

Australia's Responsible Alcohol Marketing Scheme

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Social media activity generating issues for marketers

The Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) has had its busiest quarter in 21 years with a record number of determinations (36), breaches (22) and one no fault breach from 55 complaints.

“The final quarter of 2019 saw a marked increase in breaches with the vast majority relating to social media activity,” ABAC Chair Harry Jenkins AO explained.

“ABAC has been regulating social media activity by alcohol marketers since the first complaint about Facebook marketing in 2009 and ABAC standards have kept pace with dynamic changes in social media marketing. In 2014 ABAC developed a best practice guide for alcohol marketers on the use of digital media, with updates in 2016 and 2018 to guide marketers as this medium has evolved.

“In each case of breach the marketing materials were removed or modified in accordance with ABAC’s rulings. However, it is important that agencies and staff developing social media for alcohol producers, distributors and retailers are familiar with ABAC standards and understand the need to market alcohol responsibly.

“While social media is still a relatively new area of marketing, it is well enough established that marketers should be complying with ABAC rules. The ABAC website is a good place to start. It includes resources that can assist, including detailed [Guidance Notes](#) and a [Best Practice Guide for Digital Alcohol Marketing](#).

“ABAC has been working with global organisations and various digital platforms to ensure alcohol is marketed to adults and directed away from minors.

“The International Alliance for Responsible Drinking (IARD) has been working with digital platforms to improve safeguards to prevent minors seeing alcohol advertising online. A number of safeguards have been implemented, including using artificial intelligence as a tool for spotting younger users, and the development of opt outs for those who do not wish to receive alcohol advertising via social media.

“ABAC has been advised that user guides for alcohol marketers seeking to implement these and other safeguards are being developed.”

“Unusually, this quarter saw a number of breaches related to marketing that implied it is acceptable to consume alcohol before undertaking activities that require a high degree of alertness or physical co-ordination, such as swimming, cycling and driving. Alcohol consumption in conjunction with these activities is inconsistent with the intent of the Code.

“Other breaches this quarter included packaging that was found to have strong or evident appeal to minors, including potential confusion with soft drink or confectionary products. In light of a recent spate of packaging breaches, ABAC has published an [Alcohol Packaging Compliance Guide](#) and I encourage all alcohol manufacturers to familiarise themselves with this useful advice.

“On a positive note, 2019 saw record levels of pre-vetting activity, up 25% on the previous year. Pre-vetting remains the easiest and most efficient way for marketers to ensure their promotions are responsible before hitting the marketplace. We encourage all alcohol producers, distributors and retailers to utilise this valuable service.”

ABAC’s Final Quarterly Report for 2019 detailing these and other decisions is available [online](#). More information about the Code is also available at: www.abac.org.au

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