

Drinks Trade January/February 2010

Alcohol advertising code now applies to product names and packaging

In Australia, alcohol advertising is regulated by the Alcohol Beverage Advertising Code Scheme (ABAC), which is controlled by the ABAC management committee. The management committee has five members – the Commonwealth Government has one representative, the other members being the Winemakers Federation of Australia, the Brewers Association of Australia and New Zealand, the Advertising Federation of Australia, and DSICA.

Until recently, the ABAC standards covered only the content of the actual advertisement- i.e. what was on the print ad or billboard, or in the television commercial. The standards for advertisements are comprehensive, and there are guidance notes available from the ABAC website. A pre-vetting service to help advertising agencies meet the standards while designing the advert, and before going to the expense of assembling a film crew or shooting photos is also available on a confidential basis.

Those same standards that applied to advertisements now also apply to the names of products, and also to its packaging. The intent is to treat more elements of alcohol marketing in the same manner as the advertising and to ensure that the marketing presents a mature, balanced and responsible approach to the consumption of alcohol beverages.

It is also a reaction to suggestively named products that are clearly outside the ABAC standards. No reasonable or responsible person wants to see alcohol products that appeal to children, or which make irresponsible statements about intoxication through the name or packaging, on the market. For products already on the market, there will be no impact as they are 'grandfathered' as a pre-existing product.

The name of an alcohol product can be complained about, just as an advertisement can be now. The complaint will be examined by the same Adjudicators that currently look at advertising, and against the same standards. If a product's name or packaging is outside the code's standards, an alert to retailers will be issued. What action the retailer then takes is up to them, but they will have been alerted that they are stocking a product that breaches the code, and could be asked to publicly defend that.

To help companies bring new products to market, the Alcohol Advertising Pre-vetting Service will be available to provide advice about names and packaging, the same way as they currently provide advice and guidance on advertisements.

The alcohol industry is under great scrutiny by a growing army of activists, journalists and worried parents looking for answers. The current role of alcohol in Australia's society is being seriously questioned, and product names or packaging that does not fit with the new and stricter culture that Australia is building, helps neither the consumer or the industry.