



## Case Report

<b>1</b>	<b>Case Number</b>	<b>0490/10</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Advertiser</b>	<b>We Are Signs</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Product</b>	<b>Professional services</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Type of Advertisement / media</b>	<b>Poster</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Date of Determination</b>	<b>08/12/2010</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>DETERMINATION</b>	<b>Dismissed</b>

### ISSUES RAISED

2.3 - Sex/sexuality/nudity      Treat with sensitivity to relevant audience

### DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The layout of the sign in the complaint is a black and white image of a woman with what an “amazed” look on her face. Her hands are placed on her cheek to emphasise this. Attached are the words “We Blow Our Clients - Away! with Amazing signs!”

### THE COMPLAINT

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

*I believe that this advertisement contains inappropriate sexual references sexualising themes and serves to sexually objectify women for the purposes of selling a product.*

*The dominant text of the slogan “we blow all our customers” is playing on the colloquial term “blow” referring to fellatio. This imagery is reinforced by the expression on the woman's face with her mouth expressing an “O” an expression commonly associated with fellatio in pornographic materials. The association of fellatio with “customers” creates a further association to the sex industry.*

*The imagery and associations of the sign and slogan serve to objectify both the woman on the sign and women in general for their provision of sexual pleasure. This is degrading and offensive. Furthermore the sign is positioned on a busy road which is one of the primary paths in and out of the Balmain Peninsula a road which many children and teenagers travel on a daily basis. Given the concern expressed by many experts regarding the exposure of children to sexualised imagery this presents an additional level of distaste.*

## **THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE**

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

*The sign in mention is one of our monthly advertising signs on our workshop front at 20 Robert St Rozelle. For around the past 12 months we have been putting up these 2m x 1m signs as a way of varying our exposure on a lower wall area of our workshop that was constantly tagged with graffiti.*

*As we have enough actual signage on our shop front promoting our business we decided to manufacture monthly changing signs that can be read by the slow traffic out the front of our workshop on week days as a way of attracting interest to our company.*

*In regard to the complaint it is obviously disappointing that someone has depicted this sign as to be purely of a sexual nature. As for the content there are a few twists as to how you read the sign but given the subtlety, it was never intended to sexually objectify women or in particular offend children. We all have kids of our own here and find offensive the thought that someone would even consider the implication. As for the word "Customers" that is what our clients are – customers who we sell signs to! It is quite bizarre to think any different.*

*As to our company location Robert Street is an industrial road into the back of Balmain and not a primary road the children and teenagers travel daily on.*

*No one likes to have complaints about their company as it is obviously not a good way to attract customers. This is the first complaint we have had about any of our signage and on the same day the Advertising standards Bureau contacted me regarding a complaint we immediately removed the sign. It already has a new image over it and it will never appear again.*

*In hindsight had the individual contacted us directly we would have removed the sign immediately and saved the delay.*

*In conclusion and moving forward we will ensure future monthly signs stay away from having various meanings and stay on the track of simply promoting the signs that we sell. If required we can send copies of our previous monthly signs to verify their appropriate content. I must also stress again that the offending sign was immediately removed and replaced with our December Xmas sign. It will not be seen again and as a result of these actions we believe an adequate response to this single complaint has been achieved. In regard to accusations of inappropriate sexual content in our signs our company will vehemently defend any accusations of such content as we believe this sign was not offensive.*

*In regards to varying these signs we try to be a little different in their content each month as a way of gaining interest to "see what they do next month". We draft and make these signs in house and engage no advertising agency/designers in their production.*

*Response to these signs has been very well received by our clients, friends and passing traffic who comment regularly about seeing them. This is the first time we have had any complaint about one of the signs.*

## **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 contains inappropriate sexual references.

The Board reviewed 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 of the Code states: “Advertising or Marketing Communications shall treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience and, where appropriate, the relevant programme time zone”.

The Board noted the advertisement features a woman with her hands pressed against her cheeks, her mouth open as if gasping and her eyes wide. The Board considered this image to be reminiscent of a Hitchcock heroine and considered that the overall message was one of disbelief or shock at what the woman was looking at.

The Board noted that the accompanying text on the advertisement read, “We blow our clients – away!” and considered that this wording was consistent with the image of the woman. The Board considered that most members of the community would interpret this advertisement as the woman being blown away by the services offered by the advertiser and considered that the sign was not inappropriate.

The Board noted the advertiser’s response that this image will not be used again.

The Board determined that the advertisement did treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience and that it did not breach section 2.3 of the Code.

The Board also considered whether the advertisement met the requirement of section 2.5 of the Code which requires that ‘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 the complainant’s concern that the reference to ‘blow’ is a reference to a sexual act. The Board noted that this is a possible sexual connotation to the advertisement but considered that it is an unlikely interpretation in the context of the overall advertisement. The Board considered that the use of the term ‘blow...away’ was not inappropriate and was not strong or obscene. The Board 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 complaint.

