

Government Alcohol Strategy Consultation
Response of the Periodical Publishers Association
January 2003

Introduction

The Periodical Publishers Association (PPA), as the organisation of UK magazine publishers, welcomes this opportunity to comment on this important consultation on alcohol strategy. PPA represents the interests of over 2, 500 print titles and online publishers. It is the only voice of the UK magazine industry. Copies of PPA's research into the effectiveness of Consumer and Business to Business Advertising (business readers are an important target audience) are enclosed (http://www.ppa.co.uk/magad/research/download/how_mag_ad_works.pdf <http://www.b2bmedia.co.uk/download/VitalInvestmentWeb.pdf>)

Magazines represent one of the major sources of news and information for the general public with more than 80 per cent of adults - and 84 per cent of women – reading consumer magazines. Business titles have an even greater place in the minds of their readership – nearly 90 per cent of decision-makers regularly read a business magazine. And teenage magazines have a particularly strong relationship with their young readers – a guiding voice, a friend, and an essential source of information on relationships, careers, and substance misuse.

Summary

- Magazines are a proven tool in **raising awareness of health issues** because of the close relationship of trust they have with their readership.
- In the **Teenage Pregnancy Unit's** initiative to improve sexual health in teenagers advertisements have been running in a selection of teen and young men's titles with great success – a recorded **60 per cent recognition rate** to date – and latest figures show that there has, in fact, been a **downturn in the rate of teenage pregnancies**.
- Magazines are a convenient means of reaching several specific groups of people of either/both sexes, from different social classes, from different levels of disposable income and from different age ranges.
- Campaigns work best when **directed at specific target audiences** – which is why Government campaigns led by TV advertising have been spectacularly unsuccessful.
- Sponsored editorial is a good way of getting over a positive health messages such as the one about safe drinking; tombstone advertisements are especially effective at addressing negatives.

RESPONSES

Question 41

What should be the objectives in this area? Is the aim to raise levels of awareness? Is it to inform more specifically? Is it to change behaviour?

Are there any particularly successful or unsuccessful examples we should be aware of?

Any Government campaign should aim to achieve all of the above objectives to some extent. An important first factor in the Government's approach should be to clarify the definition of alcohol misuse – whether it means 'alcoholism' or 'harmful levels of alcohol'.

Magazines are a proven tool in **raising awareness of health issues** because of the close relationship of trust they have with their readership. Experience has shown that national press campaigns, combined with specific initiatives at local level, are an effective combination in reaching health targets, as has been shown with the results of the on-going '**Sex – are you thinking about it enough?**' project.

Awareness campaigns are also effective in **highlighting existing channels of health advice**, as shown in the 1998 '**Drugs – Know the Score**' project. These campaigns were characterised by strong creatives designed for targeted groups (e.g. young male adults; female teenagers) backed by either regional initiatives (such as school programs, local healthcare and outreach projects) or by promoting health information sources.

Either way, the first steps must be to:

- raise awareness about alcohol misuse,
- identify the common identifiers of alcohol misuse and
- provide information about where to get help

These should be the Government's primary objectives and where magazines can be of greatest use.

Question 42

Given clear objectives, what is the evidence on the effectiveness of these approaches? What do they actually achieve? How can their effectiveness be measured?

The award-winning “**Know the Score**” campaign, which was run exclusively in magazines and radio advertisements, succeeded in achieving a downturn in the number of drug users. Young people noticed the advertising – a phenomenal 90 per cent – and the advertisements led to a fundamental change in young people’s behaviour. Effectiveness was measured **by regional recognition surveys and comparisons with figures for smoking** (which actually increased during the same period). This showed that the campaign, and not any general downturn in drug use, had been the main cause of effectiveness.

The **Teenage Pregnancy Unit’s** initiative to improve sexual health in teenagers is part of a far wider and complex project which has used magazine and radio advertising as a basis for raising awareness in conjunction with local health initiatives. Advertisements have been running in a selection of teen and young men’s titles with great success – a recorded **60 per cent recognition rate** to date – and latest figures show that there has, in fact, been a **downturn in the rate of teenage pregnancies**.

Question 43

How well is the sensible drinking message reaching its audience? Is it sufficiently clear? What is the evidence on its penetration and its effect on behaviour?

We do not have relevant information

Question 44

How well is scientific research feeding into alcohol education? Is the message based on sound, unbiased and uncontroversial research and are new findings effectively incorporated?

We do not have relevant information

Question 45

Should particular groups be targeted for information and communication? Is there a need to provide more intensive alcohol education to groups other than young people (e.g. elderly drinkers)?

Research should be carried out to highlight specific groups of concern.

Magazines are a convenient means of reaching:

- several specific groups of people
- of either/both sexes
- from different social classes,
- from different levels of disposable income and
- from different age ranges.

It may be possible, for example, that pre-18 year old teenagers could be targeted in an information campaign which recognises that alcohol will always be attractive to this age group but that there are health dangers. It could be particularly helpful to tie such a campaign with that already being undertaken by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit in order to **tackle the common link between alcohol and first-time, unprotected or underage sex**.

One group which might otherwise be overlooked is that of the **business community** where business titles might be the most effective means of communication on the effects of work-related drink cultures.

Question 46

What is the role of schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions in providing alcohol education as well as support for alcohol-related problems? How can we best establish and preserve a healthy learning environment?

We do not have relevant information

Question 47

What role is there for families/parents as role models or in educating their children on sensible levels of alcohol drinking and the risks of alcohol misuse? How can they be best informed and engaged in this effort?

We do not have relevant information

Question 48

What does experience show on the most effective means of getting messages across? Are there circumstances in which the Government is particularly well placed to do so, or conversely might be particularly unsuccessful?

Campaigns work best when **directed at specific target audiences** – which is why Government campaigns led by TV advertising have been spectacularly unsuccessful.

The above examples show that Government can get messages across more effectively when it **does not overtly campaign**, but uses more subtle methods of communication. Government health messages are likely to be dismissed by most people if they recognise the Government as the source, and are more likely to be effective if **Government-funded agencies** (such as the National Drugs and Sexiwise phonelines) are used.

Sponsored editorial, in conjunction with advertising would therefore be best way of reaching target groups, based on the success of the teenage sexual health and drugs initiatives. In the past the Department of Health launched a campaign for safe drinking based on 2 a day for women and 3 for men. Sponsored editorial is a good way of getting over a positive health messages such as the one about safe drinking; tombstone advertisements are especially effective at addressing negatives.

Question 49

What can we learn from educational initiatives in the field of illegal drugs?

The 'Know the Score' campaign was an excellent example of success in identifying:

- the problem
- the timeframe
- why the problem existed (why young people were taking drugs)
- what the Government message needed to be
- how to best communicate that message to the target audience
- how to support the message with practical follow-up advice

This could be a very useful basis for any Government campaign on alcohol misuse.

Question 50

Do you have any views on the existing regulation of advertising of alcohol?

We fully support the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion rules on alcohol advertising, administered by the Advertising Standards Authority. We see no reason to alter this effective method of ensuring appropriate, responsible advertising of alcoholic products, which is respected and adhered to by advertisers and media alike. As a member of the Advertising Association we support their submission.