



News Views



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The Newsletter of Alcohol Healthwatch

Stark Raving Mad

The regulatory framework for alcohol advertising is currently under the microscope. It would be a serious waste of time and resources if the review focuses predominantly on traditional forms of advertising. The stark reality is that the world of brand alcohol marketing is rapidly mutating and systemically infiltrating every conceivable nook and cranny of our very existence in order to get noticed. It has all the hallmarks of cunning.

A recent example attracted the sort of high profile media attention that you simply can't buy. The marketing strategy used to promote a new low sugar ready-to-drink product called "Stark" included a campaign to entice journalists and media personalities to integrate the word "starkish" into their media commentary as often as possible — without first knowing what the word was actually associated with. The winner, the person using the word the most, got a free trip to New York so there were quite a few who were eager to take up the challenge to win. No doubt much to the delight of the marketers for the extra free publicity, the integrity of journalistic ethics came under scrutiny and debate by the media industry. The Stark example doesn't end there.

A trendy Newmarket fashion store has picked up the concept and is liberally splashing the 'starkish' word across their shop window. They appear to see some value in marrying the alcohol brand concept with their own fashion ethos.

Cultural integration of this nature is a strong theme of alcohol marketing and is much more insidious than the more obvious broadcast media, which is open to public scrutiny and censure, and is more expensive.

Not so Exclusive

In the October 2006 edition of New Idea magazine an 'exclusive' promotes Lindauer sparkling wine using a brand ambassador, Joe Cotton of 'Pop Stars' and weight loss fame.

Drawing a strong link between the brand and Kiwi culture, the wine's Pernod Ricard Brand Manager states, *"We see Lindauer as a Kiwi Icon and Joe is developing into a great Kiwi entertainer".*

The article includes an insert, "Joe's Hangover Cures" and a full page photo of Joe posing nude in a bubble bath with glass in hand. The caption reads, *"Joe's partial to a glass of bubbles and can always trust her favourite bubbly, Lindauer, to put her in a good mood".* While this vigorous promotion mentions the Lindauer brand no less than 13 times throughout the article, it keeps a comfortable cork-popping distance from any advertising content codes. A watertight 'code compliant' Lindaeur advertisement featured later in the edition, with no hints of mood altering alcohol being drunk by a nude woman promoting hangover cures.

Alcohol branding is commonplace in media programming and popular culture, and is linked directly to consumers online, but we ain't seen nothing yet! In the brave new world of business, the line between commercialisation and entertainment is disappearing.

The more consumers try to bypass or switch off traditional advertising, the more creative product marketers become. This now includes companies producing their own shows to

fit the brands they are pushing. So far most of this network viewing is online, such as the Anheuser-Busch television look-a-like BudTV, where the programmes are given to media networks free in exchange for airtime. But this may be set to change. Reality TV is increasingly more likely to be just another commercial.

These marketing manipulations and manoeuvrings represent the true spirit of the self-regulation of alcohol advertising.

The continued support for weak and ineffective content codes, that leave the marketing field unfettered for the introduction of ever more powerful marketing strategies, are just what the industry ordered.



Newmarket fashion store buys into
'Stark' marketing ploy

US Pediatricians Challenge Marketing to Children

In a just released Policy Statement, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that Congress restrict alcohol advertising to what is known as "tombstone" advertising in which only the product is shown. This recommendation is one of a range of steps - backed up by almost 100 reference papers - that are advocated to reduce the increasing exposure of children to the marketing of products that are linked to poor health outcomes such as tobacco, alcohol and fast food.

According to the statement, young people in the USA view more than 40,000 ads per year on television alone and increasingly are being exposed to advertising on the internet, in magazines, on bill-boards and in schools. It points out that while several European countries, namely Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and Greece, forbid or severely restrict advertising to children, in the USA it is generally "business as usual".

The Academy is concerned about the trend to target younger and younger children in order to establish "brand-name preference" at an early age. The statement points to research that shows children younger than 8 years are cognitively and psychologically defenseless against advertising and do not understand the notion of intent to sell, rather accepting advertising claims at face value. The Academy strongly advocates that young children be educated about the effects of advertising – media literacy that teaches children to become critical viewers. However their call for action does not stop there.

Their Policy Statement questions the way in which a range of marketing techniques are allowed to continue and calls for Congress to place limits on them. These include among others, movies that feature brand-name products and websites that entice children and teenagers to make direct sales, including sites that promote alcohol products using chat rooms, "virtual bar" drinks recipes, games and contests and direct marketing

Sex, they point out, is used to sell everything from beer to shampoo and research shows this may be responsible for early onset of sexual activity and that it also leads to body image distortions in young girls.

They also point to the need to have child protections in place for digital TV, which is due to come on stream in New Zealand shortly. Children watching a TV programme will be able to click an on-screen link and go to a website for interactive games and promotions, away from regular programming and into a media where there is no clear separation between content and advertising.

The Statement discusses the way in which advertisers have infiltrated schools in the USA where the "3 Rs" have become the "4 Rs", the fourth being "Retail". While some retailers are supporting the replacement of carbonated sugar drinks with water, juice and milk, others take advantage of advertising under the guise of educational TV, 10 minutes of current events and 2 minutes of commercial advertising.

While the USA is clearly the land of free speech, protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution, the Academy of Pediatrics reiterate that commercial speech does not enjoy the same protection and advertising can be restricted and banned if there is a significant public health risk.

This Policy Statement from prestigious child health specialists is an important call to all Governments to find a way to put child health ahead of questionable business practices that exploit children.

A full text of this Policy Statement can be downloaded at the website detailed below.

¹ Policy Statement: Children Adolescents and Marketing. *Pediatrics* Vol 118 No 6, December 2006 pp.2563-2569
<<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/118>

VIEW POINT..... by Christine Rogan

In the interests of the liquor lobby

In an unexpected turnaround, the alcohol industry has pulled the plug on one of its own. The Beer Wine and Spirits Council (BWSC) are to shut up shop after 16 years of active lobbying for the liquor industry at the end of this year. Self described as a "mouthpiece for the industry", the Council acted mainly for the two big brewers, Lion Nathan and Dominion Breweries (DB), with Managing Directors of both of these companies on the BWSC Board. Lion Nathan, one of Australasia's largest liquor giants, describes the Council as an organisation that represented their 'non-commercial' interests. Lion has withdrawn its support to pursue a more 'direct' engagement with the Government on industry matters and to work more collaboratively with the whole industry.

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BWSC Board. Lion Nathan, one of Australasia's largest liquor giants, describes the Council as an organisation that represented their 'non-commercial' interests. Lion has withdrawn its support of the organisation to pursue a more 'direct' engagement with the Government on industry matters and to work more collaboratively with the whole industry. This has disappointed Brian Blake, the Managing Director of DB who said in their joint press release that he always saw value in an 'independent industry voice', and had hoped to expand the Council to include wider industry participation.

With Lion Nathan having a huge financial influence both here and in Australia, expect liquor lobbying to take on a stronger Trans Tasman flavour. It might be for instance, that in the wake of the BWSC's demise, New Zealand will see more activity via DrinkWise, the social aspects organisation of the Australian liquor industry.

In a nutshell, DrinkWise describes itself as a self-governing, independent, not-for-profit organisation focussing on encouraging a healthier drinking culture in Australia. So what is meant by an industry-based organisation that claims to be independent and not-for-profit? This non-profit, says it aims to send a strong signal that the alcohol industry is 'united' and any investment in harm reduction has to 'help forge a sustainable future for the alcohol business'. What does a 'united' voice for the industry mean if it is not to secure as much liquor industry clout at the policy table and ensure that policy and harm-reduction strategies are pro-business?

While the interests of DrinkWise in New Zealand are as yet unknown, it has a strong Kiwi connection in its newly appointed Director Dr Mike MacAvoy, the former CEO of the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand. In a Dominion Post (25/11/06) interview with Dr MacAvoy about his move to Australia, DrinkWise is described as being Australia's "equivalent to ALAC".

ALAC is a Crown agent set up under statute. Nevertheless it appears that in some aspects, distinctions between them and DrinkWise may have blurred of late since both organisations claim to be independent, not-for-profit and prioritise public education. The current ALAC 'culture change' programme has a strong focus on changing individual's behaviour, an approach that sits well with the liquor industry. With little in the way of evidence as to the cost-effectiveness of this approach, some in public health groups have questioned the efficacy and value of the multi-million dollar re-education campaign.

In a parting shot at public health, Dr MacAvoy in the Dominion Post interview, challenges the public health critique, saying that ALAC is required to 'live in the real world' and solutions have to be 'palatable to both the Government and community'. He goes on to say that ALAC is about 'moderation not prohibition' by implication suggesting that public health organisations must be proponents of the latter, usually a reserve of the liquor lobby in their attempts to undermine public health integrity.

With statutory agencies appealing to industry, and industry claiming to be non-commercial, the distinctions are no longer clear as to whose interests are being served. Just what the industry means by 'independent' and 'not-for-profit' remains to be determined.

2006 – Reviews, More Reviews and Rainbows

Advertising Review

In January this year a review into the regulation of alcohol advertising was announced in response to a petition organised by the Group Against Liquor Advertising (GALA).

Public health groups voiced concerns at the time about the make-up of the review's Steering Group, given its inclusion of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).

The ASA oversees the current system of voluntary 'self-regulation', the very one under review. Viola Palmer the chair of GALA said at the time that it was like 'appointing those on trial to the jury'. Submissions to the review closed at the end of October and the review steering group was due to report back to the Minister responsible for alcohol matters, Hon. Damien O'Connor, by the end of the year. This report is now not expected until the New Year.

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Alcohol Healthwatch believes there will be some interesting debate on the marketing issue, particularly in relation to the sport and recreation sector. The dependence of this sector on liquor sponsorship is clear, so it will be important to balance the needs of maintaining a strong sporting sector with the imperative of adopting effective policy to reduce harm from alcohol.

Sale of Liquor (Youth Harm Amendment) Bill

Sponsorship of the Bill transferred from Progressive MP Matt Robson to Labour MP Martin Gallagher following Matt's failure to retain his seat following the 2005 election.

The Law and Order committee chaired by New Zealand First MP Ron Mark deliberated for 11 months this year and considered 180 submissions.

The public debate tended to focus on the purchase age issue and there were calls to consider a "split age" option, allowing 18 year olds to purchase liquor to consume at on-licensed premises but returning the age for off-license purchases to 20 years.

The Bill, minus the broadcast alcohol advertising components, arrived back in Parliament for its second reading on Wednesday 7 November this year and was stopped dead in its tracks by a strong vote against it progressing.

An announcement of a 'review' into the sale and supply to underage young people by Ministers O'Connor and Burton at the 11th hour may have swayed the results, with the majority of cabinet voting against the Bill progressing.

This new review is said to be focused on the access and supply to those under the legal purchase age. There have been suggestions that a "drinking age" will be one of the options considered.

Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says that this would need careful consideration, particularly the aspects concerning the burden of liability and where that falls. A Terms of Reference for the review is due to be announced before the end of the year and little detail is known as yet about the content, time frames or process.

Green's Bill on Alcohol Advertising

The Green's Bill calling for the end to broadcast liquor advertising, like the advertising component of the Sale of Liquor (Youth Harm Amendment) Bill, has been deferred to May 2007. This will allow the above mentioned review into the alcohol advertising to be completed and the recommendations from this to be considered.

Alcohol Free Schools

All 21 schools in Upper Hutt have adopted an 'alcohol-free' policy for their school grounds. The initiative was launched on 17 November this year in response to growing concerns about the health and safety issues related to drinking in the grounds. Schools complained that broken bottles, vandalism and rubbish were putting students and other users of school facilities at risk. The schools have signed an agreement with the Upper Hutt Police allowing the police to remove anyone involved with unauthorised drinking on school grounds.

Alcohol Healthwatch has lent its support to the initiative as it is aimed at helping to ensure schools are safe places for all users. The united approach by the schools also sends a strong message to the community about the kind of behaviour that is acceptable and what is not when it comes to alcohol.

Family Fun Park Rainbows End to Stay Dry

Earlier this year Rainbows End applied for an extension of its liquor licence. Their existing licence allowed them to supply alcohol at its corporate functions and the extension was to allow the sale of alcohol in the fun park's café. While the application to the District Licensing Agency drew no objections, community concerns were exposed in a media debate. On the 2 November Alcohol Healthwatch was advised by Rainbows End that, after considering the various issues, the park's governing board had agreed that liquor would not be sold in its café.

Alcohol Healthwatch director Rebecca Williams says Rainbows End can be proud of the decision and thinks it reflects the thoughtful consideration of the issues and community concerns.

Alcohol Healthwatch News....

It was with great sadness that we said farewell to Health Promotion Advisor Anna Maxwell from the team in November. Anna has been a huge asset to the Alcohol Healthwatch team for 4 ½ years, contributing to our national policy work as well as our regional health promotion activities. Her work was greatly appreciated and she will be missed. We wish her well in her new role as a research assistant at the School of Nursing at the University of Auckland. Thanks Anna.



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*We wish all our readers a
relaxing, fun and safe
Christmas break*