

# Background Briefing

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) works to maintain the highest standards in advertising by taking action to prevent ads from being misleading, harmful or offensive. Visit [www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk) for more information about our activities, to view the Advertising Codes or to access our database of adjudications.

## Alcohol

### Booze Britain?

With increasing concern about binge drinking and anti-social behaviour, alcohol advertising is under intense scrutiny. Some pressure groups have called for curbs (including a 9pm watershed for alcohol ads) - others for a complete ban.

The already strict rules for alcohol advertising were further strengthened in 2005 when tough new rules were introduced for advertising on TV and in all non-broadcast media. The new rules ensure that alcohol is promoted in a socially responsible way, including not linking alcohol with sex or social success and preventing ads from having strong appeal to under-18s by restricting association with youth culture or juvenile behaviour.

### The rules

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#### Ads must not:

- link alcohol with seduction, sex or social success
  - link alcohol with irresponsible, anti-social, tough or daring behaviour
  - show alcohol being served irresponsibly
  - show people drinking and behaving in an adolescent or juvenile way or reflecting the culture of people under 18 years old
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The new rules also built on and strengthened the existing scheduling rules in the Advertising Codes by prohibiting alcohol ads from appearing in or around children's TV programmes or programmes likely to have a particular appeal to children. Furthermore, alcohol ads are not allowed in publications aimed at those under 18, or where more than 25% of the readership is under 18.

### And what is the impact on young people?

In 2005 Ofcom and the ASA commissioned a major two-part research project looking at the impact of the Advertising Codes in reducing the appeal of alcohol ads to young people. The second stage in 2007 (which looked specifically at 'edgier' alcohol ads which were aimed at the younger end of the legitimate market) showed:

- young people were less likely than before to think alcohol ads were aimed at them, but ...
- they still believed some of the edgier ads made drinks look appealing and that they would encourage people to drink
- more 11-13 year olds say they have never drunk alcohol – up 15% in two years

## Are the new rules working?

As part of the ASA's commitment to keep alcohol ads responsible, we conducted a survey of 307 ads that appeared during the Christmas period. The results revealed a steady increase, year on year, in rates of compliance – up from 97.4% in 2007, to 98.9% in 2008, to 99.7% in 2009. The overwhelming majority of ads are compliant with the tough regulations<sup>1</sup>.

## Any further action needed?

Evidence to date suggests that the current rules are a proportionate and reasonable response to concerns about under-age drinking. It is encouraging that our research showed young people were less likely to consider alcohol ads aimed at them. The research shows there is still work to do to limit the appeal of some alcohol ads to young people and the ASA will continue to take these factors into account and pro-actively monitor ads to make sure compliance rates remain high.

The ASA continues to work with the alcohol sector, through educational events and training seminars, to maintain high rates of compliance with the rules. We will also continue to respond quickly and effectively to consumer complaints.

## ASA action

### Town and City Pub Company Ltd t/a Yates's – November 2010

A leaflet and poster were judged to have breached the rules by having particular relevance and appeal to under-18s and potentially encouraging them to drink.

### Voodoo Events Ltd – July 2009

The ASA decided that an advertising billboard, targeted at students, was socially irresponsible and could encourage excessive consumption of alcohol.

### Wells & Youngs Brewing Company Ltd – April 2009

A poster ad for Courage beer was found to have breached the rules by suggesting that drinking the beer could increase a person's confidence.

### The Little Drinks Company Ltd t/a Retail in Motion - October 2008

A magazine ad for Saile and Sabga champagne was deemed irresponsible because it linked alcohol with seduction.

### Coors Brewers Ltd - October 2008

A TV ad for Coors light lager was considered to have breached the alcohol rules because it used themes that were likely to appeal strongly to young people.

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## Further reading

<sup>1</sup>ASA Compliance Report: [Alcohol Advertising Survey 2009](#)

[Alcohol advertising - the right measure?](#) - Event Report November 2008

[Young People and Alcohol Advertising](#) – Ofcom and ASA report November 2007