



Case Report

1	Case Number	0003/13
2	Advertiser	Radio Rentals Group
3	Product	House Goods Services
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV
5	Date of Determination	16/01/2013
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Race

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The advertisements in question for Radio Rentals and R.T. Edwards, features a cartoon Karate Master who as different products appear in the screen frame is visually using a karate chop action to chop down on the sale prices of the featured products. The audio that accompanies the visual is that of an accentuated karate master who is reading the features, description and prices of the products featured. These advertisements were used to promote the end of year stock take sale for the businesses.

THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

I object to the advertisement because it portrays a cartoon Asian man doing a karate chop with a cleaver. The depiction is a racist stereotype.

The advertisement uses a cartoon caricature called "Karate Master" who speaks with a racist stereotype 1950s style 'comedy' Asian accent. The caricature itself is also a racist stereotype.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complainant/s regarding this advertisement include the following:

With regard to the mentioned complaints, we'd like to state the following regarding our "Price Chop" television Advertisement:

- It is intended to be light hearted and humorous.*
- It is intended to portray a "karate master" character conveying the benefits of prices being chopped i.e. great savings. A Japanese karate master was chosen for the cartoon as martial arts experts are generally considered to be highly proficient at traditional karate 'punches and strikes' and we use these as a device to highlight that prices have been cut. We do not believe that this portrayal is racist. As the communication is intended to communicate the end-of-year sale where prices have been heavily cut, or "chopped", the association with a Karate Master was a natural choice.*
- It is animated and as such has the characteristics of many animated pieces (including children's cartoons) whereby physical features are exaggerated. Cartoon characterisation always accentuates various physical features and has been an accepted form of art for years. As with any cartoon image, it has been drawn to give the character personality and memorability, nothing more.*
- It has gone through an extensive internal and external approval process, including CAD approval, prior to airing – at no stage were any concerns over discrimination or vilification raised or perceived.*

The complainants seem to have two main concerns both of which may fall under Section 2.1 of the Code.

The first issue raised by the complainant is that the Advertisement depicts "Asian people" in a deliberate negative and racist manner. We believe most ordinary, reasonable viewers would not draw this conclusion and instead perceive exactly what is intended by the Advertisement, that the character shown is a Japanese karate expert. The leap from a light hearted martial arts character to deliberate racial stereotyping to us seems unreasonable. Our view is therefore that there are no grounds for the complainants' allegations of discrimination or vilification.

The second issue raised by a few of the complainants is that the character depicted has exaggerated facial features, including large buck teeth, "slits" for eyes and a 1950s style 'comedy' Asian accent. The animated character is just that, a drawn animation and as such is open to some artistic license. As with most cartoons (still or animated), many characterisations have exaggerated physical features and voices in order to give them a larger than life personality, warmth and impact. Most ordinary, reasonable people are exposed to cartoons and animations on a daily basis and would not see exaggerated physical features of the character(s) portrayed as anything outside of the accepted norm. Our view is the character depiction does not discriminate against or vilify any person or group.

For the above reasons we strongly believe the Advertisement does not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide any further information or clarification you may require in relation to this matter.

THE DETERMINATION

The Advertising Standards Board ("Board") considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (the "Code").

The Board noted the complainants' concerns that the advertisement is racist towards Asians.

The Board considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.1 of the Code. Section 2.1 of the Code states: “Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not portray people or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race...”

The Board noted that the advertisement features a cartoon depiction of a Japanese karate master promoting a ‘big price chop’ sale for Radio Rentals/RT Edwards.

The Board noted that the cartoon features of the Japanese character have been exaggerated and considered that this is not inappropriate in a cartoon. The Board considered that the cartoon depiction does not of itself amount to a depiction which would be considered demeaning by most reasonable members of the community.

The Board noted that the character speaks in a strong Asian accent and considered that this is in keeping with his Japanese appearance and again does not amount to a depiction which would be considered demeaning by most reasonable members of the community.

The Board noted that the advertisement is a stereotypical depiction of a Japanese karate master but considered that there is nothing in the depiction which is demeaning or negative and that the overall tone of the advertisement is light-hearted.

The Board considered that the advertisement does not depict an Asian person in a manner which would be considered racist by most reasonable members of the community.

The Board determined that the material depicted did not discriminate against or vilify any person or section of the community on account of race and did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

Further finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on any other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaints.