

Briefing: ASA 2008 Annual Report

April 2009

Background

In review of the past year, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has issued its annual report, "Effective self-regulation: Keeping advertising standards high". In its review of 2008, the report looks at: taking action in sensitive areas such as complaints related to environmental claims, resolving complaints, trends in complaints, and sector specific analysis.

Summary

General Advertising:

- ASA reports that 97% of advertisements that have been reported to the ASA are compliant with the rules.
- In 2008, ASA received a record level of complaints, totaling 26,433, which represents a 9.3% increase from 2007, resulting in 2,475 adverts being changed or withdrawn.
- Broadcast complaints increased 21%, while non broadcast complaints remained steady.
- Misleading claims accounted for 45.4% of all complaints received in 2008.

Motoring:

- The report states that out of all sectors, motoring saw one of the biggest increases in complaints - 1,745 complaints, up 80.3% on 2007.
- Motoring is the sixth most complained about sector, following leisure (first), food and drink, computers and telecommunications, non-commercial, and health and beauty (fifth).
- Half of all motoring complaints related to one single advert from Volkswagen where concerns around animal welfare were raised.

Environmental claims:

- The 2008 ASA Environmental Claims survey found that 94% of surveyed adverts were complaint with ASA codes.
- The annual report notes that the number of complaints on green claims reduced in 2008 but the number of upheld rulings increased. No exact figures were provided.
- The report highlights adverts from Saab on claims around bioethanol and a Lexus RX400h print advert as examples of upheld complaints regarding green claims.
- Chairman of the ASA, Lord Smith said: "Companies should be aware of the rise in consumer awareness of environmental and ethical issues alongside confusion and scepticism. The ASA does not want to discourage companies from communicating their initiatives but to help them to do so in a credible and responsible way."

Next steps

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) is currently consulting on the term "carbon neutral", looking at its definition and recommendations for good practice. The ASA made note of this consultation in relation to claims made by utility companies in advertising "green energy packages". The consultation ends on 21 May. The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is holding a stakeholder workshop on 12 May to discuss views on its revision of the Green Claims Code. SMMT is in contact with ASA to further examine the statistics surrounding complaints on environmental claims

The full report can be viewed at:

http://www.asa.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/00BD4E90-5A7E-4E33-BC14-9B0A843C4C69/0/ASA_CAP_annual_report_08.pdf

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