



Case Report

1	Case Number	0315/11
2	Advertiser	Origin Energy
3	Product	House goods/services
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV
5	Date of Determination	24/08/2011
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Other

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

A young boy is standing in front of a mirror in the bathroom, contemplating shaving his head to match the style of a TV personality in a photo he holds in his hand. He decides to do it, and picks up the electric shaver and starts shaving his head. Suddenly, someone flicks off the shaver – it's the boy's dad. When the dad looks up, he sees his son, head half-shaved, and notices that his son's hair eerily resembles his own balding head – nothing on the top, and only some on the sides. There's an awkward moment as the two don't know what to say, until a slightly embarrassed dad exits the bathroom, leaving the boy standing there dumbfounded. A voiceover resolves the scene that has unfolded, explaining that there's a better way to save on electricity – by being with Origin Energy.

THE COMPLAINT

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

I find this advertisement to be highly insensitive. This ad portrays overweight teenagers who do not fit the stereotypical male as being someone to be ridiculed. I think that it is damaging to young people who might identify with this boy because of his weight and other features. In these times of increased adolescent depression and other health issues this ad can only contribute to bullying that is inflicted on students who may already be struggling with self-esteem and acceptance into social groups. Teachers (such as myself) and parents are striving to support our youth and encourage them to feel good about themselves during the difficult

adolescent years and the subject of this advertisement undoes this work. I find it tasteless and cruel.

I believe that this add is in breach of the advertising Code of Ethics specifically:

2.1 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.

I believe that this ad will further promote the vilification and bullying of red headed children in schools which is already a significant problem. My son was bullied at high school during the 1990's and still has his hair dyed blonde monthly so I am well aware of the consequences such as depression and the potential for self harm.

My wife is a school teacher and since our experience with our son has read widely on the subject of bullying and teasing. We have spoken to parents of other red headed children who have been subjected to bullying and teasing because on the basis of hair color. Many like our son dye their hair. The consequence of this teasing and bullying can be both horrific and long-lasting. These children are now commonly being referred to as "ranga's". This term is also being used and accepted on television further contributing to teasing and bullying.

How far would someone get if the referred to a fat person as an elephant?

In my opinion the Country Energy add is a failed attempt at humour with some terrible long term unintended consequences. Parents of bullied and teased children will find the ad far from humorous. Any ad that stereotypes children with a particular hair colour as fat, ugly and stupid and contributes to them being a target of teasing and bullying should not be tolerated. My wife lodged a complaint with Country Energy and their representative who phone us back admitted that he had to watch the add a couple of times to get its point.

This pointless cruel and potentially very damaging add simply should not be allowed on television. The intended message could have been conveyed far more clearly to the viewer in a more effective manner without causing harm.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

We write in response to the complaints received regarding the Origin Energy 30 second television commercial (TVC) titled "Half Cut", specifically to address issues which may fall broadly within Section 2 of the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics.

We have reviewed the two complaints submitted, which are primarily concerned with the casting of the teenager presented in the lead role. Specifically, the complainants believe the TVC is insensitive to teenagers who are overweight and have red hair and that this depiction promotes bullying and vilification. We believe the complaints do not identify any breach of the Code and we anticipate the following explanation of the TVC will serve to satisfactorily dismiss any concern which may relate to Section 2 of the Code.

Origin has recently significantly expanded its operations in the NSW market and this execution promotes the leading position of the brand in the Australian energy market. The primary message of the TVC is to communicate that Origin delivers excellent value to customers and in particular, to Origin's newly acquired Country Energy customers. This message is conveyed creatively through a scenario that is consistent with and relevant to

Australian family life, specifically families living with teenage children. This is the audience the communication aims to engage with.

The advertisement opens with a teenage boy in a bathroom, who seeks to emulate the haircut of a sporting hero with a pair of electric clippers. He shaves a wide path through the middle of his hair with the clippers. At this point his father enters the bathroom and switches off the clippers at the power point in an attempt to save power. It then becomes obvious that the teenager's unfinished haircut bares a strong resemblance to his father's balding head. The TVC is resolved through a voiceover which says "There are better ways to save on electricity". The TVC is intentionally humorous, but in no way does this humour vilify the teenager, directly or indirectly. The humour of the TVC is created by the similar appearance of father and son once the teenager has shaved his head and is entirely appropriate.

The teenager and father presented in the TVC were cast based on acting merit and similarity of appearance solely. Any other perception around the intentions of casting and their physical characteristics are unfounded and such suggestions represent isolated points of view rather than populist concerns with the communication. The advertisement has been shown extensively in South Australia and Sydney since February 2011, without any similar complaints being made to the Advertising Standards Board.

In light of the above we strongly believe that the TVC does not breach the Code and there is no validity to the arguments presented in the complaints received to date.

Origin Energy and its agencies are strong supporters of the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics and we consequently take matters such as these very seriously. In this instance however we believe the complaints to be without foundation.

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 demeaning and stereotypes people based on their physical characteristics.

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, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability or political belief.'

The Board noted that the advertisement features a young boy looking at a picture and then starting to shave his hair in an attempt to emulate the picture. The shaver is then turned off by his Dad and the boy's haircut is left incomplete.

The Board noted the advertiser's response that the advertisement is intended to be humorous and that the boy's unfinished haircut is a direct link to now making him look very similar to his own father who is balding in a similar way. The Board considered that negative reference was made to the physical characteristics of the boy and that reasonable consumers would not

perceive this as a deliberate attack of people with red hair or even those who may be overweight, but rather a humorous way to encourage and promote the 'saving of energy and money' through the depiction of a boy who tries to look like a celebrity, but ends up looking like his father.

Based on the above the Board determined that, in this instance, the advertisement did not depict any material that discriminated against or vilified any person or section of society. 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 complaint.