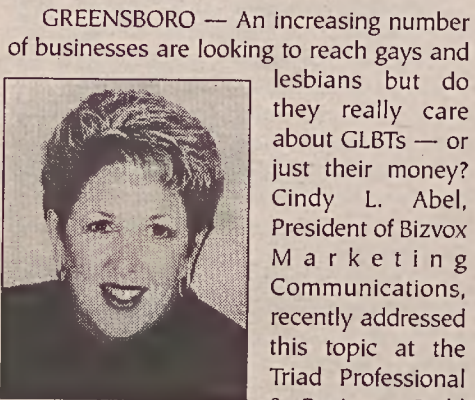


## Gay money: Can it buy equality?

Atlanta marketing exec talks to Triad Business Guild



Cindy Abel

GREENSBORO — An increasing number of businesses are looking to reach gays and lesbians but do they really care about GLBTs — or just their money? Cindy L. Abel, President of Bizvox Marketing, recently addressed this topic at the Triad Professional & Business Guild in Greensboro, describing how GLBTs can use this interest in the community to gain what matters most: full equality.

Abel pointed to the significant cultural shift in the past decade, and the reason for it: people coming out. "As we have come out, the business world has realized they were missing an opportunity. You might say, 'All they care about is our money.' Perhaps that is the initial motivation. But does that matter, if they're doing the things that help us move forward?"

Abel reminded the audience — economics have been integral to every movement for equality — citing the example of Richard Rich in Atlanta. During the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, Rich brought together business leaders and said "it's not about

black or white, it's about the economy of all of our businesses and our city," and helped prevent the riots that shook Birmingham.

She outlined some of the ways in which the GLBT community can move closer to the goal of equality if a company is willing to do what it takes not to "look better" but actually "be better."

As inclusive policies are implemented, a fair workplace begins to emerge through internal awareness and education. Additionally, "Corporate leaders such as Paul Blackney, Worldspan CEO, encourage others to institute similar policies and some even testified to Congress that, contrary to businesses' typical reluctance to embrace more legislation, a federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act should be passed."

When corporations support GLBT organizations, not only does it help advance the issues GLBTs care about, it also publicizes the fact that "It's OK to be inclusive, it's the best way of doing business" and gives others the courage to stand up and do so as well.

And as accurate images of gays and lesbians are used in advertising, they replace the standard, negative stereotypes and allow others to consider the reality of GLBT lives.

"All of these things encourage GLBT people to come out, and encourages friends and family of GLBT people to come out, provoking conversations outside the companies about who we are as people," added Abel. "Most of all, it's an opportunity for observers of these campaigns to grow, to heal the wounds of separation, and find

new ways to live with one another."

While GLBTs naturally find reassurance in seeing themselves represented in a more positive light, Abel warned GLBTs must be careful not to look to these marketing campaigns as a substitute for self-acceptance. "Just as we were not bad people when we're ignored, defamed and ridiculed, we are not suddenly good people because corporate America acknowledges our existence and is willing to reach out to us in the way we'll respond."

Knowing GLBT value in the world is something that must come from within."

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