Case Report

Case number: 0270-25
Advertiser: Boost Mobile
Medium: Billboard
Decision date: 5-Nov-2025
Decision: No breach

ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE COMMUNITY PANEL

- AANA Code of Ethics - 2.5 Language - no breach

AD DESCRIPTION

This Boost Mobile billboard features a red background with black text 'WORKS ITS ARSE OFF'. A mobile phone is covering part of the letters 'R' and 'S' from the word 'ARSE'.



SUMMARY

Complaint

A complaint was received on the grounds that the ad used inappropriate language for a broad audience which includes children.

Advertiser response

The advertiser responded that the advertisement is part of a national marketing campaign entitled ‘Boost Mobile work’s it arse off’, which celebrates the Australian spirit of hard work using humour and colloquial language. The phrase ‘works its arse off’ is a common, light-hearted expression commonly used in Australian culture and is not typically regarded as obscene or offensive, especially since the word “arse” is partially censored in all billboard versions.

A copy of the advertiser’s full response is included as Appendix A.

Decisions

The Panel found that the ad did not breach section 2.5 of the AANA Code of Ethics as the ad did not use language that was inappropriate for a broad audience.

ASSESSMENT AND DECISIONS

Section 2.5 (AANA Code of Ethics): Advertising shall only use language which is appropriate in the circumstances (including appropriate for the relevant audience and medium). Strong or obscene language shall be avoided.

The Practice Note states:

> Words and phrases which are innocuous and in widespread and common use in the Australian vernacular are permitted provided they are used in a manner consistent with their colloquial usage, for example with gentle humour, and not used in a demeaning or aggressive manner.
>
> Advertising which sufficiently beeps or censors language so that it cannot be understood will not be seen to be strong or obscene language.

Panel assessment

The Panel considered that the word 'arse' is mild and used commonly within the Australian vernacular. The Panel noted that the word was deliberately obscured, and that this softened the execution to the point where it was not aggressive or overtly offensive. The Panel considered that the word was not yelled at someone, and was not used to describe someone in a manner that could be regarded as inappropriate. The Panel considered that it is a phrase commonly heard in the Australian community to describe someone or something that works incredibly hard.

The Panel considered that the word is not likely to be considered obscene in terms of prevailing community standards, and that its use in this manner was not contrary to prevailing community standards.

Panel decision

The Panel considered that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.5 of the Code of Ethics.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The Panel found that the ad did not breach any other section of the advertising codes.

APPENDIX A: ADVERTISER RESPONSE IN FULL

The relevant advertisement is part of a national marketing campaign entitled “Boost Mobile works its arse off”. Boost Mobile Australia is a value prepaid SIM plan provider that operates on the Full Telstra Prepaid Mobile Network. The marketing campaign celebrates that Australians work hard and expect their mobile provider to work just as hard. We use uniquely Australian cultural and colloquial examples of hard-working people, situations and things in a humorous and positive way in this campaign to celebrate hard work.

The use of the word “arse” in the campaign, specifically in billboard outdoor advertising, seems to be the basis for the complaint received. Our billboard advertising as part of this campaign features the campaign headline ‘Boost Mobile works its arse off’ with the word arse partially concealed by a person or thing (noting that there are different variations and we are unsure exactly which billboard variation the complaint refers to). We refer to Section 2 clause 2.5 of the Ad Standards Code of Ethics and Practice Note as the relevant section of the code which states that: Advertising shall only use language which is appropriate in the circumstances (including appropriate for the relevant audience and medium). Strong or obscene language shall be avoided. Boost Mobile maintains that its advertisement does not breach the Code and does not use strong or obscene language that is inappropriate for the following reasons.

The phrase “works its arse off” is a widespread, culturally familiar, and innocuous expression in Australia. It is commonly used to convey hard work and dedication either positively or humorously in our society. Paragraph 1 of the Practice Note outlines that words and phrases like this that are used in Australian vernacular are permitted, provided they are used in a non-offensive, non-discriminatory way. Boost Mobile is clearly using this in a non-discriminatory and non-offensive way in our advertising. There is no reference, indication or implication that the advertisement uses the phrase in an aggressive or demeaning manner. In contrast, it is deliberately used in a positive way to celebrate the spirit of hard work that resonates with Australian culture, a theme that is central to the campaigns message.

Further, the word “arse” has been visually censored across all the campaign outdoor billboard advertising. This was a deliberate creative choice. Paragraph 3 in Section 2.5 of the Practice Note outlines that language that is sufficiently beeped or censored so it cannot be understood, will not be seen to be strong or obscene language. Notwithstanding the fact that as part of the phrase ‘works its arse off’ we do not believe the word ‘arse’ to be obscene or strong language, we believe the advertisement sufficiently censors the word to ensure it mitigates the risk of any exposure to being understood by children.

We note that there is no suggestion or reference of sexuality, sex, nudity or innuendo in this advertising that could reasonably considered a breach of Section 2.4 of the code of ethics.

Prior to launching the advertising campaign, Boost Mobile tested the billboard advertising referenced with OMA (Outdoor Media Association) members against the OMA guidelines (that include the Ad Standards Code of Ethics). All media buyers referenced in this submission were comfortable in this billboard advertising being compliant with the Code of Ethics and standards.

We also note that the Ad Standards Panel has previously dismissed other similar complaints associated with use of the word “arse” in advertising campaigns. Many of these cases use terms like “kick-ass”, “bad ass” or “tight arse” which were also noted as light-hearted, used

consistently with their colloquial meaning, and with no animosity, similarly to the usage in our campaign.

Boost Mobile believes that the censored use of “works its arse off” in our advertisements could not be considered strong or obscene language and therefore does not contravene Section 2.5 (or any section) of the Code of Ethics.