

COMMERCIAL CLOSET . MICHAEL WILKE

Hallmark greets gay market

Special messages by Maya Angelou are available online for LGBT community

You still can't find man-on-man cards at Hallmark stores, but the company is greeting the gay community for the first time with online ads.

As it introduces its Life Mosaic line of inspirational cards, featuring words by renowned poet Dr. Maya Angelou, Hallmark Cards is targeting "community leaders" — including online gays — to spread the word.

"We're looking to build inspiration for the line within communities who have had challenges and adversity like Maya Angelou," says Jennifer Brady, an associate director at Starcom IP, which handles online advertising for Hallmark. "We're targeting a wide audience of age, race and lifestyles to create a contagious confidence with community leaders."

The campaign includes ads and short polls on PlanetOut.com and gay.com (both sites are owned by PlanetOut Partners) that began in February and are expected to run periodically through the end of the year. The ads contain quotes from Angelou such as, "I am changed by what happens to me. I am not reduced by it," and "There is an intimate laughter to be found only among friends."

Also trying to reach book clubs, people in

church and the workplace, ads will appear on women's site iVillage.com, oprah.com, Martha Stewart Living, *Reader's Digest*, *Sunset*, a magazine for retired persons, and *Country Music Weekly*.

Brady couldn't say if offline gay media will be added for advertising, but says that the ads are performing well on gay.com and Planet Out. "Our expectations were exceeded," she says, though she declines to offer data before the campaign is complete.

What makes now the time for the family-oriented card company to seek the gay market? "We felt they are the right target for this line and it's important for us to reach the right consumers," says Julie O'Dell, a Hallmark spokeswoman, who adds the company hasn't "had any issues" with conservatives opposing the effort.

No magnetic attraction to gay bears

Despite its new interest in the gay market, the Kansas City, Mo.-based company has struggled with gay issues. Its internal GLBT employee group, Hallmark Employees Reaching Equality, was bitterly disappointed when it was turned down for domestic partner benefits. And while card lines were long ago added for African-Americans and Hispanics, O'Dell says she doesn't think any lesbian or gay card lines are planned — leaving the market to gay-owned specialty card shops.

Last year, a factory mix-up landed a "gay" magnetic kissing bear at Amy's Hallmark store in Providence, RI — the male bear would kiss its own kind — but the independently owned store refused to sell two male bears to a gay

couple who discovered it. When the men persisted, the store had security throw them out of the mall.

The Amy's store eventually apologized and corporate Hallmark offers, "We sold the products in boy-girl pairs to the stores, which are independently owned, since most consumers liked to buy them that way. But stores could have sold them individually, we made no suggestions on how to sell them." The bears were only sold through last February.



Maya Angelou

PlanetOut Partners advertising on the rise

Meanwhile, Hallmark is just the latest of several advertising wins for PlanetOut Partners, some through its relationship with Hallmark's online media agency, Starcom. PlanetOut also landed a three-year deal with Miller Brewing through Starcom for an interactive ad feature tool called Miller Time Network, which allows users to find nightlife near them.

Mark Elderkin, COO and executive VP at PlanetOut Partners, notes that Miller was the first major company to actually request

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