

## **Record crowd at Out & Equal's S.F. conference underscores LGBT workplace progress**

By Mark Calvey

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San Francisco-based non-profit Out & Equal Workplace Advocates is holding its annual Workplace Summit in its hometown this week for the first time, drawing the biggest crowd ever for the program focused on LGBT issues in the workplace.

The event is expected to draw 3,000 people from 500 organizations and 30 countries. Plus, Out & Equal anticipates attendance will cross over 3,000 with some people seeking on-site registration following [Apple](#) (NASDAQ: AAPL) CEO [Tim Cook](#)'s disclosure last week [that he's gay](#).



Wells Fargo Chairman and CEO John Stumpf will deliver a keynote address at this week's Out & Equal Workplace Summit in San Francisco.

"We certainly appreciate the timing of his decision. It's brought a lot of attention to the issues," said [Selisse Berry](#), founder and CEO of Out & Equal Workplace Advocates.

[Wells Fargo](#) (NYSE: WFC) Chairman and CEO [John Stumpf](#) will be a keynote speaker on Wednesday.

[Bank of America](#) (NYSE: BAC) also has a large contingent of more than 150 employees participating in this week's conference.

This year's summit is a far cry from Out & Equal's first Workplace Summit, which brought 200 people to Atlanta in 1999.

Conference organizers point to signs of progress and the work that lies ahead.

Berry said only 5 percent of Fortune 500 companies included sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies when she began working on LGBT issues in the workplace 18 years ago.

Today, 91 percent of the Fortune 500 include sexual orientation.

Last year's Supreme Court ruling extending federal benefits to married same-sex couples was significant progress, but Berry notes that in 29 states, lesbian and gay employees sharing their wedding photos at work can be fired legally.

Another hot topic at this year's summit is LGBT employee mobility in a global economy.

On Wednesday morning, the program includes a presentation on Mercer's examination of the challenges and considerations that come with LGBT global mobility.

"It is illegal to be gay in over 75 countries and the LGBT community faces moderate to extreme risks in over 150 countries, facts which present challenges for both employers and their LGBT staff," according to the Workplace Summit's 92-page program, which includes several ads from global companies touting their diversity efforts.

LGBT-employee mobility also came up during a luncheon panel discussion Monday as part of a pre-summit leadership training day.

[Visa](#), for instance, conducts briefings for LGBT employees traveling to markets with anti-LGBT laws and customs, while LGBT employees considering taking assignments in such countries have an opportunity to visit those countries before making a final decision, said [Jolen Anderson](#), Visa's (NYSE: V) chief diversity officer.

Another topic that came up during the panel: employers who adopt policies asking their LGBT employees to identify themselves as such when hired or annually thereafter. [Clorox](#) has such a policy, and as with most companies, an individual's response isn't made public internally or externally, said [Tom Wyveen](#), vice president of global HR strategy at Oakland-based Clorox (NYSE: CLX).

Clorox has been making that request to measure its LGBT diversity efforts for several years, and Visa is working with its LGBT employee group to implement such a policy. [PepsiCo](#) (NYSE: PEP) Europe's [Phil Myers](#), vice president of communications, public policy and government affairs, said such a policy isn't workable in his territory, which includes Russia and the Middle East, where anti-LGBT laws and customs are common.

An after-lunch training session Monday focused on starting and building LGBT employee groups to help increase visibility within a company, create a sense of community and help promote LGBT policies.

LGBT employee groups, which would have been a huge risk for a company 40 years ago, are now seen as a positive move to promote diversity, said [Louise Chernin](#), president and CEO of the [Greater Seattle Business Association](#), that city's LGBT chamber. Chernin led the training session on employee resource groups.

Wyveen at Clorox, as part of the luncheon panel, said the company's groups for LGBT employees and others have shifted from being social or networking groups a decade ago to playing a strategic role today in the company's efforts to pursue innovation and new business.

Chernin also asked each participant in the training session to say why they wanted to start or expand an LGBT employee group and, for those with existing groups, to share the name of their group.

She found that many of the newer groups had names along the lines of Pride@Work rather than monikers of earlier LGBT groups such as [Microsoft's](#) (NASDAQ: MSFT) GLEAM or [Boeing's](#) (NYSE: BA) BEAGLES.

"LGBT employee groups today have more straightforward names, although I hate to use the word 'straight,' " Chernin joked.

A [Hewlett-Packard](#) (NYSE: [HPQ](#)) employee put the group names in perspective, saying that historic forerunners of today's Hewlett-Packard Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Employee Resource Group were two groups, one for gay men and the other for lesbians. The HP gay men's employee group was called Friends of Dorothy and the lesbian employee group was called the Ladies Embroidery Network.

<http://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/blog/2014/11/lgbt-workplace-diversity-gay-lesbian-san-francisco.html?page=all>