



CASE REPORT

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. Complaint reference number | 241/07 |
| 2. Advertiser | Reckitt Benckiser Aust Pty Ltd (Dettol) |
| 3. Product | Housegoods/services |
| 4. Type of advertisement | TV |
| 5. Nature of complaint | Discrimination or vilification Disability – section 2.1 |
| 6. Date of determination | Tuesday, 14 August 2007 |
| 7. DETERMINATION | Dismissed |

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This television advertisement features a family going about everyday activities trying to not touch anything with their hands. They are shown variously clinging to handrails on public transports with other parts of their body, using elbows at pedestrian crossing buttons and to use an ATM touchpad, and using feet to open toilet lids and flush buttons in public toilets. In a supermarket the mother tries to sign a docket holding it with her elbows until the checkout operator, rolling her eyes, hands her a bottle of Dettol Instant Hand Sanitizer. A voiceover announces "Feel free to touch with Dettol Instant Hand Sanitizer. Kills 99.9% of germs anytime, anywhere - without soap or water." As we then see the family eating takeaway food in a food court, a business man is seen in the background pushing a shopping trolley with his elbows.

THE COMPLAINT

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

There are an increasing number of people who suffer from OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) in relation to washing their hands through a fear of germs. This advertisement is offensive for two reasons: 1. It could trigger this type of obsessive behaviour in other people 2. It trivialises this fear of germs which is not a trivial matter for those suffers of OCD whose lives are controlled by this fear.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

Reckitt Benckiser does not agree that the advertisement trivialises the fear of germs that sufferers of OCD may experience or that it will trigger excessive behaviour in other people. The advertisement depicts everyday situations where we have to touch surfaces that we would prefer not to touch due to coming into contact with germs. It portrays Dettol Instant Hand Sanitizer as being a part of a regular hand hygiene routine when soap and water are not readily accessible.

Advice was sought from our in-house Regulatory and Medical departments to ensure the advertisement was developed in accordance with all regulatory requirements and in a way that is supported medically. Specific consideration was given to ensuring that the advertisement did not play on germ phobia or obsessive behaviour that people may have. After discussions with a psychologist specialising in OCD and a psychiatrist and having reviewed the literature, the body of scientific evidence indicates that watching a television commercial of this nature would not initiate the onset of OCD in a person who was not at risk.

Reckitt Benckiser believes that the advertisement is represented in a light-hearted manner. The

music is fast and zippy and the actors do not show anxiety or a fear of germs. This is consistent with other Dettol advertising, the latest of which depicts people in everyday dirty and grubby situations, often having fun. Dettol advertising does not typically deliver an intense message that could play on the fears of those with a phobia of germs or obsession with hygiene.

Reckitt Benckiser does not believe the advertisement portrays people in a way that discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of community on account of disability – in this case, an anxiety disorder such as OCD. Particular consideration was given to avoiding such take outs in developing the advertisement.

In its advertising, Reckitt Benckiser actively promotes a health and hygiene message as part of everyday life which is entirely consistent with the prevailing community standards on health and safety.

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 about the take home message of this advertisement. The Board also noted the advertiser's response and its assertion that avoiding such a message was a consideration in the design of its campaign. The Board viewed the advertisement and considered that the advertisement did not make fun of or ridicule people with a particular disease or condition (OCD). The Board considered that the advertisement exaggerated some of the fears that many people have about touching public surfaces and avoiding germs and suggested that use of the advertised product would obviate the need for responses such as those depicted. The Board considered that the advertisement would be seen by most people as being an exaggerated and probably humorous advertisement and not as an advertisement which in any way vilified any particular group of people. The Board determined that the advertisement did not vilify or discriminate against people with a condition such as OCD and 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.