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Dear Sirs,

I am a television scriptwriter, with about ten years of experience writing for such shows as Green Wing, Bob The Builder, Shaun The Sheep, Smack The Pony and others, with a number of other projects currently in development.

Like any industry, one always hears about the Golden Age that apparently ended just moments after one entered it, but times in the television industry have become noticeably harder of late, with the drop in advertising revenue being a genuine problem.

So please don't think I take the matter lightly when I say that loosening restrictions on product placement in British television is a terrible idea that will serve only to enrich a few individuals, at the expense of a general lessening in quality of output, which will impoverish viewer and creator alike.

Here are my central objections to loosening restrictions on product placement:

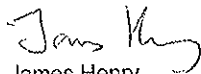
1. Product placement is a very effective way for manufacturers to get round restrictions stopping them marketing directly to young children, who would normally be protected from aggressive promotion of unhealthy items such as high-sugared drinks, or salty snacks during child-centred programming. By pushing these products on shows such as Britain's Got Talent, or Coronation Street, which have many young children amongst their viewers, manufacturers can easily circumvent these restrictions.
2. There is currently a clear line drawn between advertising, and programming. As a scriptwriter, I am free to mention a particular brand name if I wish to do so, but neither myself or the production company will receive any financial benefit for doing so, and great care will be taken that if I mention a particular brand of chocolate bar, for example, rival brands will be depicted at other points in the program, so no bias has been shown. Without this, the lines will begin to blur, breaking the contract of trust between the creators of a program and that program's viewers.
3. If restrictions on product placement are lifted, the amount of pressure that will be put on scriptwriters and lower-level producers to depict promoted brands as having certain values or characteristics will be immense, to the detriment of our integrity as writers and creators. In America, for example, particular makes of car are often inserted into shows, and depicted as highly desirable items, by characters who in real life would never be able to afford such items. As a writer, it's bad enough having to run storylines and dialogue past script editors, producers, lawyers, broadcast company (or network) executives and legal departments. But having to also run them past PR departments and advertisers is a very different matter indeed.
4. There is some question as to whether the 'extra' income from product placement could go anywhere near making up for lost advertising revenue - bearing in mind this money would have to come from advertising budgets, which are already moving away from television altogether.

5. There appears to be no guarantee that this 'extra' money will actually make its way into production budgets. Without careful safeguards, there is nothing to stop producers moving this money into the production company's (and shareholder's) own coffers, leaving the production budget to now make up an *extra* shortcut, through even further cuts.

These are just some of the issues I, and many other television writers have with the idea of loosening the restrictions upon product placement in British television.

I am, of course, available for further discussion of these and other points, if the Committee feels they would value the input of someone from the creative side of the industry.

Sincerely yours,


James Henry