



ADVERTISING
STANDARDS
BUREAU

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Case Report

1	Case Number	0168/14
2	Advertiser	Mars Petcare Australia
3	Product	Professional Service
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV
5	Date of Determination	28/05/2014
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.3 - Violence Cruelty to animals

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The latest SCHMACKOS® advertisement features Roger and Dorothy, our two well-known characters who feature in many SCHMACKOS® ads.

We start with Roger in a black and white version of a groomer's studio. Roger is scared, because from a dog's perspective being bathed and groomed is not much fun! The Groomer looks scary, but it's quickly all ok as the previously black and white room turns into a brightly coloured room when Dorothy enters with a SCHMACKOS® Twirlz. The Groomer goes from being an ominous figure to a friendly stylist, whose arms Roger happily jumps into.

THE COMPLAINT

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

The music, shadow and weapon large long knife dagger-like object is intended to terrify the audience into believing that the dog will be stabbed or murdered followed by the dog cowering and whimpering in fear cornered in a dark room with nowhere to run.

I have worked in a Dog Grooming Salon for one year. We most certainly had never placed a dog in a dark room, entered it raising an instrument in this case scissors terrifying the animals. All animals are 'shaven initially'.

This advert instills deliberate animal cruelty and is very disturbing.

Why would they make an advert where the dog feels it is going to be subjected to being stabbed or murdered or that the pet owner would act in this type of behavior.

Every time I see this advert it makes me feel uncomfortable, frightened and sick. Regardless if its an animation or not - that's the whole purpose of advertising the human brain can not discriminate between fact and fiction, the marketing teams know this and this is what they act upon.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

SCHMACKOS® advertisements are well known and highly distinctive amongst consumers. They rely on the portrayal of a number of exaggerated 'everyday' scenarios that a dog and owner may encounter. Previous examples have included 'Bathtime' (featuring Dorothy compelling Roger to have a bath), 'Schmoovie' (featuring Roger and Dorothy watching a movie together), 'Fish' (featuring Dorothy and Roger and the beach together), and many others, since the 1990's.

Our latest advertisement is 'Groomer'. The intent of this 15 second advertisement is to again reflect an exaggerated 'everyday' scenario between a dog and owner (Roger & Dorothy).

This scenario was tested and validated as part of a consumer focus group.

The SCHMACKOS® "Groomer" script is based around the insight from consumer focus groups that dogs appear reluctant to have baths or go to the vets or groomers. This commercial anthropomorphises this insight by hyperbolising dog fears.

In this instance Roger the Dog's fear is depicted in the style of a 1940's film noir thriller. The distorted angles of the set, the black and white film and the old-style soundtrack emphasise this scene is an exaggerated fear of the dog's imagination and not a true depiction of reality.

Roger's fear is cleared 5 seconds into the advertisement by the introduction of his owner Dorothy and a packet of SCHMACKOS® dog treats. At this point we leave the hyperbolised Film Noir imaginary world and show reality. The transition is dramatic, as depicted by a more realistic set, colour film and upbeat soundtrack. As Dorothy enters the previously empty room, she has a pack of SCHMACKOS® Twirlz in hand (which Roger just loves), and the shadow is revealed to be a friendly Groomer. Roger is immediately visibly happy, wagging his tail and doing a back flip into the arms of his friend the Groomer. At no point does any harm occur to the dog, nor is there any depiction or inference that the unknown person shown in the shadow intends to harm the dog (the shadow is in an adjoining room and there is no dialogue). When we tested the script as part of a consumer focus group it was verified that the viewer is aware that the fear is in the imagination of the dog and that the advertisement portrays the world through dog eyes.

The balance between the black & white 'tension' and colourful 'resolution' scenes were carefully considered in this advertisement, to ensure we were able to depict our advertising message that dogs love SCHMACKOS®, and from a dog's perspective when SCHMACKOS® are on the scene everything is better! Thus not infringing section 2 of the code.

It is estimated that 4,873,000 people saw the ad during this period. We have not had any direct consumer complaints related to this advertisement.

We trust that this response satisfies the Australian Standards Board and the Complaint will be dismissed.

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 implies cruelty to animals in a manner which is upsetting.

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

The Board considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.3 of the Code. Section 2.3 states: "Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not present or portray violence unless it is justifiable in the context of the product or service advertised".

The Board noted the advertisement is a cartoon and opens on a dog shivering as it watches the silhouette of a person approaching him whilst holding what looks like a knife or dagger before a light is switched on and we see it is a dog groomer holding some scissors.

The Board noted it had previously dismissed complaints about a cartoon-style advertisement which depicted cows being tortured in case 0123/12 where:

“The Board noted that cartoon style advertisements can be attractive to children and considered that whilst some children’s cartoons can feature violent acts (Tom and Jerry, Roadrunner) in this instance the violence is not portrayed as slapstick and humorous and the victim does not recover. The Board considered that advertisers should exercise caution in depicting violence in a cartoon style, as the cartoon style can be attractive to children...

The Board noted some complainants’ concerns over the use of torture being disturbing to real torture victims. Whilst the Board is sensitive to this issue, in this instance the Board considered that the cartoon style of the advertisement combined with the nature of the product advertised combined to minimize the impact of the violence.”

The Board noted that in the current advertisement the dog is not harmed in any way and that whilst it appears to be frightened in the opening scenes it is very quickly made clear that there is nothing to be afraid of and no-one is trying to harm the dog.

The Board noted that the advertisement had been rated ‘G’ by CAD which means it can be broadcast at any time except during pre-school programs. The Board considered that the content of the advertisement was appropriate to the relevant audience which would include children.

Based on the above the Board determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.3 of the Code.

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

