

Dear Minister

I was interested to hear that product placement may soon be allowed on UK TV and Radio. I am broadly in favour of this as a means of increasing the income for commercial TV companies in the UK that are struggling in the current climate, but do have some concerns.

During a recent visit to Australia where they have product placement, I was appalled to see just how far product placement has been taken. During an episode of their equivalent of ITV1's "This Morning" product placement was so interwoven with normal 'segments' of the show that a segment on cookery or a book might be followed by a placement for an abdominal exerciser (those that we see on low quality shopping channels) as if it were just another segment. I was shocked by this and thought it was actually quite wrong; the trust that people put in programmes like these is clearly abused in these cases as it could be seen as an endorsement of a particular product. I would not like to see this sort of thing happen in the UK.

I found the Australian system to be worse than the product placement in the US. In America it tends to involve products being in TV shows (such as a 'Spint' mobile phone being used in a show) or sponsorship of programmes. This also extends to things like "Closed Captions are brought to you by.... TOYOTA". This sort of placement still rubs me the wrong way, but I believe the British could deal with this and not be overly influenced if was properly controlled.

Generally I think having products 'on show' in programmes is acceptable. If done correctly it could actually add realism to certain shows where currently made-up brands are used. What I think would not be appropriate in the UK is if product placement was too 'in your face' as I think British people would find this somewhat gaudy.

Another concern I have is of product placement in imported shows. Is there any plan to make money from this? Why should the American Networks be the only ones to make money from this sort of thing? And also, if the BBC were to show programmes like this (such as "Heroes") why shouldn't they be able to make money from this sort of thing? I am not suggesting that the BBC should necessarily be allowed to place products in their own programmes, but I think if this works well on commercial TV in the UK then something like programme sponsorship on the BBC's non-core channels (eg BBC3/4) which would reduce the licence fee would be broadly welcome.

Kind Regards
Andrew Brown