



ADVERTISING
STANDARDS
BUREAU

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Case Report

1	Case Number	0037/14
2	Advertiser	Momentum Energy
3	Product	House Goods Services
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV
5	Date of Determination	26/02/2014
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Gender

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The advertisement opens on a man in an ordinary suburban lounge room trying to get his home theatre system to work. In a series of cuts we see him getting more and more frustrated as he can't get it to work. He repeatedly tries to turn on the TV by pressing the remote control from various angles, hoping it will work.

He is checking cables, moving furniture. There is a sense of the passage of time as the family's life goes on around him. After looking at the instructions and cables, he sits on the ground looking defeated. His wife gently asks him if he's tried the switch. The family are shown relaxing on the couch watching the TV which is now working.

THE COMPLAINT

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

The ad deliberately portrays him as incompetent and, by inference men in general. The woman looks on with a knowing smile and provides a simple solution, making him look like a fool. The ad is deliberately demeaning to men. Sexism cuts both ways

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

Momentum Energy has considered the single complaint to the Board and the advertisement in question in light of the provisions of the AANA Code of Ethics.

Momentum Energy had considered the AANA Code of Ethics and each provision against the advertisement the subject of the complaint carefully. While Momentum Energy regrets that the complainant was offended by the advertisement Momentum Energy does not consider that the advertisement breaches the AANA Code of Ethics, specifically Section 2 to which the complaint relates. The advertisement does not portray people or depict material that discriminates against or vilifies any person or section of the community.

The 'try the switch' moment is premised on the 'have you tried the instructions' or 'have you reset your computer' revelation. It is not derogatory or demeaning nor does it portray the character as incompetent and Momentum Energy disputes that further inference can be made to men in general.

Rather, the circumstances portrayed merely echoes a perception that we can all identify with – both men and women alike, across popular culture advertising.

The character was depicted as having simply missed the obvious and has the answer right in front of his face, just as expressed in the commonly used idiom "Can't see your nose in front of your face".

Momentum Energy adopted a light hearted approach with the advertisement portraying the situation in a warm, comical and whimsical way - including the sympathetic characters around him and the choice of music. The advertisement ends with a happy resolve where a positive outcome is received and the family gets to relax together in front of the working appliance. The advertisement simply reinforces that the interaction between the man and woman within the family unit requires teamwork and cooperation.

Momentum Energy does not believe that the commercial is sexist or shines a bad light on men. The advertisement does not allude to the fact that women are more competent or superior than men. It is simply trying to observe that sometimes the answer is right in front of your face and the solution is more obvious to others whom are less immersed or overwhelmed by the situation. It's not about sexism, as this happens to both men and women. Rather, it is about acknowledging that all of us occasionally cannot see what is obvious.

Momentum Energy uses this metaphor to suggest that Momentum Energy are different and can offer a simple solution to their problem of dealing with energy retailers. It capitalizes on the play of the word 'switch', which carries both the meaning of "a device for making and breaking the connection in an electric circuit" and "an act of changing to or adopting one thing in place of another". The consumer just has to try the switch.

We wish to also point out that the commercial does not finish with the character under the TV. It in fact ends with the character happily on the couch surrounded by his family with the TV working. Great care was taken in preparing the advertisement to ensure the advertisement complies with the AANA Code. The advertisement does not discriminate or vilify women or men, nor treat any manner that is insensitive to the relevant audience. Momentum Energy submits the advertisement does not breach any of the AANA Code.

For the reasons stated above we ask the board to dismiss the complaint.

Momentum Energy thanks the Board for the opportunity to respond to this complaint and to confirm its ongoing support for the ASB and associated codes of conduct.

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 sexist in its suggestion that men are simple.

The Board viewed the advertisement and noted the advertiser’s response.

The Board considered whether the advertisement complied with Section 2.1 of the Code which requires that 'advertisements shall not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual preference, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.'

The Board noted that the advertisement features a man trying to use the television remote control to turn the television on. He has little success and removes cords from the TV attempting to get it to work. A woman (his wife) asks him if he has tried the switch. The voiceover then describes the benefits of making the switch to Momentum Energy.

The Board noted that the man is shown trying various different ways to get the television remote to work including repositioning himself around the lounge room and up close to the television. The Board noted that his wife is seen in the background and she is aware of what he is doing but does not interfere or mock his efforts. The Board considered that the scenario depicted ie: trying to work out the technology and which cord connects to what, is one that many members of the community (men and women) could relate to and that it is light hearted and humorous.

The Board noted it had previously dismissed similar complaints regarding the portrayal of a man who is unable to fit a child’s car seat and whose wife organises their life insurance because he finds that too difficult (0504/12) In that instance the Board:

“...noted the complainants’ concerns that the advertisement portrays men as unable to fit car seats or do any task unless it is easy. The Board noted that the suggestion that the man would not be able to fit a car seat is stereotypical and considered that it is presented in a manner which is mildly humorous and not negative or demeaning.”

In the current advertisement the Board noted that after some time, the wife approaches the man and asks the question “have you tried the switch?” The Board noted that the switch is meant to refer to the switch for the television as well as the switch to Momentum Energy. The Board noted that the woman does not speak to the man in a demeaning way and she does not humiliate or belittle him. The Board note that in the final scene the whole family is on the lounge enjoying a program on the television.

Consistent with its previous determination, the Board considered that the depiction of the man being unable to work the tv/cords is a reflection of a situation facing many people and that the depiction is not suggesting it is specific to men and in any case is light hearted.

The Board considered in this instance the advertisement did not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates or vilifies a person on account of their gender.

The Board determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Board

dismissed the complaints.