



Case Report

1	Case Number	0177/17
2	Advertiser	Mars Petcare Australia
3	Product	House Goods Services
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV - Pay
5	Date of Determination	10/05/2017
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.6 - Health and Safety Within prevailing Community Standards

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This television advertisement is promoting Pedigree DentaStix and opens with a father feeding his young child, who has managed to get food all over her face. When the father ducks his head around the corner to get the baby-wipes and returns, he's greeted by the sight of a very happy, but now magically clean baby and a very innocent looking dog which is licking its lips.

The ad closes with the tagline 'Cleaner gets you closer' – Pedigree Feed the Good.

THE COMPLAINT

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

The advert clearly encourages dog owners to reward their dogs for seeing a young child's face as a source of food. Despite centuries of domestication, dogs are still hunting animals. Dog attacks on children tend to be on the face. It is highly irresponsible (and thus in breach of section 2.6) for Pedigree to encourage dogs - through their owners, obviously - to regard a child's face as a legitimate source of food and reward.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

Thank you for providing us with a copy of a complaint (0177/17) received by the Advertising Standards Bureau (ASB) (the Complaint) regarding a Mars Petcare Australia advertisement, Pedigree 'Dentastix Messy Baby' (Advertisement).

Mars Petcare respects and acknowledges the right of the public to provide opinions regarding advertising content and also values the work of the ASB. Mars Petcare therefore appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Complaint as follows.

Description: Dad is feeding a young child (under 2 years) in highchair, whose face has become covered in sauce/food. Says to child, "All done" and "Let's get you cleaned up before Mum gets home" and quickly comes back into shot with a pack of baby wipes. At this point we see that the child's face is clean and she is looking content. In the corner of the room the family dog licks its lips innocently. Dad puts down wipes and says "That'll work". At some point later, Dad gives the dog the product. Voiceover says "Dentastix cleans so you can get closer".

The CAD details for the Advertisement are as follows:

Reference number: 1161668

Rating: G

Mars Petcare contends that the Advertisement does not breach any section (including Section 2) of the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics (the Code), which also covers the AANA Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children and the AANA Code for Food and Beverages Marketing. These latter codes are not applicable in this context as the Advertisement is not directed at children and does not advertise a food or beverage product.

Sections 2.1- 2.5 of the Code are not relevant to the Complaint or to the content of the Advertisement for the following reasons:

- a) the Advertisement does not discriminate or vilify (section 2.1);*
- b) the Advertisement does not employ sexual appeal (section 2.2);*
- c) the Advertisement does not present or portray violence (section 2.3);*
- d) the Advertisement does not portray sex, sexuality or nudity (section 2.4);*
- e) the Advertisement does not use strong or obscene language (section 2.5).*

2.6 Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety.

The complainant contends that the Advertisement 'encourages dog owners to reward their dogs for seeing a young child's face as a source of food' which is 'highly irresponsible' given 'dogs are still hunting animals' and 'dog attacks on children tend to be on the face'.

Mars Petcare does not believe that the Advertisement conveys the message that dog owners should reward their dogs for seeing a young child's face as a source of food. The primary message conveyed by the Advertisement is that close contact with a dog can be made more bearable if you give your dog Dentastix, which is designed as a daily oral care product. Rather than encourage the inferred behaviour of "seeing a child's face as food", the Advertisement uses humour to bring attention to the importance of oral hygiene in dogs, and to show how Dentastix can bring us "closer" to our pets.

In our view, the Advertisement does not contravene Prevailing Community Standards with respect to health or safety for the following reasons:

a) it is not unusual for responsible dog owners and their children to come in close proximity of their pets' oral cavity. Whilst many parents might not condone animals coming in to such close contact with their children, the action of a dog licking a child's face is common within many dog-owning households.

b) the Advertisement does not show the dog actually licking the child's face, nor does it suggest that the child is in any danger. In the scene in which the Dad returns to the kitchen, the child is not distressed and the dog is shown sitting contently in the corner. The dog is not portrayed in a violent or aggressive way. There is nothing to suggest that the dog has hurt the child.

c) the Advertisement does not represent a realistic or plausible scene. No viewer would logically believe that the dog could lick the child's face (while the child is seated in a high chair out of reach of the dog) and return to its original position in the few seconds during which the Dad has turned away. It is clearly intended as an unrealistic, tongue-in-cheek depiction of an everyday situation.

In our view, it is clear that the Advertisement does not show the dog being 'rewarded' for the inferred behaviour, but rather that this owner administers the product for its intended purpose (ie, as a daily oral care product). Importantly, Dentastix is not the same brand or product as a dry dog food product, which may in part be used by owners to 'reward' good pet behaviour.

Furthermore, the Advertisement shows a domesticated pet in a highly socialised, urban situation, typical of consumers of the product. It is distinct from that of 'hunting animals' which tend to be cared for in a vastly different setting, making the approximation of behaviour tenuous.

Finally, Mars Petcare notes the ASB's determination of case number 0070/13, in relation to an advertisement that had similar content to the Advertisement. In its determination, the Board noted that 'whilst many parents might not condone animals coming in to such close contact with their children, the action of a dog licking a child's face is common within dog-owning households.' The Board considered that most members of the community would agree that the practice of a dog licking a child's face, whilst not to be encouraged, is not of itself a breach of community standards on health and safety. This is consistent with more recent determinations of the Board in case numbers 0033/16 and 0348/15, which cite the Board's findings in case number 0070/13 (as expressed above), and are also highlighted in

the ASB's "Health and Safety: Determination Summary."

Mars Petcare is committed to complying with the Code and all relevant advertising laws and codes at all times and on the basis of the above, maintains that the Advertisement does not contravene the Code. Mars Petcare respectfully submits that the Complaint should be dismissed.

Please let us know if you require further information.

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 implies a dog has licked a young child's face clean which suggests dog owners should reward their dogs by using children's faces as a source of food, and that this is a breach of Prevailing Community Standards.

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

The Board considered Section 2.6 of the Code. Section 2.6 of the Code states: "Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety".

The Board noted that this television advertisement depicts a father going to get a wipe to clean food off his young child's face but when he returns he sees the child's face is clean and the family dog is licking its lips.

The Board noted the complainant's concerns that dog attacks frequently involve a person's face and that the advertisement is irresponsible in this depiction of a dog coming in to contact with a young child.

The Board noted that the dog in the advertisement appears to be a typical family pet, and not a dangerous breed, or a dog typically associated with dog attacks, and considered that whilst many parents might not condone animals being in such close contact with their children, in the Board's view the dog does not appear menacing and the father is only briefly out of eye contact with the child as he reaches for a wipe. The Board noted the overall humorous tone of the advertisement and considered that there was no suggestion that the family dog was a danger to any person at any time.

The Board noted the complainant's concern that the advertisement encourages dog owners to reward their pets by seeing a young child's face as a source of food. The Board noted that the scenario used in the advertisement, of a dog apparently licking clean a child's face, is intended to be light-hearted and humorous and considered that in the context of an advertisement promoting a daily oral care product for a dog the overall message likely to be taken is that if your dog's teeth, and subsequently breath, is clean then some situations might not be as bad as they otherwise would – i.e. a dog licking a person's face. The Board

considered the complainant's interpretation of the advertisement encouraging dog owners to allow their pets to copy the actions implied in the advertisement is an interpretation unlikely to be shared by the broader community.

The Board noted that there are hygiene implications with an animal licking a person's face but considered that we don't actually see the dog lick the child's face, rather it is implied. The Board noted it had previously considered similar advertisements where we actually see a dog licking a person's face in cases 0070/13, 0348/15 and 0066/16 and considered that consistent with these previous determinations, the action of a dog licking a child's face is common within dog-owning households and most members of the community would agree that the practice of a dog licking a child's face, whilst not to be encouraged, is not of itself a breach of prevailing community standards.

Overall the Board considered that the advertisement did not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety and determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.6 of the Code.

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