

A photograph of a person holding a large rainbow Pride flag in front of a brick building with windows. The flag is held up, and the person's arm is visible. The brick wall is a mix of reddish-brown and tan tones. The windows are dark, suggesting they are either closed or the interior is dark. The overall scene is brightly lit, likely by natural light.

CPM PRIDE CONVERSATIONS

CPM

The logo consists of the letters 'CPM' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Below each letter is a horizontal bar with a rainbow color gradient, transitioning from red on the left to purple on the right.

A conversation with Christopher McDonnell, Head of Pride ERG

Christopher has been with CPM for seven years and wears two hats – first and foremost he is the Head of Global Privacy; an incredibly important role given the volume and complexity of data we hold and process. Secondly, and one which he is incredibly passionate about, he is the lead of our CPM Pride Employee Resource Group (ERG).

The CPM Pride ERG was launched in January 2022 and serves to bring together members of the LGBTQIA+ community and allies, to create a visible and relatable safe space where we can connect, learn, share and support each other to be our authentic selves at work.



So Christopher... tell us a bit about your journey...

My journey to living my authentic life was, in many ways, one that mirrors that of so many others. I “came out” much later in life than I would have liked, at the age of 26, largely as a result of not having a sound understanding of the thoughts and feelings that I had recognised but hidden from a young age.

Growing up in the 80s and 90s, there was still a lot of shame and rejection experienced by members of the LGBTQIA+ community, not helped by a harmful piece of legislation in the UK known as Section 28, which prohibited the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ meaning that same sex relationships were not addressed at schools. I didn’t see myself represented in the media or mainstream society and the timing coincided with the back end of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. When I finally came to terms with who I was and accepted the life that I was born to live, everything changed.

“I didn’t see myself represented in the media or mainstream society...”

My first career was nursing - something I had wanted to do from a very young age. I entered nursing aged 16 and it was everything I lived for. Coming out at the age of 26 gave me a sense of peace and identity that I had never experienced before and allowed me to see a future that was not limited or defined by hiding behind the identity that my career gave me. I loved being a nurse, but it was a safe and easy way to avoid having to face into the reality of starting to accept a part of myself that I had hidden from a very young age.

What inspired you to set up a Pride ERG here at CPM? What would you like the group to stand for/achieve?

My journey towards coming out was a long and at times painful one, but one which has shaped who I am today and has given me the burning desire to ensure that those within the LGBTQIA+ community, regardless of where they are on their journey, see themselves in everyday life. It is very much this mission that led to me getting involved in the CPM Pride ERG. Once I embarked on my journey to authenticity, the ride was pretty smooth, right up to current day, but this is not the case for everyone.

I want every member of the community to know that they have a safe, welcoming and accepting space, free from judgement and discrimination to travel their own journey, at their own pace and in their own way. Coming from London and having been a nurse for some 16 years, I thought that I had seen true diversity, until I started working for CPM. In my early years at CPM in Barcelona, there was large LGBTQIA+ community and it struck me that this should be acknowledged and celebrated and that we should seek to tell the local community in Barcelona that CPM was a place where everyone was welcome.

Back in 2018, myself and a number of colleagues set up the local ERG which at the time was focussed primarily on coordinating our activity at Barcelona Pride and that year, we had our first float in the Pride parade. In 2019 we had two floats and also became an affiliated chapter of Omnicom OPEN Pride. The following two years, for obvious reasons, were low activity years but this gave us the opportunity to re-group and consider how we could expand the scope of the Barcelona ERG to welcome colleagues from throughout the CPM Group of Companies and so I was thrilled and honoured when I was asked to lead the CPM Pride ERG as it expanded.



We're focused on allyship this month. Can you tell us in your own words why this is so important, and perhaps share any real examples?

Hearts and minds change best and most easily when people have a way to relate to the lived experiences of others in a way that breaks down barriers to understanding or perceived fears and deficits in understanding.

Allies can often serve as a neutral medium to support with education and raising awareness and journeying towards a place of acceptance, understanding, peaceful and dare I say happy coexistence.

“No community or group of people can achieve its objectives alone.”

Often the objectives and needs of one group are not vastly dissimilar to those of others and so joining forces, recognising intersectionality and engaging the support of allies has undoubtedly moved the world forward leaps and bounds in the last decade and I truly believe that this will continue to be so. In so many ways, there really is, I believe, no going back.

Are you starting to see more acceptance of LGBTQIA+ in society?

Absolutely. And I believe that there are two very strong reasons for this. The first being that there are generational shifts which have resulted in at least some of the ignorance and discrimination dying out - this is the optimist side of me! The second reason, closely linked to the first, is that we are living in a totally different world now to the one in which I grew up. Opinions and beliefs were formed at home and at school, influenced by what for many was a relatively small number of people. We now live in the information age and with that comes the ability to be inquisitive, to search for answers and to identify in ways that simply weren't possible during my formative years. We are however worryingly seeing steps back in some areas in legislation and attitudes and we need to rely on our community and allies as much now as ever before to ensure that the levels of acceptance we have seen over the past decade continue to grow. I do believe we've turned a corner but we cannot be complacent.



How would you like to see allies continue to support and stand up for the LGBTQIA+ community?

The first and foremost thing I ask of allies for any minority, underrepresented or oppressed community, and indeed all areas of intersectionality is to be a supportive and active ally. Allyship is only effective when it is based on action and if allies 'show up'.

“Allyship is only effective when it is based on action and if allies ‘show up’.”

The exact form that 'showing up' takes is varied. We continue to see a growing amount of active allyship in all areas of society, but sadly, we are also seeing a vast amount of performative allyship which really serves no actual good and at times, can have a damaging impact. Performative allyship is essentially the appearance of being an ally focussed almost solely on building an individual's personal brand. Most often today, this takes the form of posting and sharing on social media to portray the appearance of being an ally. Whilst this does of course at times help to raise awareness, spark discussion and promote thought and dialogue, it needs to be backed up with meaningful actions such as challenging injustice, oppression and discrimination whenever and wherever possible, of course in a way that is safe for all concerned. Performative allyship does not move the agenda forward.

What is the one main thing you would like us all to take away from Pride month 2022?

Many of us are reconnecting this year after three years since the last major in-person Pride events. The world has changed significantly since we were last able to truly come together to celebrate Pride.

“Pride was born out of the need to protest and demand the most basic human rights for the LGBTQIA+ community.”

Remember how much we have to celebrate but also how much there is still to be achieved in the fight for equality. Pride was born out of the need to protest and demand the most basic human rights for the LGBTQIA+ community. Millions of LGBTQIA+ people worldwide are still denied those rights and often face persecution and so whilst we party and celebrate our queerness, we must remember that we come together at Pride to continue the fight.