



Case Report

1	Case Number	0343/17
2	Advertiser	Reckitt Benckiser (Aust) Pty Ltd
3	Product	Toiletries
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV - Free to air
5	Date of Determination	09/08/2017
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

- Other Social Values
- 2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Gender
- 2.5 - Language Inappropriate language

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This television advertisement opens on an actor taking a break from her red carpet appearance to say that even Hollywood's latest sweetheart needs to 'punish the porcelain'. As she enters a room with a toilet on a raised dais, she goes on to say that to avoid embarrassment she gives every bathroom the 'VIPoo treatment' and we see her remove a bottle of VIPoo from her handbag and spray it in to the toilet bowl. She explains that if you spray the water before you go to the toilet, the product will trap the smell of your 'devil's doughnuts' and we see cartoon imagery of brown doughnuts trapped in the water of the toilet, with no smell escaping. The final tagline is, "Even a VIP needs to VIPoo".

THE COMPLAINT

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

*It is crass and vulgar
There is no be so graphic*

Just a stupid, disgusting advert.

I object to this commercial as it shows poo in a toilet and makes me ill when I am eating. This commercial is designed for five year old children who makes it an insult to the intelligence of

the average adult and makes it very annoying to watch. This product with the awful name of VIP Poo mentions my name in the advertising. I am wondering why the person who created this commercial did not name the main character after themselves. Maybe they did not want to be associated with a spray called VIP poo.

If this ad is supposed to be funny then it falls a long way short. Yes, I understand the need for air fresheners in the bathroom but I don't need to see this woman doing "devil's donuts" while I am having dinner and trying to relax after dinner. I actually change the channel to avoid the ad.

Didnt like the VIP Poo slogan or the image of a piece of excrement floating to the bottom of the toilet bowl . Unpleasant image while eating as well.

This ad talks about defecating. It continues to offend me and the ad is run at family meal times and whilst children are watching, again offensive

It is the most disgusting ad I've ever seen. How on earth can an ad like this be broadcast on television. Aren't there any standards that must be met before an ad like this can be aired? "Punish the porcelain" for Christ's sake? It's beyond belief that you people can let an ad like this be broadcast on Australian TV!

This is the second time I've seen this advert which is in the worst possible taste. It is for a product to be sprayed in the toilet before defecating. It is not something I expect to see on television (or anywhere else for that matter), especially as I was eating my lunch at the time. As well, I believe it demeans women in the way it is presented.

It is utterly inappropriate for the time of day. It is beyond even today's liberal and tolerant standards. It is degrading for a major proportion of society; to accept this advertisement condones a new community standard of humour to that of early teen schoolboys.

She says 'punish the porcelain'. Not lady like. Now my 4 year old keeps repeating the phrase

The ad shows pictures of poo floating around in a toilet and talks about hiding smells. Don't need to be seeing images of poo floating around in a toilet being advertised on tv. The time I've seen it most has been around dinner time. Absolutely disgusting - makes one stomach churn.

The animated sequence of the ad depicts human faeces - animated to look like donuts - falling into a toilet bowl and emitted fumes.

This content has undertones of gender discrimination, in that it implies that Women have issues with passing faeces in a workplace or other communal environment and that the result of the odour of a bowel movement may:

- a) negatively affect any males that and next to use the facilities and*
- b) negatively influence the male boss re future employment prospects.*

It also implies that women have sufficient obsession or paranoia to compromise their own bodily health and function for the rationale of creating a potentially adverse aroma.

The whole tone is stereotypical and offensive to the intelligence of the Australian community

and the tolerance of the community to uncontrollable bodily functions i.e faecal odour.

This commercial is too visually disgusting and disgusting in its content and commentary. Where are the boundaries?

I can only hope this is an American commercial left in the program by mistake, and will not be on air again.

The advertisement is shown usually when you would be eating, specifically I have seen it prior to 9 o'clock, which is offensive. I find it totally inappropriate & disgusting, something that doesn't need to be promoted, especially at meal times. It also shows women in an unfair position, we don't need to see adverts like this on TV at all!

I find this advert disgusting in the extreme. We don't need to know about punishing the porcelain and the devils donuts. This ad should be removed from TV immediately. It is disappointing that companies need to stoop to such levels to sell a product.

Sickening.... when u see the ad u will know what im taking about...relating donuts to shit donuts literally.. calling it V.I.POO... the adults who came up with this ad are certainly sick in the head... it's not clever is wrong seriously wrong. It's gross and disturbing.

Firstly the name, secondly the content of the advert. I do not believe that any sane, thinking adult needs to be made aware of where toilet smells come from.

The depiction of stools being dropped into a toilet and a smell arising therefrom, on prime time television is totally unnecessary and quite frankly disgusting.

The advert is absolutely revolting, the imagery is disgusting and the content, including the name of the product is highly offensive.

Clearly I do not know who prepared this advert but it must have come from either some sick bastard or a kindergarten child.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

Thank you for bringing to our attention the complaints you received regarding our Air Wick V.I.Poo Toilet Spray advertising. Reckitt Benckiser (RB) is committed to responsible advertising and we have carefully reviewed the complaints against all requirements of Section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics. We submit that the TVC does not portray women in a way which discriminates against or vilifies them. We also submit that the TVC does not breach any other social values with the language used or the message conveyed.

The TVC advertises V.I.Poo toilet sprays, which are a range of products applied to the toilet bowl prior to use, in order to trap malodours. These products work differently to traditional air fresheners – they are used before the malodours are released and help to trap malodours in the bowl. Therefore, it is key to discuss the benefit of “spray & trap” as consumers need to understand this proactive, pre-use approach as opposed to the reactive, post-use approach of standard air freshener aerosols.

Relevant Audience

The CAD Placement Code for this TVC is W. This means that it is classified as General/Care in placement. It may be broadcast at any time except during P and C programs or adjacent to P or C periods. Our media agency confirmed that no spots are placed in children's programming.

2.1 - Discrimination or vilification

We submit that the TVC does not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies women.

The tone and language our "Hollywood Sweetheart" uses is designed to engage the core target market of Generation X and Y (roughly 23-52 years old) who are technology savvy, working professionals. The approach taken in the TVC is clearly intended to be light hearted, matter-of-fact, humorous and tongue-in-cheek. It is obvious that the advertisement is not intended to, and is unlikely to, be taken by reasonable Australian consumers to mean that all women have problems using the toilet at work; that are all paranoid about toilet smells or that they all think their toilet use will negatively affect future employment prospects.

The TVC is clearly not intended to imply anything about women in general. Our 2017 market research "VIPoo Toilet Habits Survey," showed that both genders experience self-consciousness when using the toilet. Our research found that the main problem that both men and women have with toilet use is dealing with the resultant malodour. It also found that 34% of Australians had an embarrassing toilet experience at out-of-home locations such as the workplace, in an aeroplane, at a restaurant, at the in-laws' house and at events/festivals. Therefore the TVC displayed a situation that would be relevant for the product's use.

The TVC presents our Hollywood Sweetheart as a confident, matter-of-fact and practical person. She is a fictional female, and indeed is portrayed as a highly successful one. She does not display any characteristics of paranoia, obsession or over-exaggeration of the situation. She is not portrayed negatively, nor is she humiliated or treated with any ridicule.

2.2 - Exploitative and degrading

We submit that the TVC does not degrade or exploit anyone, including women. The overall TVC tone is positive. Our Hollywood Sweetheart is confident and assured. She is not portrayed in a degrading, debased or exploitative manner. All the actors are depicted in clothing appropriate to the context of the Hollywood premiere. The CAD Placement Code is for a General Audience with care in the placement with regards to children's programming.

The imagery of how the product works uses cartoon-like graphics. These are needed to explain the product benefit of "spray & trap" in a socially acceptable manner. They are also in keeping with the light-hearted tone and the nature of the topic of faeces and malodour. Such a topic would be difficult to depict in other ways. We submit that these images do not degrade anyone.

2.3 - Violence

The TVC does not contain any violence.

2.4 - Sex, sexuality and nudity

The TVC does not contain any sex, sexuality or nudity.

2.5 - Language

We submit that the TVC does not contain any inappropriate, strong or obscene language. We submit that the language used is appropriate both to the topic and the CAD Placement classification.

The TVC needs to explain how the product works, since it is distinctly different to traditional air fresheners. To soften the language used and address the delicate topic in a humorous way, euphemisms were used – such as "punish the porcelain," "devil's donuts" and "icky smell." These euphemisms, along with the cartoon-like imagery, explain how the product works while avoiding the need to use other, more direct, but possibly more offensive, terms.

The Board has previously found that if colloquial terms used are not sexualised or obscene, it will be considered appropriate. We submit that the language used is not obscene or sexualised.

2.6 - Health and safety

The TVC does not show any material that contradicts the prevailing community standards of health or safety.

2.7 – Distinguishable as Advertising

It would be clear to the audience that this TVC is recognised as advertising and commercial in nature.

In light of the above, we strongly urge the Board to dismiss the complaints and look forward to receiving the Board's determination in due course.

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 discriminatory as it suggests women should be ashamed of their toilet habits, depicts images of faeces, which is distasteful, and uses inappropriate language.

The Board noted the complainants' concerns that the advertisement's subject matter, and visuals, are distasteful and not appropriate for a television advertisement. The Board noted that advertisers are free to use whatever images and phrases they wish in an advertisement provided that such images or phrases do not breach a section of the Code. The Board considered that the issue of taste falls outside of the Code therefore the Board cannot consider this aspect of the complaints when making its determination.

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 this television advertisement features a female actor promoting a spray which can disguise unpleasant toilet-related odours.

The Board noted the complainants' concerns that the advertisement suggests women are concerned that their toilet habits need to be hidden from men and colleagues as they may be thought less of.

The Board noted that the advertisement is promoting a toilet spray designed to trap malodours in the toilet bowl. The Board noted that the advertisement uses a woman to promote this product but considered that there is no suggestion that it is only women who would, or should, use the product and in the Board's view the advertisement could equally have featured a male actor without any difference in the overall message or tone.

The Board noted the overall tone of the advertisement and considered that the advertisement is intended to be light-hearted and humorous and in the Board's view the advertisement does not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of gender.

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

The Board 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 (including appropriate for the relevant audience and medium). Strong or obscene language shall be avoided".

The Board noted the complainants' concerns about the language used in the advertisement, specifically the references to 'punish(ing) the porcelain' and 'devil's doughnuts'.

The Board noted that the language used in the advertisement is in relation to faeces and considered that whilst the subject matter itself would be considered distasteful by many members of the community, in the Board's view the actual language used is not strong or obscene and in the context of the advertised product, which is legally allowed to be advertised, the language is not inappropriate in the circumstances. The Board noted the visuals accompanying the descriptions of going to the toilet and considered that they are clearly animations which are unrealistic and given the light-hearted tone of the advertisement the overall visual and verbal references to faeces are not inappropriate in the context of an advertisement for a toilet spray which will be viewed by a broad audience including children.

The Board considered that the advertisement did not use strong or obscene language and the references were not inappropriate in the context of the product advertised and determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.5 of the Code.

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

