



# CODE OF ETHICS

## PRACTICE NOTE

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This Practice Note to the AANA Code of Ethics is provided as a guide to interpretation to assist advertisers, their agencies and the community in understanding the AANA's intent in relation to the Code. The interpretations in this Practice Note are based on the intent of the Code and relevant determinations of the Advertising Standards Board (Board), and may be amended by the AANA from time to time<sup>1</sup>.

The Board shall have regard to this Practice Note as it expresses the AANA's intent in relation to the Code of Ethics.

For simplicity, in this Practice Note the word "marcomms" is used to refer to advertising or marketing communications.

### WHAT DOES THE CODE APPLY TO?

The Code applies to material which draws the attention of the public in a manner calculated to promote or oppose directly or indirectly a product, service, person, organisation or line of conduct, and includes:

- all advertising or marketing communications under the reasonable control of the advertiser, whether or not consideration has been paid;
- all advertising or marketing communications with an Australian-customer link (ie if any or all of the customers of the product, service etc are physically present in Australia), and which is under the control of an Australian company;
- sponsorship announcements such as "this program brought to you by . . .";
- advertorials and infomercials;
- community service announcements;
- user generated content which is communicated via a site or digital platform over which the marketer has a reasonable degree of control; and
- any media, including on line and social media (the Code is technology neutral).

The Code does not apply to:

- labels and packaging, or
- public relations communications, or
- promotions for a broadcasters' programs aired on that network (television or radio).

### USER GENERATED CONTENT

User Generated Content (UGC) is material which has not been created by the brand owner but by a person interacting on the brand owner's digital marketing platform.

Reasonable Control – a brand owner has reasonable control of user generated content when it becomes aware of the material.

An advertiser/marketer becomes aware of material when:

- it has posted or published material;
- it becomes aware of UGC through reasonable review;
- a user notifies the advertiser/marketer of the UGC; or
- a complaint is lodged with the ASB about the UGC.

The Code does not apply to:

- UGC on pages and sites which are not within an advertiser's or marketer's reasonable control even if brands or products are featured. Examples include:
  - A user posting a brand's TVC on YouTube with additional footage/comments;
  - A user posting footage on YouTube using a brand or product but with no involvement from the advertiser/marketer;
- UGC featuring hashtags that may relate to a brand or brand campaign from platforms such as Twitter and Instagram;
- A tweet from a brand re-tweeted with added content by a user, over which the advertiser/marketer has no control;
- UGCs that are reposted by a person other than the brand.

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to [www.aana.com.au](http://www.aana.com.au) to obtain a current version of this Practice Note

## PREVAILING COMMUNITY STANDARDS

The provisions in Section 2 of the Code are subject to Prevailing Community Standards. Prevailing Community Standards are determined primarily by the Board, whose members are representative of the community, on a case by case basis, as part of the complaints process. To assist advertisers and complainants, this Practice Note provides some guidance into Prevailing Community Standards. It is influenced in part by previous decisions of the Board, the AANA's intent in developing this Code and any relevant research (of the AANA or Advertising Standards Bureau as relevant).

The guidance to Prevailing Community Standards may be informed in part by research conducted by the AANA. The Board should have regard to that research as reflected in this Practice Note from time to time in determining Prevailing Community Standards.

## TWO PARTS OF THE CODE

The Code is divided into two sections. The purpose of the two sections is to differentiate between the provisions which apply to complaints by competitors (Section 1) and complaints which are brought by consumers (Section 2).

Section 1 – Competitor Complaints is intended to provide a mechanism for complainants to resolve disputes between competitors in an efficient and low cost way without the need for recourse to the courts.

Section 2 – Consumer Complaints is the section for complaints under the Code by consumers.

## SECTION 1: COMPETITOR COMPLAINTS

- Section 1 reflects the consumer protection principles in the Australian Consumer Law (part of the Competition and Consumer Act) (ACL).
- Complaints are made to the Advertising Claims Board: <http://www.adstandards.com.au/process/claimsboardprocess>
- Section 1.2 reflects concepts in the ACL in relation to misleading and deceptive conduct.
- To establish that marcomms are not misleading and deceptive an advertiser may be required to provide substantiation of any claims made. This means that an advertiser must have a reasonable basis for their claims. Substantiation may be in the form of tests, studies or expert reports depending on the type of claim made.
- The Advertising Claims Board will consider whether the information most likely to be taken from the advertisements or marketing communication by an average consumer in the target market would be reasonably regarded as truthful and honest. In testing the requirement that marcomms should not be designed to be misleading or deceptive, the Board

will consider the advertiser's stated intention, but may also consider, regardless of stated intent, that an advertisement is by design misleading or deceptive.

## SECTION 2: CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

- Section 2 of the Code provides the self regulatory rules around portrayal of people, violence, treatment of sex, sexuality and nudity, appropriate language and Prevailing Community Standards in marcomms.
- **Prevailing Community Standards** apply to all parts of Section 2. This means that the Board will have regard to community standards at the time the marcomms was published. The Board will, in considering what community standards are at the relevant time, also have regard to any research conducted by the Advertising Standards Bureau as well as this Practice Note. There is no one test of Prevailing Community Standards. The Prevailing Community Standard will differ in relation to the different restrictions in relation to health and safety, nudity, language, violence and portrayal of people.
- **Relevant audience** is a relevant concept for the restrictions on treatment of sex, sexuality and nudity and language. These sections of the Code require the Board to be informed by the media placement plan and audience measurement data.
  - **Relevant audience** is informed by the media placement plan and content of the marcomms. It requires the Board to examine the media plan (formal or informal). It is the audience that the advertiser intends to see the marcomms. The Board shall have regard to the audience or readership composition data for the relevant media. For example, OzTAM data can be used to inform the Board that the relevant audience for commercial free to air and subscription television is grocery buyers between the ages of 20 and 35. In the case of social media, the Board should have regard to the opt-in nature of the medium and the age gating which may apply to some social media sites in determining the relevant audience.
  - **Broad view of “audience” taken by the Board.** For the purposes of advertisements in public places, the Board will not only take account of the relevant audience, but it can also take a broad view of the “audience”. This recognises the broad nature of the audience for advertisements in public places. The Board will not just have regard to whom the advertisement is targeted (the relevant audience) but the Board also looks at who can see it and the Board will take that into consideration in determining their view of whether the advertisement treats sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to that audience or in regards to whether the language used is appropriate for that audience.

- **Images of Children and Young People**

- Particular care must be exercised when using images of children and young people in marcomms.
- Advertisers should have regard to the AANA Practice Guide: Managing Images of Children and Young People: <http://bit.ly/15fB2Tp>

- **Portrayal of people (Section 2.1).**

- This section describes types of behaviour and restricts depictions of those types of behaviour against people within certain groups.
- The types of behaviour are:
  - Discrimination – unfair or less favourable treatment
  - Vilification – humiliates, intimidates, incites hatred, contempt or ridicule
- The groups are:
  - Race – viewed broadly this term includes colour, descent or ancestry, ethnicity, nationality, and includes for example ideas of ethnicity covering people of Jewish or Muslim origin
  - Ethnicity – those with a common social identity as a result of customs, traditions and belief about historical origins
  - Nationality – people belonging to a particular nation either by birth, origin or naturalisation. This can change over time so a person born in the United States who becomes a citizen of Australia by marriage may describe their nationality as both Australian and American
  - Gender – male or female characteristics
  - Age – based on a person’s chronological age (ie the date they were born) and not a person’s biological age (ie physical age a person may exhibit)
  - Sexual preference – includes homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality and trans sexuality
  - Religion – a person’s belief or non belief about god or the existence or non existence of god or gods
  - Disability – a current, past or potential physical, intellectual, psychiatric, or sensory illness, disease, disorder, malfunction, malformation, disfigurement or impairment, including mental illness
  - Political belief – support for or opposition of a particular political party or ideology.
- A negative depiction of a group of people in society may be found to breach section 2.1 even if humour is used. The depiction will be regarded as negative if a negative impression is created by the imagery and language used in the advertisement.
- A realistic depiction of people with a disability can be acceptable, even if the advertisement is upsetting to some members of the community, where there is an important message being delivered.

- Advertisements can suggest stereotypical aspects of an ethnic group or gender with humour provided the overall impression of the advertisements is not a negative impression of people of that ethnicity or gender.
- Portraying a woman as attractive does not of itself constitute discrimination or vilification of women.
- Images of men or women in traditional roles are not prohibited provided the major focus of the advertisement is on the product, not the role portrayed. However care should be taken if depictions suggest that such activities are “women’s work” or “work of little value”.
- The AANA Practice Guide: Managing Images of Children and Young People provides more information about the use of images of Children and Young People. It provides that advertisers and marketers must take reasonable steps to ensure that images of children and young people are not sexually exploitative in nature.

- **Objectification (Section 2.2)**

- Section 2.2 addresses concerns about the objectification of people. The new wording restricts the use of images which employ sexual appeal which is exploitative and degrading of any individual or group of people. It is not limited to images of women but applies more broadly.
- This section proscribes objectification of men, women and children.
- In advertisements where images of children are used, sexual appeal is not acceptable and will always be regarded as exploitative and degrading. Advertisements must not state or imply that children are sexual beings and that ownership or enjoyment of the advertised product will enhance their sexuality. Children must not be portrayed in a manner which treats them as objects of sexual appeal.
- Not all images of people who are scantily clad will be unacceptable under this section. This section restricts the use of such images only if they are exploitative and degrading.
  - **Exploitative** means clearly appearing to purposefully debase or abuse a person, or group of person, for the enjoyment of others, and lacking moral, artistic or other values.
  - **Degrading** means lowering in character or quality a person or group of persons.

- **Violence (Section 2.3)**

- Consequences of violence may also be prohibited however graphic depictions of traffic accidents or the consequences of domestic violence may be justified by the community safety message involved.
- Sexual violence is not acceptable.
- The Board has also found that a strong suggestion of menace presents violence in an unacceptable manner and breaches this section of the Code.
- Audio representations of violence may be prohibited. For example, a radio advertisement for a vehicle which

included the sound of a man being slapped and his consequent expression of pain, was found in breach.

- Violence against animals is caught by this section.
- Depiction of violence to promote a violent game may be acceptable provided it is relevant to the product advertised.
- Realistic depictions of the consequences of violence are not acceptable.
- More leeway is permitted where the depiction is stylised rather than realistic. However, advertisers should exercise caution when using cartoon violence as a cartoon style may be attractive to children.

#### • Sex, sexuality or nudity (Section 2.4)

- This section applies equally to images of men as well as images of women and children.
- Images which are not permitted are those which are highly sexually suggestive and inappropriate for the relevant audience. Explicit sexual depictions in marcomms, particularly where the depiction is not relevant to the product or service being advertised, are generally objectionable to the community and will offend Prevailing Community Standards.
- Full frontal nudity and explicit pornographic language is not permitted. Images of genitalia are not acceptable. Images of nipples may be acceptable in advertisements for plastic surgery or art exhibits for example.
- Discreet portrayal of nudity and sexuality in an appropriate context (eg advertisements for toiletries and fashion) is generally permitted but note the applications of the relevant audience. More care should be taken in outdoor media than magazines, for example.
- Advertisements which depict women or men scantily clad, are generally acceptable, if relevant to the product.
- Images of women in bikinis are permitted, however, unacceptable images could include those where a woman (or man) is in a suggestively sexual pose, where underwear is being pulled up or down (by the model or another person), or where there is clear sexual innuendo from the ad (e.g. depicting women as sexual objects).
- Advertisements with appeal to young people (under 14 years) which contain sexualised images or poses are to be used with caution. Models which appear to be young should not be used in sexualised poses. An advertisement in which the female looks very young and is lying in bed with a man included no direct reference to the product being advertised and was found in breach by the Board as it used a highly sexualised image regardless of the audience to which the advertisement was directed.
- The use of the word “sex” does not, of itself, make an advertisement unacceptable. However, such advertisements must not contain images that are highly sexualised.

#### • Language (Section 2.5)

- Words and phrases which are innocuous and in widespread and common use in the Australian vernacular are permitted (provided they are used in a manner consistent with their colloquial usage, for example with gentle humour, and not used in a demeaning or aggressive manner). Examples are “bugger”, “shit”, “pissed-off”, “crap”, “bloody”, “cheap bastard”, “bum”, “honk if you did it last night” and “balls”. The “f” and “c” words are generally not permitted. Non verbal representations of the “f” word are also not permitted. Words and acronyms that play on the ‘f’ word, eg WTF and LFMAO, but do not use the actual word are normally considered acceptable if used in a light hearted and humorous way, are in subtitle rather than spoken word and are appropriate to the situation.
- When considering the application of this section to UGC within the control of the advertiser, the Board will have regard to the contextual and conversational nature of social media. In some cases the use of the vernacular in UGC may not offend prevailing community standards of the relevant audience.

#### • Health and Safety (Section 2.6)

- Images of bike riding without helmets or not wearing a seatbelt will be contrary to prevailing community standards relating to health and safety. Similarly, advertisements depicting unsafe practices or images, such as riding down a hill in a wheelie bin, using a mobile phone while driving or apparently hiding in a chest freezer etc are unacceptable. Advertisers should take care not to depict behaviour that children may imitate.
- Motor vehicle advertisements are subject to the health and safety section. This means that a motor vehicle advertisement cannot depict images contrary to public health and safety notwithstanding the images being unrelated to the motor vehicle advertised.
- Bullying – the age of the people depicted in an advertisement, their relationship to each other and the nature of the communication are relevant in determining whether an advertisement constitutes bullying and is contrary to Prevailing Community Standards.
- More care must be taken when the people depicted in an advertisement are children or if there is an unequal relationship between the people in the advertisement, eg student and teacher, manager and worker.

## SECTION 3: OTHER CODES

Section 3 of the Code references the other AANA Codes:

- Code of Advertising or Marketing Communications to Children <http://www.aana.com.au/codes.html>
- Food & Beverages Advertising & Marketing Communications Code <http://www.aana.com.au/codes.html>