, and \$217,000 for Kirk Jorgensen, a former Marine running to DeMaio's right, who has received \$2,000 from ActRight and the Family Research Council.

Although neither of DeMaio's opponents has focused specifically on his sexual orientation, there have been some apparent indirect references.

Jorgensen's campaign literature, for instance, stresses his "tight-knit family" and his endorsement from former Rep. Duncan L. Hunter, who calls him "a committed family man who ... wants to leave a safe and prosperous America for his children and grandchildren."

Even so, Copic said, "we've come a long way since the days of Anita Bryant," a Florida Republican who led anti-gay-rights initiatives in the 1980s.