

Alcohol marketing – key issues

*Young people across the globe live in environments characterised by aggressive and ubiquitous efforts encouraging them to initiate drinking and to drink heavily** Marc Danzon, Regional Director of WHO, 2001.

What do we know about the effects of alcohol advertising?

Industry groups argue that alcohol marketing does not increase consumption but merely increases market share.

According to marketing experts, however, all advertising has three main purposes: *to help potential customers choose among competing brands; to increase sales among existing customers; and to recruit new customers* (Kilbourne, 1999). *Advertising can be powerful in reinforcing problematic behaviours and can make unfamiliar behaviours seem familiar, so they're more easily adopted* (Hoek, J. 2006; marketing researcher, Massey University).

Owing to the many influences on consumption, to “prove” that alcohol advertising causes increased drinking in the population is extremely difficult, and results from these research studies have been mixed. In New Zealand, overall per capita consumption has actually decreased since alcohol advertising began (though it is now trending upwards again). However, this tells us nothing about the impact of alcohol advertising on particular segments of the population, such as youth and women, whose drinking has significantly increased over recent years.

More important is research that looks at the responses of individuals, particularly young people, to alcohol advertising. Reviews of this research conclude that constant exposure to alcohol advertising:

- is at least reinforcing drinking among the young (Cooke et al. 2002)
- inculcates “pro-drinking attitudes” and increases the likelihood of heavier drinking (Babor et al. 2003: a WHO sponsored review).

It is also likely that alcohol advertising influences social norms around alcohol use, including awareness of alcohol as a drug, as well as the acceptability of policies that control access (Casswell, 2004 *Alcohol and Alcoholism* 6).

Growing evidence, such as the recent studies from the U.S. below, links various forms of alcohol marketing to predisposition to drink and amount of drinking in young people:

- Advertising expenditure in youth environments and recall of advertising found to be related to greater youth drinking (Snyder et al. 2006, *Arch. Paediatric Adoles. Med.* 160:1).
- Exposure to televised alcohol ads in 11-13 year olds found to be associated with increased subsequent consumption (Stacey al. 2004 *Am. J. Health Behav.* 28:6).
- Liking for and recall of ads found to be significantly associated with alcohol use (Unger et al. 2003 *Addiction Research and Theory*, 11:3).
- Exposure to ads at point of sale, in magazines and events found to predict adolescent drinking (Ellikson et al. 2005 *Addiction* 100:2).

...it is imperative that alcohol advertising research influence policy-makers to create a more level playing field for the reception of health promotion messages by the young (Babor et al. 2003).

What are the trends in alcohol advertising?

Many researchers have identified the following trends in New Zealand and overseas:

1. More money is being spent on alcohol marketing, pervading more areas of life:

- Use of newer media often popular with youth, such as the internet and cell phones (see www.lionred.co.nz; www.tui.co.nz; www.42below.co.nz).
- Alcohol sponsorship more common in key areas of popular culture such as music, film, fashion (eg Big Day Out, Bicardi Beats, Smirnoff Fashion Awards, Speights orientation...).
- Sport a particularly large focus of alcohol sponsorship; growing association with youth-popular sports such as surfing; sports clubs and events financially dependent on alcohol companies.
- More alcohol-branded merchandise: t-shirts, caps etc enabling the public to become “walking advertisements”.

- New products: innovative RTDs, ice lollies, alcoholic energy drinks targeted to younger market and 'starter drinkers'.
- Novel modes of delivery of drinks such as shooters, shots and sachets.
- Branded products placed within the content of movies, television programmes, and lyrics.
- Liberalisation of laws around access to alcohol leading to greater exposure to advertising. The lower purchase age brought a new age group of potential customers; supermarket sales exposed children to promotional material; more premises generate more promotional material.

2. Content of advertisements increasingly sophisticated and innovative:

- Messages and brands designed to appeal to specific subcultures, with the aim of "embedding brands in the culture itself" (Klein, 1999). The product is frequently not mentioned in ads.
- Greater use of parody, subtlety, subversive humour (eg Tui 'yeah right' campaign).
- New beverages and brands targeted to females; aligned with changing roles of women (Lyons et al. 2006).
- Innovative developments in naming, packaging and point-of-sale promotions. Targeted pricing strategies.
- Alcohol brands on food products (eg Arnotts Kahlua biscuits, vodka ice cream).
- Campaigns more interactive using a mix of media and techniques — such as billboards drawing users to on-line competitions with texting involvement.
- Greater use of high profile competitions/prizes and giveaways (eg www.getssponsoredbycoruba.co.nz - win 52 dozen and merchandise; Lionred "Undies 550", Miss Tui; Export ski weekends, Coruba txt to win ipods....).

Researchers in Auckland recently interviewed a wide range of young people about alcohol marketing. The interviews show *'growing exposure to alcohol marketing in youth environments, more diverse sites for alcohol promotion, and alcohol promotion 'naturalised' in youth cultures* (Borrell et al., 2005, Whariki Research Group, Massey University).

Although young people often denied that advertising influences their choices, they showed a detailed knowledge of alcohol promotion campaigns

...With that Export ad ...they got the bus, like I'd love to do that. Just like grab a whole lot of people and go.But you'd need Export to do it as well... (male, 17)

... You see like slaughtered people, absolutely trolleyed and it's just awesome... and (advertising) reminds you of that occasion... (male, 17)

...If you buy two Tuis you get a prize – little hats (17 year old) (McCreanor et al., 2005; *Addiction Research and Theorv.* 13:6)

How is alcohol marketing currently regulated in NZ?

Since 1993 New Zealand has allowed the advertising and liquor industry stakeholders to "self-regulate", developing their own content codes through the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). Public complaints about advertisements that may be in breach of the liquor code are adjudicated by a complaints board and appeals board. Advertising industry and public representatives make up the membership of these boards, but the majority of public members are from a legal or business background and do not have health sector experience. A pre-vetting system checks advertising concepts comply with the code before production.

A general 'Advertising Code of Ethics' states: *All advertisements should be prepared with a due sense of social responsibility to consumers and to society.*

Clauses provide a guide to unacceptable content, for example:

...Advertisements shall not be sexually provocative or suggestive or suggest any link between liquor and sexual attraction or performance

...Liquor advertisements shall not be directed at minors nor have strong or evident appeal to minors in particular."

There have been several industry-led reviews which have led to minor changes to the code. The most recent was in 2003 which resulted in alcohol advertisements being allowed on television at the earlier time of 8.30 pm rather than 9pm. There is no restriction on timing of alcohol advertising on radio.

The Broadcasting Standards Authority, a statutory body, is responsible for the 'saturation' levels of ads in broadcast media, alcohol sponsorship of programmes and incidental promotion in programming.

What's good about this system?

The ASA and alcohol industry groups argue that the New Zealand system is held up internationally as an example of best practice.

Voluntary self- regulation through content-based codes:

- can restrict the most offensive advertisements that clearly breach the code
- incurs no cost to the government
- suits the alcohol industry who can market with relative freedom.

What are the problems?

Public health groups have suggested that industry self-regulation is akin to “letting the fox guard the chicken coop”, and regulation of alcohol marketing should rightly be the role of the government in the interests of public health.

Where-ever they have been implemented, self-regulatory systems to control alcohol advertising (as well as other products hazardous to health) have been found to be weak. It has been suggested that voluntary code-based systems are inherently unable to counter the subtleties and emotional impact of contemporary alcohol marketing (Hill and Casswell, 2004).

Some common criticisms of self-regulation for liquor advertising:

- Code-based systems focus on controlling the content of individual advertisements rather than the overall amount and cumulative effects of alcohol marketing.
- The codes are vague, open to interpretation and circumvention. They allow advertisers to push boundaries without overtly breaching the codes.
- Many concerns are dismissed as humour, hyperbole, irony, parody and fantasy.
- Advertisements don't have to be directed at 'young people in particular' or use young actors to be appealing to them.
- They are dependent on complaints. Few complaints doesn't mean there's not a problem, but is likely to reflect lack of awareness of the influence of alcohol advertising as well as lack of knowledge of the system and energy for complaining.
- Lack of sanctions for breaches — other than removal of the ad after it has already been widely exposed.
- Lack of representation from people with public health expertise on drafting, adjudication and review panels.
- Not all advertisers are signatories. They don't cover labelling, merchandising and packaging.

How does alcohol marketing work in other countries?

Self-regulatory systems to regulate liquor advertising are common, though are often mixed with legislative restrictions. A few countries have more extensive bans on a range of media.

- **Italy:** (mix of self regulation and legislation) *“Content control in alcohol advertising does not seem to work because the rules are vague and therefore open to various interpretations. As testified by the defences presented in cases of complaint, there are numerous ambiguous contents that could be interpreted as violating the spirit of the guidelines”* (Beccaria, marketing researcher, 2006).
- **USA:** In a "reform" of voluntary advertising codes in 2003, industry groups pledged not to place ads where the underage audience is 30% or more of the audience. A series of recent studies, however, show that youth under the legal drinking age are exposed to substantially more alcohol advertising on radio, television and in magazines than the rest of the population; and that exposure of underage girls to alcohol advertising is increasing. *“The studies suggest a failure of industry self-regulation”* (Centre on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, 2002-2005: www.camy.org).
- **Netherlands:** Public health groups report that the self-regulatory code is: *vague, regularly violated, the public are unaware of the process, decisions are lengthy and concern about the influence of alcohol marketing is growing* (STAPA, 2005).
- **Australia:** A review of the self-regulatory system in 2003 found the system seriously lacking and measures were taken to strengthen it. However, in a study this year 14 complaints were submitted for ads which, according to a panel of independent experts, clearly breached the code — only one was upheld. *“Industry self-regulation is clearly not working”... “We're creating a culture where we associate consuming alcohol with being happy, being successful and being productive”* (Jones, S. 2006: marketing researcher).

Stronger regulation is found in France, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, Iceland, Spain, Portugal, Denmark and Finland — some countries prohibiting advertising of higher strength alcohol, alcohol advertising on certain media or in sporting contexts. For example:

- **Norway:** prohibits all types alcohol marketing
- **Sweden:** Alcohol marketing on radio or television is prohibited, but a print ban was recently deemed to violate European Union legislation. Every alcohol advertisement must now include a specified text relating to the risks.
- **France:** a 1991 law bans television and cinema advertising and most cultural or sports event sponsorship of all alcohol over 1.2%. It also allows referral only to the product features and requires that the ad be accompanied by a health message.

Aren't industry groups encouraging responsible drinking?

Some alcohol producers have responded to concerns with “sensible drinking” websites and reminder messages on bottles, cans and advertisements. Critics claim that these messages are weak — a tiny voice in the sea of messages promoting positive experiences of drinking.

Public health groups argue that strategies that rely on educating the individual drinker have little evidence for effectiveness when compared with those that work on the environment, making ‘healthy choices the easy choices’.

What are the options for better regulation of alcohol marketing?

Type/level of control	Regulatory options and comments
<p>Prohibition of all alcohol advertising in New Zealand-controlled media and phasing out of alcohol sponsorship of sporting and cultural events and clubs</p> <p>Partial bans on alcohol advertising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on placement eg in sporting environments; where a certain proportion of people are underage; or permitted only in R18 environments • on type of media • on saturation (amount) of advertisements • tighter restrictions on new products • content restrictions eg no “lifestyle advertising”, product and price information only • on beverage eg low alcohol products only advertised <p>Enforced codes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • legally binding codes with real sanctions • applied to all advertisers • strong pre-vetting • definite code boundaries determined by research with input from vulnerable groups • fast, easy, well publicised complaints process <p>Mandatory health risk messages: a rotating set of government approved risk messages accompanying advertising</p> <p>Increased counter-advertising</p> <p>Status quo</p>	<p>Legislation to prohibit advertising (similar to that in France) <i>This option is most compatible with goals of reducing harm and reduces risk of a partial ban increasing marketing via other media. Sponsorship loss to communities may need interim government funds.</i></p> <p>Regulation by statutory body</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • takes over regulation of alcohol marketing in all media • monitors exposure and impact of alcohol marketing in various contexts • develops regulations and oversees compliance • screens new products <p><i>Such a specialist body may also oversee marketing of other products harmful to health.</i></p> <p>Co-regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compliance with any industry codes overseen by statutory body • drafting of codes, complaints adjudication and reviews by an panel with a strong public health representation <p><i>Content-based codes control contemporary marketing poorly. To be consistent with government health objectives, codes would also need to cover exposure.</i></p> <p><i>Research evidence says warning messages may not affect behaviour but may affect knowledge of risks and intention to change drinking habits. Need to be targeted and specific.</i></p> <p><i>Health promotion counter-advertising requires huge budgets, and has poor evidence for leading to sustained behaviour change.</i></p> <p>Industry control <i>shown to be largely ineffective; inconsistent with government health objectives</i></p>

