

**THE BLOG**

Is Your Car Gay?

By Marty Kaplan

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A case study in new media ecology is being played out in real time right now. The Ford Motor Company, bowing to pressure from Reverend Donald Wildmon's American Family Association, has pulled its advertising from gay publications. The reason, Wildmon told Ford, was that his people would stop buying Fords if Ford insisted on pumping advertising dollars into publications that support "the homosexual agenda." Wildmon was also unhappy that Ford supports workplace diversity and contributes to LGBT causes.

Set aside for a moment the idiocy of "the homosexual agenda" ("Dad?" "Yes, son?" "That Ricky Martin song made me gay." "But son –" "I want to marry Ricky Martin! In a white dress!"). Also set aside, for now, the incompatibility between Christian gospel and the Wildmon doctrine of hating your neighbor. Forget for a minute, if you would, the issue of economic boycotts, and the threat of them, and whether they're valid and effective tools (or not) in the hands of people you don't agree with, as well as when wielded by people you do agree with.

Instead, look at how this story is moving through the media. It started a few days ago in The Advocate, one of the affected publications. It moved to the wire services, and to print outlets, and then to cable news, on CNN's "American Morning."

But all the while this traditional pattern of coverage was occurring, something else was going on, way more important, and way more than coverage. John Aravosis's AMERICAblog was all over this story from the moment it began. His site became a public square for information about the Ford deal with Wildmon and the LGBT community's reaction. He published the phone numbers and emails of Ford executives. His readers got Ford people on the phone, and he published and dissected their lame attempts to spin their way out of their self-made crisis. His site became a bulletin board, an information clearing house, and a war room, instantaneously linking hundreds of thousands of people, a micro-political movement with no need to rent filing cabinets, hire direct-mail specialists, or run ads.

In one amazing example of the distributed intelligence that the Web has become, Aravosis published a clip from a trade publication which named the two Ford negotiators who cut the anti-gay deal with Wildmon: David Leitch and Ziad Ojakli. And then, overnight, the commenters on Aravosis's blog figured out that Leitch and Ojakli were both former senior Bush White House officials.

This is reporting, even though no one is paying for it, and even though no journalistic brand-name is attached to it. It's also advocacy: information assembled for a purpose. Does that make it less than journalism? No: it makes it more than stenography, which is what so much of the MSM has embarrassingly become.

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