



## CASE REPORT

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| 1. Complaint reference number | 566/09                                   |
| 2. Advertiser                 | Nova 106.9                               |
| 3. Product                    | Entertainment                            |
| 4. Type of advertisement      | Outdoor                                  |
| 5. Nature of complaint        | Language – use of language – section 2.5 |
| 6. Date of determination      | Wednesday, 9 December 2009               |
| 7. DETERMINATION              | Dismissed                                |

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This outdoor advertisement depicts the crew from the morning Nova radio program accompanied by the acronym WTF in large letters next to the crew.

## THE COMPLAINT

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

*WTF means - what the f\*\*k. How is this allowed? Kids will be asking their parents, what does WTF stand for. This is completely unnecessary and inappropriate! If this is not the correct way to complain, or there is someone more involved that I could contact, please let me know. Thank you.*

*I have a 6yo child who has learnt to read and is interested in all written forms. Everyone knows that WTF stands for 'What the Fuck' So when we're driving behind a bus displaying this poster, how am I supposed to explain that to my child? I also teach children and when we discuss abbreviations in the classroom, this is not one I want to be asked to have to explain. Whilst I appreciate that the station has taken an alternative meaning of "What the Friday" ... which I only discovered after having to go to their website to lodge this complaint, I still feel that most people would not believe WTF means "What the Friday".*

*As part of digital language, WTF is totally inappropriate and does not need to be seen in mainstream society.*

*I have searched the company website and found they are proud of their advertising by running a poll on it. You will find this here:*

[http://www.novafm.com.au/nova1069/Poll\\_What-39-s-your-favourite-WTF-poster\\_199](http://www.novafm.com.au/nova1069/Poll_What-39-s-your-favourite-WTF-poster_199)

*Maybe you could ask them to change it to LOL and bring some positive response to their advertising instead of the negative.*

*I feel this ad is a form of visual pollution by lowering the standards of our community. I feel it is intended as a cheap joke at the expense of the standards of our community.*

*In an era of increasing texting and use of acronyms (particularly by our young people), "WTF" (as used as the slogan for the ad) is a widely used expression that means "What the F\*\*k?".*

*I feel this ad is in poor taste, encouraging greater use of poor and offensive language, and something I do not believe is necessary for this radio station to promote their breakfast show.*

*As a member of the community who believes in keeping standards, and as a mother of 4 young children who actively read all the words and letters they see around them, I feel this is unnecessary, "cheapens" our standards, and is in poor taste.*

## **THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE**

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

*The complaints relate to language used in the advertisements.*

*The transport and bus shelter advertisements are part of an overall campaign promoting Nova 106.9's new Breakfast Team. In this regard, we refer to our letters to the ASB of 2 November 2009 in relation to Advertisement Complaint Reference 502/09 relating to Nova 106.9 billboard advertisements and 6 November 2009 in relation to Advertisement Complaint Reference 533/09 relating to Nova 106.9 transport advertisements. The transport and bus stop advertisements are exactly the same as the billboard advertisements. Each advertisement contains a picture of the Breakfast Team in an unusual situation, juxtaposed with the letters "WTF?". The advertisements are intended to be light hearted, irreverent and slightly brash, consistent with the Nova Brand.*

### **AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics**

*The complaint suggests that the transport and bus shelter advertisements raise issues under section 2.5 of the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics (Code).*

*At the outset it is important to note that Nova 106.9 Pty Ltd (Nova) does not consider itself strictly bound by the Code. Nevertheless, as a matter of corporate policy and broadcasting practice, Nova uses its best endeavours to comply with the Code at all times.*

*Section 2.5 of the Code provides that:*

*"Advertisements shall only use language which is appropriate in the circumstances and strong or obscene language shall be avoided".*

*Nova acknowledges that "WTF?" in today's language would generally be considered to be a reference to "What the f & \*! 7". However, it is important to note that the advertisements do not contain these words or any other swear words.*

*Whilst the acronym used in the advertisements may not be to everyone's liking, Nova does not believe that the language used in the advertisements is "strong" or "obscene" or otherwise in breach of the Code. (Footnote 1)*

*The Macquarie Dictionary (41h edition) defines "obscene" as "offensive to modesty or decency; indecent; inciting to lust or sexual depravity; lewd".*

*In our view, the term "WTF" is an acronym in common usage amongst Nova's target audience, which is people aged between 18 to 39 years, as has been shown by regular AC Nielson ratings surveys. Only those who are familiar with this acronym will understand the advertisements which are intended to deliver a light-hearted message.*

*While Nova does not consider that the advertisements raise issues under section 2 of the Code, Nova does value feedback on the advertisements and intends to monitor any similar complaints received in the future to ensure that these advertisements are not offensive to a significant proportion of the community.*

*Footnote 1 - This is consistent with the decision of the ASB in complaint reference 53/09. In that case the ASB concluded that the abbreviation 'fcuk' is not actually obscene language.*

## **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 was in very large print and the full meaning of the letters "WTF" would not be permitted, so why are the letters?

The Board noted the advertiser's response and viewed the advertisement. 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 and strong or obscene language shall be avoided."

The Board noted that it has previously considered advertisements which have used acronyms to appeal to a younger adult market. Consistent with previous decisions the Board considered that the use of the acronym 'WTF' was not of itself strong or obscene language. The Board noted that the advertisements are outdoor advertisements and available to a broad audience. The Board considered that the acronym was in line with the image of the advertiser and the target audience of 18-25 yr olds. The Board considered that although young children may view the billboard they would be unlikely to understand the acronym and that the advertisement is therefore not inappropriate in the circumstances. The Board noted that some children who view the advertisement may ask parents what it means but that this is an issue that parents can choose to answer or to explain away. 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.