

Background Briefing

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) works to maintain the highest standards in advertising by taking action to prevent ads from being misleading, harmful or offensive. Visit www.asa.org.uk for more information about our activities, to view the Advertising Codes or to access our database of adjudications.

Scheduling restrictions

Just as some television programmes or films are not always suitable to be seen by certain audiences, advertisements on television and radio need to be scheduled sensitively to make sure they do not cause unnecessary distress, harm or offence.

The UK Code of Broadcast Advertising includes a series of rules and restrictions to protect the public from inappropriate advertisements, with a particular focus on protecting children from potentially harmful content.

The rules

Broadcasters must exercise responsible judgement on the scheduling of advertisements and operate internal systems capable of identifying and avoiding unsuitable juxtapositions between advertising material and programmes, especially those that could distress or offend viewers or listeners.

Children's programming

Understandably, the main restrictions on scheduling concerns what may and may not be shown around children's programming – namely restrictions that are necessary to protect children from harm.

Any advertisement that might frighten or distress children or that is unsuitable in another way (e.g. due to sexual references) is subject to restrictions on when it can be broadcast on TV and radio. This can include a restriction to prevent an ad from being shown around programmes made for or of particular appeal to children (e.g. on children's channels), or from being shown before a certain time of day, e.g. 7.30 pm or 9.00 pm.

There are also specific rules which prevent particular products from being advertised around children's programming. These include:

- alcoholic drinks containing 1.2% alcohol or more by volume
- food or drinks products which are high in fat, salt or sugar
- trailers for films or video games carrying an 18-certificate or 15-certificate
- gambling
- Slimming products, medicines, vitamins.

The rules also ensure that a distinction is maintained between ads and programmes in children's minds. This is done, for example, by restricting ads featuring celebrities from

being broadcast around programmes in which they're also appearing and by preventing ads for merchandise for a children's programme from being broadcast within two hours before and after an episode of that programme.

Complaints

In 2010 around 350 ads drew over 1100 complaints that they were inappropriately scheduled. Approximately 60 of those ads required investigation, and a dozen were either banned or were required to be scheduled differently. Given the millions of ads seen and heard by the viewing public each year, these figures indicate that, on the whole, advertisers are appropriately scheduling their ads. No advertiser wants the negative publicity of an ASA ruling against them, and broadcasters do not want to have their broadcast license revoked by Ofcom – the risk they run for airing ads inappropriately.

One more thing ...

If you wish to complain about a scheduling issue, be sure to check that your complaint falls within the ASA's remit. In 2010 many of the complaints the ASA received about scheduling related to trailers for TV programmes or even the programmes themselves. These types of complaints are the responsibility of [Ofcom](#). For more information on what we cover, please visit our [website](#).

ASA action

Coty UK Ltd - November 2010

The ASA upheld complaints that a perfume ad featuring the singer Beyonce was unsuitable to be seen by younger children and gave it a post 7.30 pm restriction. The ad had already been restricted not to appear around children's programmes.

InBev UK Ltd – December 2008

A TV ad for Stella Artois breached the rules when it appeared directly after 'Dunston Checks In', a children's film. The ASA welcomed the action taken by Channel Four to prevent the same thing happening in future.

Premier Inn Hotels Ltd – March 2010

Lenny Henry's parody of the film The Shining in this ad prompted complaints when it was shown on the children's channel Nick Jr. The ASA restricted the ad from being broadcast in or around programmes made for children.

Paramount Pictures UK – May 2010

A video-on-demand film trailer for the 15-rated film 'Carriers' was shown before and during the X Factor final on ITV Player. The ASA considered that some scenes in the ad were unsuitable for younger children and should be more sensitively scheduled.

Further reading

[The UK Code of Broadcast Advertising](#)

[The UK Code of Non-Broadcast Advertising](#)