RuPaul Sponsored by HIV?

February 11, 2011 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

When it comes to TV watching, I have a varied diet. Serious stuff like *The Rachel Maddow Show* on MSNBC and not-so-serious stuff like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, on both BBC America and SyFy, are in heavy rotation on my screen.

When it comes to gay-specific programming, I find that I don't watch as much of it as I used to. However, my curiosity got the better of me when the new season of *RuPaul's Drag Race* on Logo premiered recently.

The usual mayhem and revelry were in full swing. Obviously RuPaul has not lost touch with the masses. I hesitate to comment further on the actual content of the show because it's not my bailiwick.

I do feel more comfortable discussing what was on air during the commercials. I couldn't help but notice a lot of commercials for HIV drugs during the season premiere. Subsequent episodes have continued to air the spots.

My initial reaction was, "Gee, it's great to see HIV awareness on TV!" My follow up reaction was, "Gee, that's a lot of HIV advertising!" My follow up reaction to my follow up reaction was, "Gee, why are they doing so much HIV advertising?"

I'm not alone in noticing. My admittedly anecdotal, nonscientific poll of friends and colleagues had all taken note of the HIV ads.

Let's break it down: Logo is a basic cable network intended for LGBT viewers and their admirers. *RuPaul's Drag Race* features gay men and transgender people. The audience presumably for this show also features gay men and transgender people. These groups are at high risk for HIV. So, HIV ads air during the show.

I get that logic and I don't necessarily reject that line of thinking completely. But, a gnawing feeling in my stomach tells me there may be more to the story.

The logic I spelled out above would make more sense to me if I saw HIV ads dispersed more evenly throughout the programming on Logo. Aren't there gay men and transgender people watching all the shows on Logo?

The only conclusion I can come to is that the advertisers believe the audience for this show in particular is of special value to them. Who do they believe is watching this show more than other shows on Logo? This is where I start to get uneasy.

On the one hand, it seems reasonable to assume that perhaps there might be more “harder-to-reach” gay men and transgender people watching this show. After all, the show features many contestants from these “harder-to-reach” communities.

On the other hand, that’s a stereotypical mindset. I put “harder-to-reach” in quotes in the last paragraph because it’s a loaded phrase often used to describe folks who HIV prevention and treatment folks have difficulty reaching with their messaging. Are they really harder to reach or do they just need messaging they can relate to?

And is *RuPaul’s Drag Race* the best backdrop for these HIV ads? The “even if I just reach one person” mantra does not answer this question. Drug makers--and most advertisers--want to reach lots of people.

Are the viewers of this show in a frame of mind to absorb the HIV messaging they are watching as the advertisers intended? Or are they instead in a frame of mind that may actually result in them being further repelled by such HIV messaging?

Lots of questions, not many answers. At least we can all agree RuPaul can still work it!

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.