

Guiding Principles

Self-Regulation of Marketing Communications for Beverage Alcohol

INTRODUCTION

There are many codes of practice for the self-regulation of marketing communications for beverage alcohol: they operate at company and sector levels and as part of national self-regulatory codes which also apply to other products and services. Some are relatively recent, while others have evolved over many decades to reflect developments in the marketplace and the cultural norms of the wider society.

Marketing codes of practice vary according to country and product to reflect local cultures, lifestyles, and traditions and national contexts. However, they have at their core a number of near-universal provisions regarding social responsibility, fairness, and decency. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to countries seeking to establish or enhance marketing self-regulation codes of practice for alcohol beverages, by helping to define these common core principles.

Marketing self-regulatory codes are an important demonstration of the industry's commitment to ensuring its marketing communications are socially responsible. While the overwhelming weight of evidence indicates that moderate consumption of alcohol by adults is generally compatible with a balanced and healthy lifestyle, excessive or irresponsible consumption can have negative consequences for the drinker and others. For this reason, alcohol beverage companies are mindful that society expects their marketing communications to be legal, truthful, honest, and consistent with prevailing cultural standards of good taste and social responsibility.

The term "**marketing communication**" has been adopted from the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Consolidated Code of Marketing Communication Practice and is defined as follows:

Advertising as well as other techniques...and should be interpreted broadly to mean any form of communication produced directly by or on behalf of marketers....

Where they appear without qualification, the words "marketing communications" refer specifically to marketing communications for beverage alcohol.

The Guiding Principles were approved in November 2011 by the sponsors of the International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP): Anheuser-Busch InBev, Asahi Breweries, Bacardi-Martini, Beam Inc., Brown-Forman Corporation, Diageo, Heineken, Molson Coors, Pernod Ricard, SABMiller, and UB Group.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Responsible Marketing Communications

Alcohol beverage marketing communications should

- be legal, decent, honest and truthful, and conform to accepted principles of fair competition and good business practice;
- be prepared with a due sense of social responsibility, not using themes, images, symbols, or portrayals likely to be considered offensive, derogatory, or demeaning;
- comply fully with relevant national self-regulatory codes;
- respect human dignity and integrity;
- avoid any association with violent, aggressive, hazardous, illegal, or antisocial behavior;
- avoid any association with, or reference to, drugs or the drug culture.

2. Responsible consumption

Alcohol beverage marketing communications should

- portray only moderate and responsible consumption by people of legal age to consume alcohol beverages;
- avoid condoning or trivializing excessive or irresponsible consumption or intoxication;
- avoid portraying abstinence or moderate consumption in a negative way.

3. Health and safety aspects in marketing communications

Alcohol beverage marketing communications should not

- suggest that alcohol beverages can prevent, treat, or cure illness or resolve personal problems;
- present alcohol beverages as a stimulant, sedative, or tranquilizer;
- depict or be addressed to at-risk groups, e.g., pregnant women;
- portray or encourage drinking prior to or during activities requiring sobriety or a high degree of skill or precision, such as controlling a motor vehicle or operating machinery.

4. Minors¹

Alcohol beverage marketing communications should

- avoid the use of themes, icons, music, games, or characters that appeal primarily to minors;
- avoid showing minors (or people likely to be perceived as minors) drinking alcohol beverages;
- be placed only in media which can reasonably be expected to meet stated audience composition targets, where at least 70% of the audience is of the legal purchase age.

5. The effects of alcohol

Alcohol beverage marketing communications should not

- mislead consumers about the nature and strength of alcohol beverages;
- present high alcohol strength as a principal basis of appeal;
- suggest that alcohol beverages can enhance physical, sporting, or mental ability;
- present alcohol beverages as necessary for social success or acceptance;
- present alcohol beverages as a means of removing social or sexual inhibitions, achieving sexual success, or making an individual more sexually attractive.

¹ Minors are defined as those below the legal purchase age (LPA), i.e., the age at which national legislation permits the purchase or consumption of alcohol beverages (in countries where these ages are not the same, the higher age applies). In countries where there is no LPA, minors are defined as those below the age of 18.

CODE IMPLEMENTATION²

Once a self-regulatory code has been drafted and adopted, whether at national, sectoral, or company level, means of implementing it should be put in place. An essential element is a clearly-defined procedure for handling and resolving complaints. This procedure should be transparent and readily accessible, so that interested parties, including members of the public, know how to complain about marketing communications which they consider to breach the code.

It is important that the complaint-handling procedure is impartial and seen to be so, however, the form which the procedure takes can be adapted to suit individual circumstances and type of code.

² For further information, refer to the **International Guide to developing a self-regulatory organisation – International edition** (<http://www.easa-alliance.org/page.aspx/267>). This guide is accompanied by the **Alcohol Module**, which relates specifically to self-regulatory systems for marketing communications for alcohol beverages.



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The International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP; www.icap.org) is a not-for-profit organization supported by major international producers of beverage alcohol. Established in 1995, ICAP's mission is to promote understanding of the role of alcohol in society and to help reduce harmful drinking worldwide. ICAP's efforts to foster dialogue and partnerships in the alcohol policy field are shaped by its commitment to pragmatic and feasible solutions to reducing harm that can be tailored to local and cultural considerations and needs. ICAP has been recognized by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) as a non-governmental organization in Special Consultative Status.

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