



CASE REPORT

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| 1. Complaint reference number | 209/08 |
| 2. Advertiser | Drug & Alcohol Services SA |
| 3. Product | Community Awareness |
| 4. Type of advertisement | TV |
| 5. Nature of complaint | Other - Causes alarm and distress
Other - Causes alarm and distress to children |
| 6. Date of determination | Wednesday, 9 July 2008 |
| 7. DETERMINATION | Dismissed |

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The advertisement begins with a birds-eye view of a toilet bowl. A man's hands cling to the side of the bowl and remnants of vomit can be seen inside the bowl. The camera sways as though the viewer is the person poised above the bowl. Sounds of gagging and groaning can be heard.

A young child is heard: 'Daddy, Daddy.'

Again the camera is looking through the eyes of the man. The camera swings around to show a young girl at the bathroom door.

With concern in her voice she asks: 'Are you OK?'

The man replies: 'Daddy is OK Sweetie, just not feeling too well this morning..' He begins to gag.. and shoos the child out of the bathroom with a wave of his hand. 'You go and watch some TV...'

The camera swings back toward the toilet as the scene fades to black and the man can be heard vomiting.

Text on screen: Drink too much ... it gets ugly. Logo and website details shown at bottom of screen.

THE COMPLAINT

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

My three children were eating tea Friday night and the add came on with pictures of vomit in the toilet bowl and put them off their food. The same thing happened on Saturday lunch time. I told them to change the channel, which they did and it was on the other channel as well. They eventually turned the TV off. A very disgusting add that even makes me feel revolted.

Its disgusting!! I drink a bit and I know the issues about binge drinking but why do I have to look at a bowl full of vomit on my TV. You don't get any warning its coming it just appears!! What is next - a rape or a murder to say don't do those things??

I don't think we need to hear people vomiting on TV and as for having a child in ad its disgusting. No child needs to have to stand see him doing that. I know she properly doesn't but that's what she is supposed to see.

This ad has been played many times during what I would call dinner time! I am 16 weeks pregnant and really don't need to see anyone vomiting at any point but while trying to get my dinner down and keep it down is probably the worst time. I don't have any objection to what they are trying to do or to the other ads they use, however this one is a little too close to stomach churning.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complaint/s regarding this advertisement included the following:

The main aim of the 'Drink too much, it gets ugly' campaign is to reduce the South Australian community's acceptance of public drunkenness. The campaign was developed to deliberately highlight 'ugly' but realistic examples of binge drinking behaviour, and to prompt people to think about how getting drunk can have a negative impact on themselves, their families and friends.

Within Australia, alcohol misuse has a significant impact on health, law enforcement and family services. Its impact is felt not only by the individuals who drink to excess and their families, but also the wider community. It is estimated that alcohol misuse cost the Australian community over \$15 billion in 2004/05.

In South Australia;

- *Almost 65% of all alcohol is consumed during risky or high risk drinking sessions.*
- *Approximately 46% of men aged 20-29 years and 30% of men aged 30-39 years are consuming alcohol at risky or high risk levels for short-term harm at least monthly.*
- *Almost 300 deaths and more than 5 000 hospitalisations occur each year as a result of harmful drinking.*

These levels of consumption result in significant harms. In 2004 in South Australia:

- *41 000 people reported being physically abused by people who had drunk too much.*
- *125 000 people were threatened by people who had drunk too much.*
- *Over 250 000 people were verbally abused by people who had drunk too much.*
- *186 000 people were drinking alcohol at extreme levels on a monthly basis, putting themselves at risk of short-term harm (e.g. violence, road crashes).*

While drink driving and violence account for the largest proportion of harms, excessive alcohol consumption also results in a range of other harms including, but not limited to:

- *Injuries - resulting from alcohol fuelled violence, accidental injuries (e.g. falls).*
- *Unsafe sexual practices and sexual assault.*
- *Family breakdown.*

When developing this campaign, DASSA considered the impact it may have on the wider community. A focus of the development of the campaign was how to effect change in community attitudes, and eventually behaviours towards around binge drinking, in order to reduce the harms associated with this common practice.

Research

Before this particular advertisement was created, DASSA commissioned primary research utilising focus groups of males aged 18-39 who drink alcohol regularly. This focus group testing enabled the identification of the most appropriate message and imagery to impact the target market.

The research indicated the following attitudes regarding alcohol consumption among 18-39 year old men who drank regularly:

- *They did not see their own drinking as being at risky levels, although the research indicated they were drinking at risky levels on a regular basis.*
- *They were concerned about how their drinking may impact on them as individuals and their family and friends.*
- *They felt that hard hitting advertisements were more likely to have an impact on them.*
- *They suggested that for adverts to be effective they needed to show real life actions and people's reactions to drinking excessively.*
- *That, if they had children, they saw themselves as role models for their children.*

The 'toilet' themed advert was developed based on this research. The images depicted in the commercial show a realistic portrayal of a potential behaviour, 'vomiting', that is commonly associated with drinking too much alcohol. The scene is not meant to be disgusting or to cause distress, but rather to demonstrate the harmful consequences of binge drinking, and to increase the understanding of the negative consequences on individuals and their families of drinking too much alcohol. Any distress caused by the vomiting scene is clearly outweighed by the need to raise public awareness of the possible harms caused by excessive drinking.

Given the serious and topical nature of this campaign, an objective has been to get the widest possible reach in regards to screening time. Conscious of the possible sensitivities of the general public there was a deliberate choice not to utilise implied violence in the partner 30 second advertisement which demonstrates 'ugly' behaviour outside a nightclub. With regard to the 15 second advertisement, at all times we considered the impact and endeavoured to strike a balance

between reality and not causing distress – we restrained the visual imagery and augmented with sound effects. Without these tools it would be impossible to clearly tell the story in a 15 second time frame.

AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics

DASSA believes that the ‘Drink too much, it gets ugly’ ‘toilet’ themed advertisement is consistent with the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics, particularly in relation to Section 2. In developing this campaign, due care has been taken to present the images in an appropriate and sensitive manner, having regard for the target audience for whom the advertising is directed. The campaign materials are particularly targeted at males aged 18-39 years who drink alcohol regularly. Evidence shows that this is the group most likely to drink at risky levels in the community (drinking 7 or more standard drinks on any one drinking session). Drinking at risky levels can lead to a range of harms - including but not limited to - violence, drink driving, crime, injuries, anti social behaviour and family breakdown.

AANA Code of Advertising for Children

In relation to the AANA Code of Advertising for Children the code states that ‘advertisements to children must not portray images or events in a way that is unduly frightening or distressing to children.’ This advertisement is not aimed at children with scheduling particularly targeted around shows that males aged 18-39 watch, and at times when males in this age range are likely to be thinking about drinking alcohol, drinking alcohol, and times after alcohol has been consumed. DASSA has also followed the advice given by the Commercials Advice Pty Ltd (CAD) by not screening the advert during any programs targeted specifically at children. Attached is the media schedule for the advertisement for your information.

Rating

The ‘toilet’ themed advertisement was reviewed by CAD who ensure that only material which is suitable for a particular classification zone is broadcast in that zone. The advertisement was given the PG (parental guidance) rating and as such can be shown during the following hours, namely 8.30am to 4:00 pm weekdays, 7.00 pm to 6:00 am weekdays and 10:00 am to 6:00 am at weekends. CAD also suggested care should be exercised when placing the advert in cartoon and other child-appeal programs. As a result, this advertisement does not appear in children’s programming, but specifically targets the 18-39 year old male audience through its programming.

DASSA is sensitive to the needs of the public and can, on request, forward a schedule of future television programs that will allow complainants to avoid them. Although the Advertising Standards Board (ASB) has received complaints regarding the ‘toilet’ themed advert, anecdotally people have commented on the accuracy of the scenario and how it certainly connects with those people who have children and have been in that situation before. From these reports, the television advertisement has been successful in raising awareness of the issue and hopefully leading to discussion about the issue of binge drinking and eventually behaviour change.

DASSA is also completing a comprehensive independent evaluation of the campaign to assess the effectiveness before proceeding with planned media buys in September 2008 and November 2008. All complaints and feedback will form part of this analysis.

I note that your procedures require that all complaints about advertisements for alcohol are to be referred to the ABAC Complaints Adjudication Panel. The ‘toilet’ themed advertisement should not be confused with an alcohol advertisement. The advertisement was developed to show the effect that drinking excessive amounts of alcohol can have on both individuals and the people around them.

Summary

DASSA has developed a social marketing campaign around binge drinking in the community to help raise awareness of this issue and reduce the harms associated with this common practice.

We trust that the Advertising Standards Bureau members will support our assessment that the 15 second ‘toilet’ television commercial does not breach the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics. On these grounds we request that the Advertising Standards Bureau dismiss these complaints.

THE DETERMINATION

The Advertising Standards Board (“Board”) considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (the “Code”).

The Board viewed this television advertisement and found it to be powerful, emotive and had impact.

The Board considered that as the advertisement did not show actual vomiting it could not be considered to be offensive or overly graphic.

The Board further considered that the advertisement was a very clever form of social messaging because it struck a nerve in many members of the community - that of the vulnerability of children in response to an adult consuming excessive alcohol.

The Board noted that the child in the advertisement depicts the parent's shame but did not consider this to be at odds with prevailing community standards in relation to the consumption of alcohol.

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