



Case Report

1	Case Number	0083/12
2	Advertiser	Red Bull Aust Pty Ltd
3	Product	Food and Beverages
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Internet
5	Date of Determination	14/03/2012
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

- 2.5 - Language inappropriate language
- 2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Religion

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The advertisement depicts three cartoon characters fishing on a lake. One of the characters, named Jesus, states he's bored and decides to leave the boat and appears to walk on water as he departs. The other two characters in the boat voice their surprise and suggest that this feat may be a miracle or a result of drinking Red Bull (which has given Jesus wings) but Jesus replies that it's nothing to do with either, it's because he knows where the stepping stones are.

THE COMPLAINT

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

This advertisement is highly offensive and breaches section 2.1 of the code in regards to religious discrimination. The advertisement is disrespectful and uses the term 'Jesus' in a very crude way. People of religious faith would be disgusted by such a foul ad.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

Red Bull Energy Drink television and online advertisements demonstrate the energising effects of Red Bull on body and mind in a fresh and cheeky way via light-hearted cartoons that are not designed to be taken literally.

As with most cartoons, the drawings and storylines have been developed over many years with the purpose of communicating a humorous, satirical story or message and not a true life scenario. For example, The Simpsons is an animated cartoon whereby the characters are created for their humour and yet not taken so literally.

The Red Bull brand image is hallmarked by individuality, innovation and non-conformism. These brand values are reflected in the brand communication, characterised by self-confidence, a witty approach and unique identity, as well as self-irony, which is appreciated by the millions of fans worldwide who purchase our products, attend or participate in our events and consume our media content through various media channels.

However, we respect the views and opinions of the complainants as advised by the ASB, and as the Red Bull television commercials are not intended to offend, we have chosen to remove the relevant advertisement from all television and online mediums as of this Sunday 4 March 2012.

Red Bull Australia is committed to complying with the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics and all applicable laws related to advertising.

Given our action, we trust that the matter does not require the consideration of the Advertising Standards Board.

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 complainant’s concerns that the advertisement is inappropriate, offensive and blasphemous.

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

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, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability or political belief.”

The Board noted that the advertisement features animated, cartoon style characters intended to depict Jesus and two of his followers or disciples. The three men are on a small boat on the water and they discuss the miracle of Jesus walking on water and whether or not this is because he has consumed Red Bull. Jesus confirms that he is walking on stepping stones not performing a miracle. At the end of the advertisement Jesus slips on a rock and says “Jesus”.

The Board considered that the use of a depiction of Jesus and references to specifics that are well known within the Christian faith is a serious and sensitive issue and could be considered offensive and inappropriate by members of the community.

The minority of the Board agreed that some members of the community would consider that the advertisement mocked and trivialised Christian beliefs, in particular by suggesting that Jesus walking on water was not a miracle. The minority of the Board considered that the advertisement is demeaning of Christian beliefs and that it does vilify people of Christian belief and values.

The majority of the Board also agreed that advertisements which use humour in connection with religious concepts would be considered offensive by many members of the community. However the Board noted that the Christian faith is well established and accepted in Australian society and that many well known elements are now used as general references, for example, 'walking on water' to describe the achievements and success of particular people.

The majority of the Board considered that the advertisement was not attacking of a vulnerable minority group and that it does not discredit any specific elements of Christianity. In fact the Board considered that the advertisement clearly acknowledges that walking on water is 'another one' of the miracles that Jesus performed and is supportive of the Christian belief that Jesus did perform miracles. The majority of the Board considered that the imagery depicted in the advertisement does not denigrate Christianity or Christians and would be seen by most people as a humorous play on a well known biblical story with no reflection on the beliefs underpinning the scene.

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

The Board then considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.5 of the Code. Section 2.5 of the Code states: "Advertising or Marketing Communications shall only use language which is appropriate in the circumstances and strong or obscene language shall be avoided."

The Board noted that blasphemy in itself is no longer an offence and that, although the word 'Jesus' in this context could be considered offensive by some members of the community, in the Board's view there is no strong or obscene language explicitly stated in the advertisement.

The Board considered that the depiction of Jesus using the term "Jesus" could be interpreted as Jesus admonishing himself.

The Board considered that the word is not strong or obscene and that it did not breach Section 2.5 of the Code.

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

