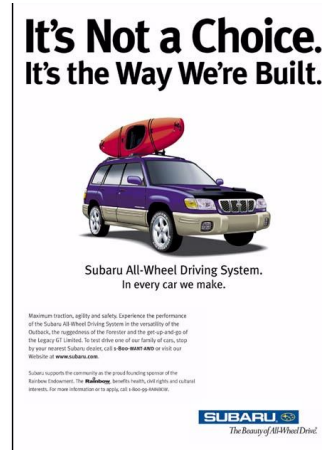


## Quick Biz Reading

### Subaru and a special marketing strategy.

Around 1995, Subaru of America knew they had four main types of customers: teachers, health-care professionals, IT professionals and people who like the outdoors. Doing market research, they found another group: lesbians. Why? One reason was that camping and other outdoor sports are popular with gay women. Subaru's SUV had an "all wheel drive" system that made it good for driving in the country. But this was a challenge: How could they market to this group?



In the 1990's in America, people were not comfortable talking about gay and lesbian issues. The rule was: **Don't ask/ Don't tell.** That meant, "Don't ask someone if they are gay. Don't tell anyone if you are gay." So they had to be clever to reach their audience. Many companies use sports players in their ads. Subaru made an advertisement with Martina Navratilova. She was a famous tennis star. She had also said publicly that she was gay. The ad also had other female sports stars. The ad didn't say she was gay. It didn't have to. People, especially lesbians, already knew. The point of the ad was that the people were strong, intelligent women – who drove Subaru.

The company tried TV ads with lesbian couples. Those were not very popular. Then they came up with the idea of sending "almost hidden messages" in their ads. One ad had a car with a license plate that said "XENA LVR" – that means "Xena Lover." *Xena: Warrior Princess* was a TV action show about a powerful woman. Gay people noticed the license plate. Straight people didn't even think about it.



Some ads had words you could think about in different ways. One said, "Get out. And stay out." The picture showed an SUV in the country. Maybe it means, "Get outside and stay there." To gay people, it might be "Get out of the closet." (Say publicly that you are gay). Another said, "It's Not a Choice. It's the Way We're Built." It is talking about the All-Wheel Driving System. For gay people, it seems like a message that sexual preference is something they are born with, not a choice.

Subaru was one of the first companies to directly market to gay people. And it worked!

- ❶ Work with a partner. In Japanese, talk about this story. How much do you remember?
- ❷ With your partner, try to tell the same story in English.
- ❸ This kind of marketing is called, “niche marketing.” It is when you sell to a small group of people, not to everyone.
  - What are other examples of niche marketing? Why does it work?
  - Think about the ads you see on social media. What ads seem like they were meant just for people like you? Is that niche marketing?
- ❹ **Take it deeper.** Gays are a good market. Many gay couples have two incomes. They usually have no children. They have money. They don’t have the expenses that straight couples do. What other products might they want? What are other groups that you could sell things to?

Sources:

<http://marketingtherainbow.info/case%20studies/cs%20cars/subaru.html>

<https://priceconomics.com/how-an-ad-campaign-made-lesbians-fall-in-love-with/>

<https://www.triplepundit.com/2016/06/cliche-stereotype-turns-subaru-marketed-lesbians/>