

# Advertisement features

Advertising Guidance (non-broadcast)

Legal, decent, honest and truthful



## Foreword

The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) offers guidance on the interpretation of the UK Code of Advertising (the CAP Code) in relation to non-broadcast marketing communications.

The Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) offers guidance on the interpretation of the UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (the BCAP Code) in relation to broadcast marketing communications.

Advertising Guidance is intended to guide advertisers, agencies and media owners how to interpret the Codes but is not a substitute for those Codes. Advertising Guidance reflects CAP's and/or BCAP's intended effect of the Codes but neither constitutes new rules nor binds the ASA Councils in the event of a complaint about an advertisement that follows it.

For pre-publication advice on specific non-broadcast advertisements, consult the CAP Copy Advice team by telephone on 020 7492 2100, by fax on 020 7404 3404 or you can log a written enquiry via our [online request form](#).

For advice on specific radio advertisements, contact [Radiocentre](#) Clearance and for TV advertisements, [Clearcast](#).

For the full list of Advertising Guidance, please [visit our website](#).

## Advertisement features and the ASA

Whether they are referred to as advertorials, advertisement features, advertisement promotions or the publisher's promotion, the appeal of advertisement features is that they allow marketers to draw on the credibility that is lent by the publisher to the product or service marketed. The features that seem to be favoured most by marketers are those which successfully adopt the look of the host publication.

Care needs to be taken so that readers are not confused about whether the copy is marketing or editorial. The following notes contain guidance on the way in which advertisement features should be identified.

It is the Authority's role to promote and enforce the highest standards in all non-broadcast marketing in the UK. It does this in the public interest and in co-operation with the whole of the marketing business by ensuring that everyone who commissions, prepares and publishes marketing communications observes the Code.

### What is an advertisement feature?

The Committee of Advertising Practice, the ASA's sister organisation responsible for creating, revising and enforcing the Code, asked its Industry Advisory Panel to draw up a description for advertisement features to help the industry decide whether they fall within the Code rules. This has now been incorporated into the Code:

An advertorial is an advertisement feature, announcement or promotion, the content of which is controlled by the marketer, not the publisher, that is disseminated in exchange for a payment or other reciprocal arrangement" (Introduction III. K).

There is no fixed interpretation for the Code's definition of an advertisement feature but each example can be assessed against it as a guide. This description will be kept under review as the market develops. Examples of the likely interpretation of 'payment or other reciprocal arrangements' and 'control of content' are shown below.

### Payment or other reciprocal arrangements

Money does not always change hands when an advertisement feature appears but some other arrangement may have been made in place of direct payment. For instance, a bus company might advertise in a newspaper and in exchange the newspaper might be given space to advertise on the bus-sides. These are clearly subject to the Code. In another case, an advertisement feature covering a whole page may be run free of charge if the marketers agree to insert a paid-for advertisement at a later date.

## Control of content

Clearly the question of payment and other reciprocal arrangements is a factor, but not the only one. Whether a feature or promotion is covered by the Code depends on the control the marketers exert over its content.

A good benchmark is whether or not the company has final approval of text and any visuals used. For example, a company might provide information to a journalist or online influencer which is then used as the basis for an article, vlog or blog; or a publication might ask for a fee to reproduce a photograph or cover a story. Neither scenario would make the resulting article an advertisement feature. If, however, the company was permitted to have control over the content of the article, the result would be an advertisement feature.

In another example, a travel writer might be given an expenses-paid holiday by a travel company in the hope that a favourable article, vlog or blog would subsequently be produced. In most circumstances, where there has been no agreement on what the journalist or influencer will say, the resulting article would not be considered an advertisement feature. If, however, copy was subject to the company's approval, then it would fall under the Codes.

## The Rules

### Responsibility

Responsibility both for the clear identification of the promotion and for its content rests equally with the marketer, publisher and agency. In the event of a complaint, the marketer and publisher are named jointly in any subsequently published ASA ruling. The agency would also be identified.

## Identification of marketing communications

The Code requires marketing communications to be readily recognisable:

**2.4** "Marketers and publishers must make clear that advertorials are marketing communications, for example by heading them "advertisement feature".

Advertisement features often mirror the format, style and typography of editorial articles contained in the same publication. It is particularly important, therefore, that readers can see at once that what they are looking at is not editorial but an advertisement feature.

It could be clear through the context that the material is advertising but, if it isn't, a label which makes clear the content is a marketing communication is likely to be required.

Some examples of labels that are likely to be acceptable are: 'Advertisement Promotion', 'Advertisement Feature' or, in some online media, '#ad'.

## Content of advertisement features

The content of advertisement features should conform to all the requirements of the Code. It should be legal, decent, honest and truthful. Specifically:

- 3.1 "Marketing communications must not materially mislead or be likely to do so."
- 3.6 "Subjective claims must not mislead the consumer; marketing communications must not imply that expressions of opinion are objective claims."
- 3.7 "Before distributing or submitting a marketing communication for publication, marketers must hold documentary evidence to prove claims that consumers are likely to regard as objective and that are capable of objective substantiation. The ASA may regard claims as misleading in the absence of adequate substantiation."

Substantiation for claims should be held prior to publication and this should be made available to the ASA on request. Marketers should check with the Code for full details of the rules.

Advice on specific marketing communications is available from the Copy Advice team by telephone on 020 7492 2100, or you can log a specific written enquiry via our online request form <https://www.asa.org.uk/advice-and-resources/bespoke-copy-advice.html>. The website contains a full list of Advertising Guidance as well as access to the AdviceOnline database, which has links through to relevant Code rules and ASA rulings.

**Committee of Advertising Practice**

Mid City Place, 71 High Holborn

London WC1V 6QT

Telephone 020 7492 2200

Textphone 020 7242 8159

Email: [enquiries@cap.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@cap.org.uk)

 [@CAP\\_UK](https://twitter.com/CAP_UK)

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