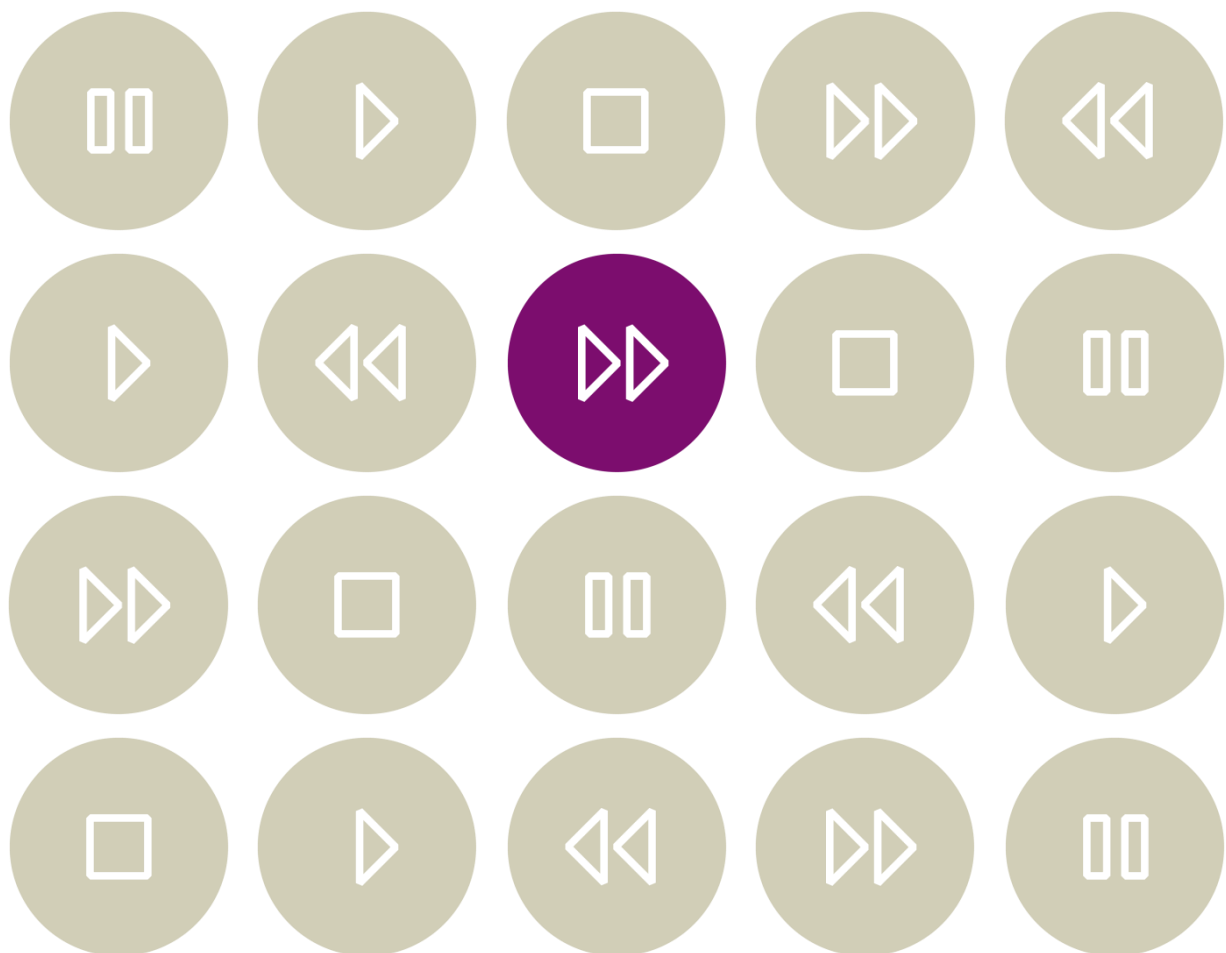


Having More Impact; Being More Proactive

Our strategy 2014 - 2018



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Section one: Our strategy on a page

Our purpose and ambition

Our purpose is to make advertisements responsible and our ambition is to make every UK ad a responsible ad.

What we do is important

We're passionate about what we do because responsible advertisements are good for people, society and advertisers

How we make every ad a responsible ad through our five year strategy



The five strands of our strategy

1 Understanding: We'll be an authority on advertising and active on issues that cause societal concern. We'll be open to calls for regulatory change, acting purposefully and in a timely fashion, while being fair and balanced in our assessment of the evidence and arguments

2 Support: We'll provide support to advertisers to help them create responsible ads. We'll increase, improve and better target our advice and training so every business has access to the information and support it needs

3 Impact: We'll spend more time on matters that make the biggest difference. Focussing on our existing remit, we'll spend less time tackling ads that cause little detriment to consumers or on the vulnerable. But, where a complaint indicates that the rules have been broken, we will always do something

4 Proactive: We'll be proactive and work with others. We'll use a wide range of information to identify and tackle problems to make sure ads are responsible, even if we haven't officially received a complaint.

5 Awareness: We'll increase awareness of the ASA and CAP. We will make sure that the public, civil society and the industry know who we are and what we can do, so they can engage with us when they need to, and have confidence in our work

Section two: Strategy - Having More Impact; Being More Proactive

A. Our purpose and ambition

Our purpose is to make advertisements responsible and our ambition is to make every UK ad a responsible ad.

'Responsible' means socially responsible advertisements that do not mislead, harm or offend people. 'Advertisements' means marketing communications within our remit.

B. Why what we do is important

We're passionate about what we do because responsible advertisements are good for people, society and advertisers.

Responsible ads give our society value and choice. They fund the media, sport and culture we all enjoy. They can be a force for social good, encouraging us to contribute to good causes and put our seatbelts on. And they help power the economy.

By making advertisements responsible we protect consumers helping them feel more confident in the ads they see and hear.

We make sure advertisers play by the same rules, delivering flexible, efficient and cost-effective regulation in the place of, or in partnership with, statutory regulation. By being fair and balanced, we create an environment in which responsible advertisements can flourish.

C. How we make every ad a responsible ad through our strategy



D. The case for change

Technology is dramatically changing advertising

Advertising is in a period of revolutionary change, with new technologies giving advertisers more ways to advertise and interact. Boundaries are blurring: between advertising and other content; between advertisers and advertised to; and between countries.

The advertising market is expanding, but we don't have endless resources

Providing a complaints service remains important. But we must prioritise how we use our resources to focus on where our efforts will have the greatest impact. If we need to expand what we do, we'll seek to increase our resources in a measured way.

Not everyone wants to make an official complaint; social media means issues are often aired more generally or directly to business

We want to tackle the issues that are the most prevalent and significant - not just the ones people complain to us about – and to do so in an evidence-based and proportionate way. Following recent regulation scandals, it's becoming increasingly unacceptable to refuse to intervene on the basis that no-one's complained.

There's a long-term trend in declining public trust and as trust falls, expectations rise

People trust things less than they did, including advertisements and self-regulation. Regulation must have an impact if it's to build trust and act as a deterrent to bad practice.

Society will become increasingly diverse and with disparate views

Changes in the make-up of society will challenge us as we continue to strive to reflect society's views in our regulation.

Societal concerns about advertisements will continue to prompt demands for regulatory intervention

This is particularly the case for concerns about public health, children and the financially vulnerable. To stay relevant, we need to listen, be active and respond to the evidence in a fair and balanced way.

Most businesses want to advertise responsibly

But not all have access to professional help and even those who do might find it difficult to keep up in a fast-changing world. They need timely and relevant advice.

The ASA system remains the best way to regulate advertisements, and for it to remain effective the industry must continue to support the ASA

Advertising self- and co-regulation is a flexible, efficient and cost-effective way to make advertisements responsible. Everyone in the industry should play their part, both by running responsible advertisements and by contributing to our funding.

E. Strategic decisions: what we'll do

We'll be an authority on advertising and active on issues that cause social concern

We'll be open to calls for regulatory change, acting purposefully and in a timely fashion, while being fair and balanced in our assessment of the evidence and arguments.

We'll provide support to advertisers to help them create responsible ads

We'll increase, improve and better target our advice and training so every business has access to the information and support it needs.

We'll target our efforts and actions on where they will have the most impact

Focussing on our existing remit, we'll spend less time tackling ads that cause little detriment to consumers. We'll concentrate on matters that impact consumers generally or on the vulnerable and reassess our activities to make sure they have the necessary impact. But, where a complaint indicates that the rules have been broken, we will always do something.

We'll be proactive and work with others

We'll use a wide range of information to identify and tackle problems to make sure ads are responsible, even if we haven't officially received a complaint.

We'll increase awareness of the ASA and CAP

We will make sure that the public, civil society and the industry know who we are and what we do, so they can engage with us when they need to, and have confidence in our work.

F. Strategic decisions: how we'll do it

Understanding: we'll be an authority on advertising. We'll be diverse and reflective of society and its expectations by:

- Being expert in our knowledge of existing and emerging ad technologies and the industry.
- Seeking out and conducting research into latest forms of advertising, consumer use and understanding.
- Increasing our access to the latest, most appropriate, technology.
- Having and valuing a diverse organisation, including Council.
- Testing the public's pulse on key issues.
- Ensuring the ASA's independence.
- Being active, but fair and balanced in our assessment of the arguments and evidence, on matters of societal concern, particularly those affecting public health, children and the financially vulnerable.

Support: we'll support every organisation, large or small, to create responsible ads by:

- Increasing, improving and better targeting our advice and training.
- Striving for joined-up broadcast ad advice.
- Working to understand industry's needs so that we provide clear and early advice, especially around convergence and new technologies.
- Raising the profile of our advice with industry.

Impact: we'll spend more time on matters that make the biggest difference and make sure we have impact by:

- Pursuing clarity in all aspects of our regulation e.g. not just waiting for a complaint in order to provide certainty for advertisers on important matters of Code interpretation.
- Making sure that every aspect of our regulation has impact e.g. by being faster, having better enforcement or being clearer in how we communicate.
- Being more efficient in how we deal with problems.

- Focussing on matters that will make the greatest difference to our purpose, particularly those matters that impact on either the majority of consumers or the vulnerable.
- Being more joined-up internally, for example by building in appropriate feedback mechanisms between ASA and CAP.
- Working with others to achieve the best results e.g. other regulators, industry.

Proactive: we'll use a broad base of intelligence to tackle advertising problems proactively by:

- Analysing complaints trends.
- Seeking out and conducting research.
- Spotting and dealing with problems on a sector or issue basis.
- Obtaining and understanding stakeholder views.
- Working with stakeholders to tackle concerns.

Awareness: we'll be known for how we can help within our industry and across society by:

- Raising our public profile.
- Proving the value of the ASA system.
- Developing good relationships with, and a good level of understanding amongst stakeholders including regulatory partners and Government.
- Being up-to-date and accessible in the way we interact with our stakeholders.

G. Strategic decisions: what will change

- We'll make sure we focus our efforts in the right place by developing the capability to identify issues that matter most for making advertisements responsible and that require priority intervention, particularly in the complaints handling process.
- We'll make sure our actions have an impact. That means reassessing our actions and sanctions because we won't deal with everything in the same way.
- We'll become more proactive by improving our capability to think ahead, plan and then act. We'll identify and tackle advertising issues, for example by analysing complaints trends, conducting and seeking out research and understanding stakeholders' views and concerns.
- We'll make sure we have the best people, people who are passionate about our purpose, knowledgeable about advertising and who are able to deliver great outcomes by being creative.
- We'll ensure that we have diversity in our organisation, both in the people we employ and Council, as well as the views that we garner.
- We'll ensure that our people are culturally open-minded to change, to different external views and to changing the way we work if it's not working for our stakeholders. We'll support our people to look outside in, rather than inside out.
- We'll invest time and resource into understanding and using new technology in our work.

- And we'll seek to become more efficient in our work to free up resource to do new activities. If we need more money we will approach Asbof / Basbof, but realistically that won't be until 2015.

H. Strategic decisions: what we won't do

- We will reduce the time and resources currently allocated to matters that have a lower impact on our effectiveness and purpose.
- We will reduce significantly our supervision of cases and limit Managerial oversight to matters that carry the greatest level of risk or complexity.
- We will not actively allocate resources to pursuing an increase in remit or responsibilities e.g. in financial advertisements; off-line point of sale or packaging.

Section three: How we arrived at our strategy

This strategy is based on a culmination of work including desk research and interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, particularly Council. It's also based on our own knowledge of the organisation and what feels right for us from experience.

Overall, the interviewees focused on how we regulate rather than what we regulate. The sense was that we have broadly the right remit in terms of media and the harms we regulate (barring one or two suggestions that we should be working more on privacy and data protection). That is notable when considering how these conversations might have proceeded five years ago when the focus would surely have been squarely on *what* we regulate (e.g. digital) rather than how we do it.

There was a consistent view amongst all stakeholders that we should retain a special focus on the vulnerable (e.g. financially vulnerable; elderly; illiterate; children) with the twin aims of preventing both harm and helping to maintain the integrity of marketing communications.

An overriding feature of the discussions was the high regard in which the organisation is held. People like the majority of what we do, but inevitably we spent our time discussing areas that could be improved. This means that our strategy isn't necessarily a radical U-turn on what we've been doing for the last 50 years. It's about sharpening our focus.

As the research phase progressed, it became very noticeable that the same themes kept coming up. Conversations became very similar; the only thing that altered was the motivation of why it was being raised. For example, the overriding messages were:

- be more proactive
- have more impact – be faster, more efficient, more focussed
- understand your stakeholders better
- understand advertising and new ad technologies better
- be better known.

Some of those relate to what we do and others to how we do it; all take their place in different parts of our strategy. And our strategy acknowledges that those messages have been delivered by different stakeholders, who have different needs from us.

To take an example, proactivity featured strongly in most conversations but stakeholders had different views on why we needed to do it. For some, recent regulation scandals like those around the press and banking meant we had to change to remain credible. Others were worried that we were letting consumers down by only dealing with matters in the complaints post bag, especially because they believed many people wouldn't complain. The industry added their concern that the reputation of advertising was being negatively affected if we didn't actively engage. They were also frustrated that they didn't have the clarity they needed on the interpretation of the Code. They thought it wasn't good enough that they we had to wait for a complaint (that might not materialise for a couple of years) in order to clarify our position on online advertising.

The research phase helped us to arrive at section two's set of beliefs and assumptions about what would be important in the next five years, which we used to create section two's short, focussed set of strategic decisions.


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