


Annual Report

Advertising Standards Authority


95

Around £10 billion is spent annually on advertising. In terms of volume that means some 30 million press advertisements and 2.8 billion mailings each year. In addition to press advertising and direct mail, the ASA deals with all other advertisements in non-broadcast media


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Direct Marketing: Direct mail, Leaflets, Brochures, Catalogues, Circulars, Facsimiles, Inserts



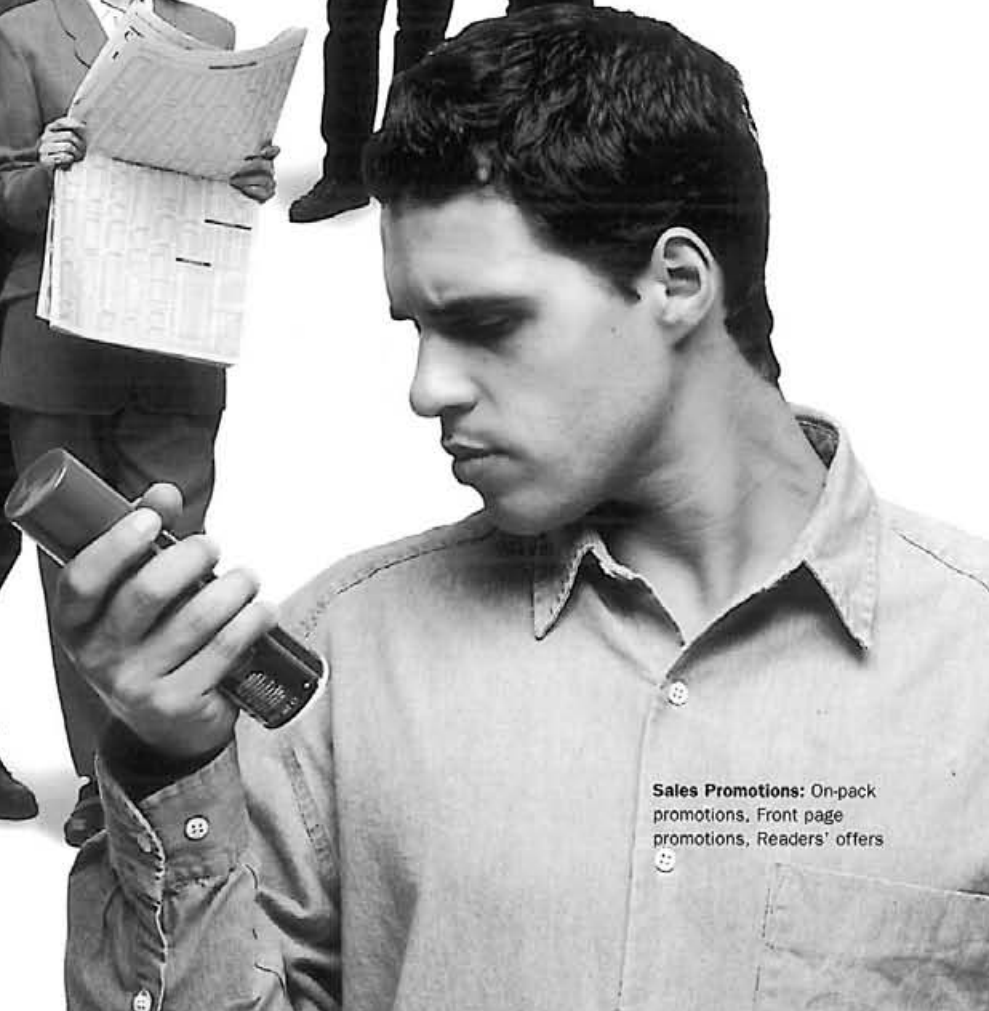
Outdoor: Posters, Transport, Aerial announcements



Screen: Cinema commercials, Electronic media, Computer games, Video, Viewdata services, Internet



Press: National, Local, Magazines, Free newspapers



Sales Promotions: On-pack promotions, Front page promotions, Readers' offers



**Chairman Lord Rodgers
and Director General
Matti Alderson at the
Manchester consumer
conference in October '95**

Chairman's Report: This is my first year as Chairman and I was fortunate to inherit from Sir Timothy Raison an excellent Council and a smooth-running organisation with a fine record of achievement. Advertising is a dynamic and creative industry and the ASA needs to run fast to keep up with changes and fulfil its obligations as the independent arm of a self-regulatory system.

February 1995

The ASA does a very good job, but it can't avoid giving the oxygen of publicity to posters which set out to shock.

Marketing

May 1995

The ASA has teeth. If you persist in breaking its code... you can end up facing a legal injunction from the Office of Fair Trading.

Godfrey Smith, Sunday Times



I pay my tribute to CAP and to all those responsible for the new Codes that became effective at the beginning of the year. The ASA Council always makes its decisions with the Codes beside it in the knowledge that these are the rules that the industry has agreed for itself.

Statutory control of advertising is much less likely today than twenty years ago when Ministers were sceptical about whether the ASA, then in its awkward adolescence, could be effective in dealing with complaints. But regulatory institutions are on the political agenda again and the way that advertising is regulated may not escape scrutiny.

Public opinion and Parliament are volatile. We cannot take for granted that they will always see the advantages of the present arrangements.

That is why the industry must respect the Codes both in the letter and the spirit. A tiny minority of advertisers could cause problems for the whole industry if they were thought to play games with the system.

Many charities and campaigning organisations have become far more aggressive and competitive in their advertising. But they too must play by the rules.

Taste and decency

Questions of taste and decency are particularly subjective and the fact that an advertisement is offensive to some people is not itself sufficient grounds for objecting to it. What may cause serious or

widespread offence on a poster in the high street or at a bus stop, can be acceptable in a magazine targeted at a specific readership.

We have streamlined our fast-track procedures to deal with a quick and controversial advertising campaign that might otherwise be over before Council had reached a decision on it.

Council members

The ASA is a limited company and, as Chairman, I appoint the Council which is its governing body. At least half of its members must be unconnected with the advertising business and I decided to invite members of the public to apply for appointment. This seemed right in principle and would, I hoped, open up a wide source of new talent. I was delighted when over a thousand people wrote to say that they wished to be considered.

Two of them, Jane Anderson and Dr. Norman Tutt, have since been appointed to vacancies. During the year, I also appointed Hugh Burkitt and Peter Mitchell as industry members although all members sit as individuals, reflecting a diversity of background and experience.

At the end of the year, three members of Council retired after serving with distinction for many years. They were Tony Fisher, Christopher Hawes and Robert Pinker and the ASA is greatly in their debt.

Manchester consumer conference

I was pleased that we were able to arrange an important seminar in Manchester. The ASA is based in London but it is essential

that we keep fully in touch with opinion nationwide. The main purpose of the seminar was to hear what a diverse group of men and women felt about such issues as children in advertising, taste and decency and health.

A higher profile

Much of the effectiveness of the ASA lies in the wide publicity given to its decisions on complaints, in the regional and local, as well as the national press. The sanction of disapproval is powerful.

Increasing publicity for the work of the ASA may be one of the reasons for the marked increase of individual complaints over the previous year. This has been reflected in the additional volume of business being considered both by the Council and the Secretariat under the experienced leadership of Matti Alderson. Because of the need to be scrupulously fair to all parties, it is an exacting task to deal promptly and precisely with complaints. I am much impressed by the commitment of the ASA's staff to these objectives. I am grateful to them and also to the Advertising Standards Board of Finance under its Chairman, Brian Nicholson, and its Secretary, John Robinson, for the entirely hands-off way in which it makes available the funds that constitute our income.

Rt. Hon. Lord Rodgers of Quarry Bank,
Chairman

October 1995

The ASA deserves credit for slapping down these abuses of advertising.

Daily Telegraph leader about charity advertising

October 1995

Self-regulation has worked, not because advertisers are angels, but because their commercial imperative is best served by upholding basic standards of truth and taste.

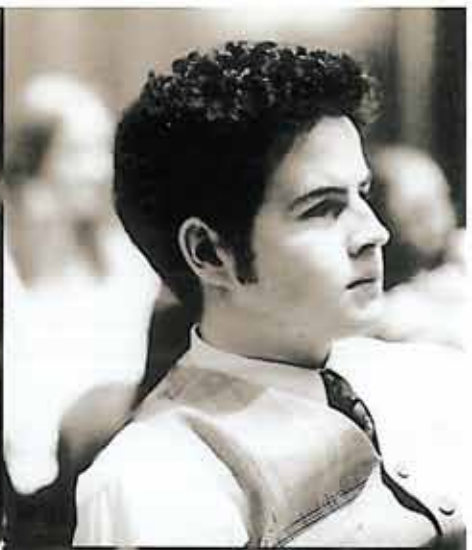
The Guardian

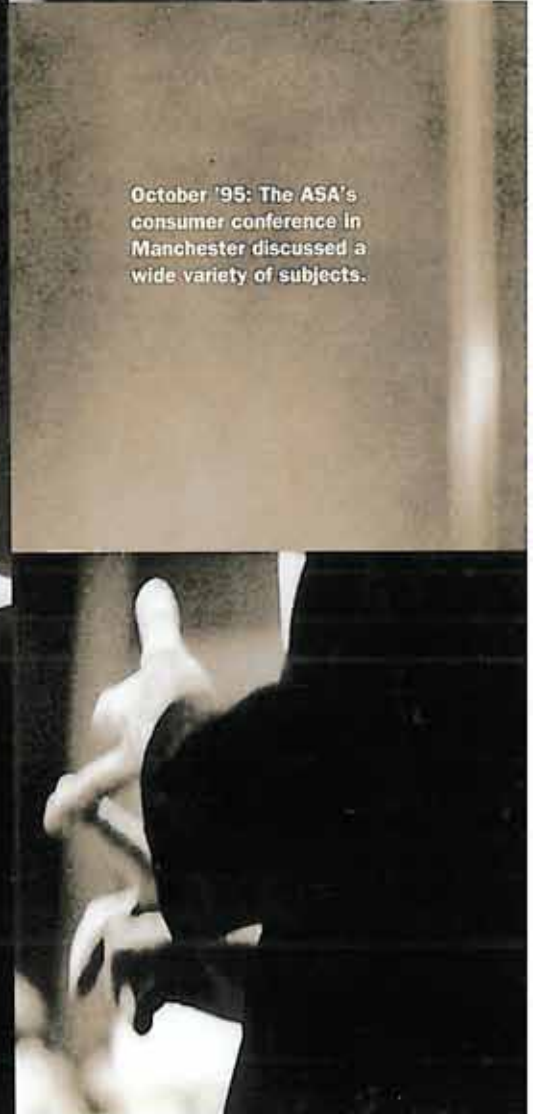
December 1995

The ASA is held in high esteem by the industry and envied by other countries – rightly so.

Campaign







October '95: The ASA's consumer conference in Manchester discussed a wide variety of subjects.

posters

Posters are a highly visible advertising medium seen by a very diverse range of passers-by.

Review of 1995: Every year, the ASA deals with an increasingly broad spectrum of issues, types of media and product categories and 1995 was no exception. It is estimated that around £10 billion is spent annually on advertising and in non-broadcast advertising that means some 30 million press advertisements. The combination of industry commitment to the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion, pre-publication advice, ASA research and monitoring, and the investigation of complaints helps to keep problems to a minimum and this review gives an insight into some of our work during 1995.

Putting posters into perspective

During 1995 there was an increase of 124% in complaints made about advertisements on hoardings. There were 2,288 complaints in total relating to 349 advertisements, 2,030 were complaints of offence.

In fact, only 28 advertisements on posters were found to break the Codes, but the public are clearly expressing an increased level of disquiet about the images that confront them uninvited in the High Street. This signals a warning to advertisers to take greater care to make sure that the product and the advertisement fit the medium.

Some anxiety stems from the fact that posters are seen by children. Parents have expressed dismay that certain posters force them into discussing issues with their children that they may be unwilling, or unready, to discuss.

Four posters feature in the top ten complaints table shown on page 20:

Two posters which drew a significant number of complaints, but which the Authority considered unlikely to cause serious or widespread offence, were those for Playboy TV proclaiming 'Morgasms' and for the film Disclosure featuring a couple in an intimate embrace. In the Authority's experience, it is the gratuitous use of sexual imagery which the public find offensive. In both these instances however, the approach chosen by the advertisers was in keeping with the nature of the product advertised.



Disclosure

"Ours is a liberal society. The price of it remaining free is that we occasionally live with our outrage rather than rushing to ban what has caused us offence."

Leader in The Independent on the Disclosure poster, March 1995

Hamlet
251 complaints

Code section – 47.1

The way in which children perceive and react to advertisements is influenced by their age, experience and the context in which the message is delivered. The ASA will take these factors into account when assessing advertisements



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Another poster campaign, for Hamlet cigars, which attracted criticism, featured an illustration of the National Lottery starry 'hand of fate' outside a window 'giving the finger' to someone inside smoking a cigar, with the familiar legend 'Happiness is a cigar called Hamlet'. A total of 251 members of the public wrote to voice their concerns to the Authority, who concluded that the advertisement was in breach of its decency rules.

The Club 18-30 campaign attracted criticism from not only the press, but also a significant number within the advertising industry itself and, following a total of 490 complaints to the Authority, the advertisements were withdrawn. Slogans such as 'Beaver Espana', 'Summer of 69', and 'Girls, can we interest you in a package holiday?' (the latter headline above a photograph of a man with a prominent bulge in his boxer shorts), were considered irresponsible given the choice of medium.

To sum up, advertisers who appear to legitimise, condone or encourage behaviour that parents and society may be trying to discourage raise questions about the industry's ability to use this medium unfettered. This will be a challenge for the industry in 1996.

ASA Council
adjudication



On-line ASA: Now that the advertising industry has extended the Codes' remit to cover non-broadcast electronic media, it seems appropriate that the ASA will shortly join the netset with its own Website on the Internet.

The interactive site will be centred around the Codes themselves and how they are applied, but will also feature our Monthly Reports and this Annual Report. It will be tailored to suit a diversity of users, from students and consumers who require easily digestible background information about the Authority's work,

through to journalists and advertising practitioners who want to refer to the Codes' rules on-line.

The site will help promote the use of the Codes and the Copy Advice team to those placing advertisements and promotions on the Internet.

Electronic advertising

The press has been teeming with articles about new or emerging methods of communication over the past twelve months. How are they likely to change our lives and, just as importantly for the ASA, will new media like the Internet become a mainstream channel for advertising?

The ASA does not gaze into a crystal ball but it does inform and prepare itself for future developments. Non-broadcast advertisements in electronic media such as computer games and CD-Roms must comply with the Codes and the ASA has had to increase its own skills with these media to deal with the public's concerns.

The ASA already has sanctions which are applied to UK advertising on media such as the Internet: for example, adverse publicity has always been one of the most effective weapons against misleading advertising. In addition, the ASA will, if necessary, ask the Director-General of Fair Trading to use his powers against persistent or deliberately misleading advertisers using the Internet. Only one complaint about an advertisement on the Internet was investigated by the ASA in 1995 and the advertiser agreed to make the changes we required without the need for the ASA to apply any of its sanctions.

At present video-on-demand is some time away. Penetration of the Internet and its use by consumers is still relatively low and commercial advertising on CD-Roms and the Internet is in its infancy. But if the advertising industry wants to use these forms of media to communicate to new and existing customers, they will need to be aware that the Internet will quickly become discredited as an advertising medium unless UK advertisers are seen to be legal, decent, honest and truthful.



**Free
Inside**



"He admitted, with a cheeky smile, that he had applied to join the AIR MILES scheme."

Peter, we love your cheek.



Air Miles Travel Promotion

This promotion glamorised the use by one young boy of his father's credit cards and passport to run away. Also, no permission had been given by his family for their son to be featured in this way

Front page promotions

"Free Inside – Ice Cream for every reader!" This kind of front page flash announcement is familiar to most readers of newspapers and magazines. But what does it actually mean? Are we to expect the soggy remains of an ice cream inside the newspaper? Of course not. But if the offer was for stamps or perhaps a CD, instead of ice cream, we might reasonably expect them to be tucked away somewhere inside. Other conditions we are not told about on the front can also make a difference when deciding whether to snap up a good offer and, in the process, buy that particular paper, or pass on to the next newspaper or magazine on the shelf. For example, does the promotion start today, or do we need to buy several editions, collect tokens, or make a premium rate telephone call?

During 1995, negotiations took place between the publishers and the Committee of Advertising Practice to agree a set of guidelines for newspaper promotions and front page flash announcements. The resulting advice note sets out clearly for the industry what information should appear on the front of a paper or magazine so that consumers know exactly what's on offer before they part with their money.

So when the summer comes, readers will know that their expectation of a cooling ice cream will have to be quenched until they have collected sufficient tokens.

Case Study: Moore Laboratories' mailing for Citra-Slim

The threat of adverse publicity is sometimes underestimated as a deterrent. But this case demonstrates why it is one of the most powerful sanctions used by the ASA.

Thousands of consumers thought they had received a note from a friend when they got hand-written envelopes containing what appeared to be an advertisement for a 'miracle' slimming product torn out of a magazine. A post-it note attached read: "You should try this, it really works. W."

The advertisers may well have felt they could evade the Authority's controls by operating this deceptive scheme from Guernsey.

They had not, however, bargained for the long arm of the ASA.

An investigation was opened immediately.

At the same time, the ASA initiated contact with regulatory organisations across the UK and in Guernsey.

Hundreds of people rang the ASA for advice while our Press Office kept journalists up to date on the latest developments.

Front page news and TV coverage exposed what many described as a 'con' or a 'scam'.

The Committee of Advertising Practice alerted industry bodies to help close the net on the advertisers.

Long before the last mailing had been dispatched, it was clear that Moore Laboratories had been thwarted by the combined effectiveness of ASA/CAP action and massive press coverage.

Citra-Slim
167 complaints

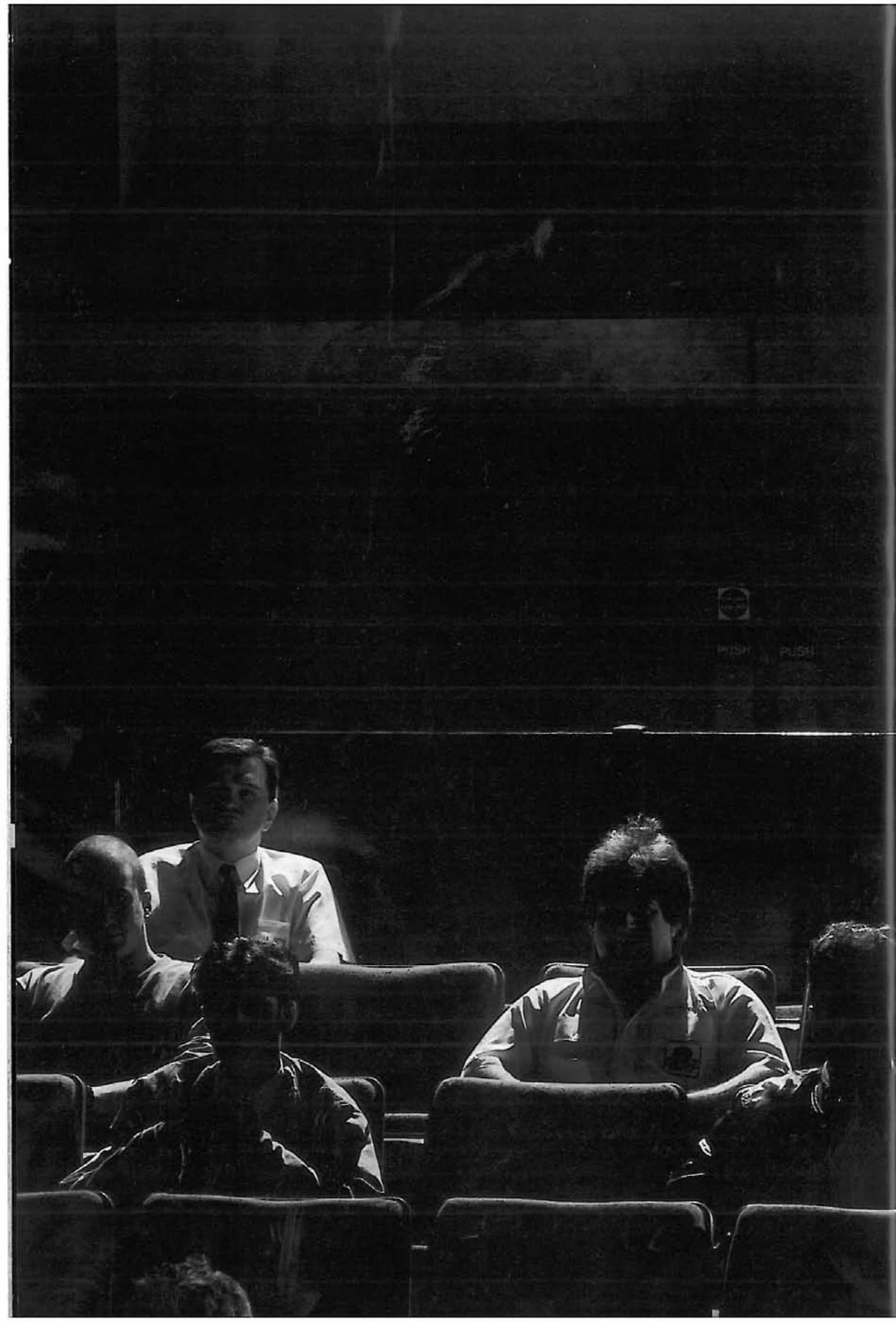
ASA Council
adjudication

"Cruellest Slimming
Con of all"
Today newspaper,
front cover,
15th September 1995

Code Section - 7.1
No advertisement should
mislead by inaccuracy,
ambiguity, exaggeration,
omission or otherwise

7.1 No advertisement should mislead by inaccuracy, ambiguity, exaggeration, omission or otherwise.





Legal, Decent, Honest
and Truthful? Two
cinema ads in 1995
seemed to have other
things on their minds.





Health & Home Shopping

76 people thought they had won £20,000 when this mailing arrived on their doorstep.

The number of complaints dropping onto the ASA's doormat during the same period was somewhat less: 1,006.

2.8 billion mailings were dropped onto doormats throughout the UK during 1995.

'Free'

You might think that the meaning of the word 'free' is very simple and straightforward. But this is not always the case. A free offer can be tied to making a purchase – for example: "buy one and get one free". Alternatively, you might be invited to send off for a free gift but asked to pay for the postage. Or, the advertisement might coax you to "try me free!". All of these are covered by the Codes' rules but some promoters still manage to slip up occasionally.

'Free' is obviously a very precious word to promoters. They go to great lengths to make sure that it is not misused by anyone, fearing it might add to the existing consumer scepticism that very little is, in reality, truly free. As a result, there has been a great deal of discussion in the industry over the course of the year and the interpretation of the Codes' rules have now been consolidated.

As the Codes make clear, the word 'free' is to be interpreted to mean that the consumer will be asked to pay no more than the current public rates of postage or the actual cost of delivery for their free item. Promoters are allowed to make a

charge for postage, but they are not permitted to ask the consumer to pay for packaging. Additionally, promoters cannot attempt to recover the cost of the free item through charging for administration, insurance or inflated postage costs.

If companies stick to these rules, consumers can be confident that they really do understand what 'free' means in promotions.

Direct marketing

The direct marketing industry is a large and growing business. Some 2.8 billion mailings dropped onto doormats throughout the UK during 1995 and there are no signs that this will decrease in 1996.

Fortunately, the number of complaints dropping onto the ASA's doormat during the same period was somewhat less: 1,006, of which 730 related to the content of the mailings and 267 to the use of lists for personally addressed mailings.

Such a low level of complaint could not be achieved without much behind-the-scenes groundwork by the industry and the ASA. There is a great deal of commitment from the direct marketing industry itself which has done much to rid itself of the 'junk mail' image that followed the intrusive and inaccurate timeshare mailings in the 1980s.

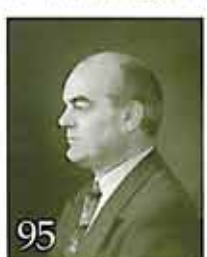
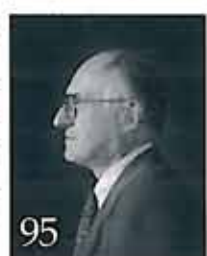
The ASA regularly checks samples of mailings to pick up potential problems and to act at an early stage to prevent consumers from being misled or disappointed. Advertisers frequently seek advice before circulation and the Royal Mail continues to play a valuable role in helping to enforce the ASA's adjudications.

Despite this well deserved praise for the direct marketing industry it should not rest on its laurels. The widespread press coverage generated by a rather ill-advised mailing in 1995 (see case study on page 12) demonstrated how one bad apple can damage the reputation of the industry as a whole. Instances like these, however few and far between, are a reminder that self-regulation means more than just complying with the rules. It is also about urging compliance among peers and speaking out against those few who choose to abuse the system and consumers.

For the Authority's part, education and vigilance will continue to be the watchwords.

Complaints about the way in which personal information is used for direct marketing purposes continues to fall: 267 in 1995 down from 343 in 1994.

Year	Complaints about the way in which personal information is used for direct marketing purposes	Complaints about the way in which personal information is used for other purposes	Total
1994	343	10	353
1995	267	10	277
1996	215	10	225
1997	185	10	195
1998	155	10	165
1999	125	10	135
2000	105	10	115
2001	95	10	105
2002	85	10	95
2003	75	10	85
2004	65	10	75
2005	55	10	65
2006	45	10	55
2007	35	10	45
2008	25	10	35
2009	15	10	25
2010	10	10	20
2011	5	10	15
2012	5	10	15
2013	5	10	15
2014	5	10	15
2015	5	10	15
2016	5	10	15
2017	5	10	15
2018	5	10	15
2019	5	10	15
2020	5	10	15
2021	5	10	15
2022	5	10	15
2023	5	10	15
2024	5	10	15
2025	5	10	15
2026	5	10	15
2027	5	10	15
2028	5	10	15
2029	5	10	15
2030	5	10	15



ASA Council: So, whose task is it to say if an advertisement breaks the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion? Featured opposite are the people appointed by the ASA Chairman to reflect a diversity of background and experience. The majority of Council members have to be free of all advertising interests. During 1995, a total of thirteen people have served on the Council.

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10
	11	12	13	14
		15	16	17
			18	19

1. Chairman Rt. Hon. Lord Rodgers of Quarry Bank (Bill Rodgers) was member of Parliament for Stockton-on Tees from 1962-83. Elected a Labour MP, he became one of the SDP's founding 'Gang of Four' in 1981. Lord Rodgers became a Privy Councillor in 1975 and a Life Peer in 1992. From 1987-1994 he was Director General of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

2. Richard Bradley is Vice-Chairman of both L'Oreal (UK) Ltd and the Cosmetics, Toiletry and Perfumery Association and is a past President of COLIPA, the industry's European body. He is also Chairman of both the Cosmetic Industry's Education Trust and its charitable foundation.

3. Hugh Burkitt is Chairman of Burkitt Edwards Martin. He was a co-founder and the first President of Alto, a federation of European advertising agencies set up in 1991.

4. Elizabeth Filkin is the Adjudicator for the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, a Director of Britannia Building Society and Hay Management Consultants. Previously she was Chief Executive of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

5. Tony Fisher is a marketing consultant, a Director of the Advertising Standards Board of Finance and a former Chairman of the Committee of Advertising Practice. He is also Chairman of the Trustees of the Advertising Bodies Pension Fund and a trustee of the CBI Education Foundation.

6. Christopher Hawes is Deputy Chairman of The Media Business Group Plc. He was Chairman of the TSMS Group Ltd from 1989-94 and, prior to that, Chairman of Davidson Pearce Group Plc from 1972-88. He is a past President of the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising.

7. Sylvia Heal is a National Officer for Carers National Association. Appointed as a JP in Surrey in 1973, she was Deputy Chair of Chertsey Division Domestic Panel. She is a former Labour MP for Mid-Staffordshire and was Opposition spokesperson for health and women's rights.

8. Sheila Iffat Hewitt is Chairman of Surrey Heartlands NHS Trust. She is a member of the Immigration Appeals Tribunal and the London Rent Tribunal and serves as a Magistrate in Surrey. Born in Pakistan, she has lived in the UK since 1971.

9. Patricia Mackesy was formerly Chairman of Oxford Magistrates Bench and of Camden Juvenile Court. She was also Deputy Chairman of North Westminster Court and a member of the Home Office Magistrates' Committee. She now lives in Aberdeenshire.

10. Dr. Ian Markham is a lecturer in theology at Exeter University, specialising in the philosophy of religion, comparative religion, Christian ethics and British theology. He has published on the area of Christian ethics and culture.

11. Peter Mitchell is Strategic Affairs Director at Guinness Plc. He is also President of the Brussels-based World Federation of Advertisers.

12. Catherine Peckham is Professor of Paediatric Epidemiology at the Institute of Child Health and Hon. Consultant at Great Ormond Street Hospital, London. She heads the European Union Concerted Action on HIV/AIDS in mothers and children and has written extensively on health issues relating to pregnancy and childhood.

13. Robert Pinker is a Professor of Social Administration at the London School of Economics. He is the Privacy Commissioner for the Press Complaints Commission and a board member of the Direct Mail Accreditation & Recognition Centre.

14. Len Sanderson is Advertisement Director and Deputy Managing Director of the Daily Telegraph and is a Telegraph Plc board member.

15 Director General
Matti Alderson

16 Deputy Director General
Christopher Ogden

17 Director of Finance
Phil Griffiths

18 Director of Communications
Caroline Crawford

19 Director of Investigations and Copy Advice
Roger Wisbey

1995 Complaint Figures

	'95	'94
Investigated		
Upheld	3,562	1,611
Statement	1	4
Resolved informally	1,214	1,047
Not upheld	758	300
Awaiting outcome	232	83
Not Investigated		
Outside remit	1,484	1,622
Not justified	4,932	4,238
Mail Order		
Goods received or refunded	326	339
Others	22	37
Awaiting outcome	6	33
Database	267	343
Total complaints received	12,804	9,657

The 12,804 complaints received during 1995 related to 7,715 advertisements compared to 1994 when the 9,657 complaints related to 7,334 advertisements. 3,562 complaints were upheld relating to 515 advertisements.

Included in the figures are intra-industry complaints which totalled 1,135 during 1995, as against 996 in 1994.

All figures were calculated on 1st February 1996 and include duplicate complaints unless otherwise stated.



International Fund for Animal Welfare

The comparison between the serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer, and people who did not support the Wild Mammals Bill was irrelevant and offensive. Other claims made in the advertisements in this campaign were acceptable



Club 18-30

490 complaints gave a clear indication that the public regarded these posters as obscene, irresponsible and offensive

Explanation of the figures:

1995 saw the first ever marked increase in complaints to the ASA. Over the past couple of years complaints have remained at a fairly constant level – 9,657 in 1994 and 9,603 in 1993 – but complaints last year rocketed to an all-time high of 12,804, an increase of 32.5%.

The number of advertisements complained about showed a 5% increase from 7,334 in 1994 to 7,715.

10 advertisements accounted for 2,881 complaints: nearly a quarter of the total. (See the top ten advertisers listed right). Complaints about misleading advertisements showed a marginal fall from 8,360 in 1994 to 8,312 in 1995.

Complaints under the decency rules however increased from 1,705 to 4,402 with 541 advertisements being the subject of complaint. The ASA's Council felt that 50 of these were likely to cause serious or wide-spread offence and asked for them to be withdrawn.

The portrayal of women in advertisements raised 400 objections, 11 of which were upheld. This continued the decline from the 1993 high of 536 complaints when 111 were upheld.

The number of complaints which did not demonstrate that there was a case to answer under the Codes accounted for some 45% of the total: 4,932. These complaints, referred to as 'not justified' in the figures on page 20, are those where the ASA felt that the complainants had clearly misunderstood the advertisement or where they had an unusual interpretation of the advertisement that was unlikely to be shared by others. In such instances the advertiser is notified routinely about these complaints but no further action is taken under the Codes.

Top 10 advertisers by complaints

British Safety Council (page 22)	1,192 (upheld)
Club 18-30 (page 8 & 21)	490 (upheld)
International Fund for Animal Welfare (page 21-22)	270 (upheld)
Gallaher Tobacco (page 8)	251 (upheld)
Warner Bros (page 7)	207 (not upheld)
Moore Laboratories (page 12)	167 (upheld)
RSPCA (page 22)	100 (not upheld)
Health & Home Shopping (page 16)	76 (upheld)
Air Miles Travel Promotion (page 11)	58 (upheld)
Playboy TV (page 30)	70 (not upheld)

RSPCA
100 complaints

Code section – 3.1
Before submitting an advertisement for publication, advertisers must hold documentary evidence to prove all claims, whether direct or implied, that are capable of objective substantiation

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The only thing in this photograph that's protected by law is the man's identity.



Charities and pressure groups

1995 saw the first year of the National Lottery. It also saw a large increase in complaints to the ASA about advertisements by charities and pressure groups.

In total, 1,765 complaints were received relating to 107 advertisements. This compares with 177 complaints about 73 advertisements in 1994. A record 1,191 complaints were against one advertisement by the British Safety Council, which featured the pope wearing a hard hat with the line: 'The Eleventh Commandment: Thou shalt always wear a condom.' Even if these complaints are excluded from the total, the balance of 574 complaints is still an increase of 224% on the previous year.

Why the big expansion? It has been widely reported by the press that charities believe they are suffering from the effects of increasing competition with the National Lottery and perhaps this has contributed to more aggressive tactics being implemented by some voluntary sector advertisers. These tactics might partly explain the increase in the level of complaints.

However, advertising for or against the Wild Mammals Bill in 1995 led to complaints being stimulated by the opposing sides of the argument. For example, one campaign by the International Fund for Animal Welfare alone attracted 270 complaints.

While most pressure groups and advertisers in the charity sector hold good evidence for their claims, some have become over-zealous in their approach and have made claims in their advertising which distort or exaggerate the truth. One advertiser, for example, claimed that dumping chemicals at sea caused genital abnormalities and reduced fertility levels among men. A company spokesman admitted that, in their opinion, the world did not have time to wait for such evidence. Arguably, this might have been a stronger message to proclaim in their advertisement.

Paid-for endorsements

Another area of complaint in 1995 concerned endorsements by charities of commercial products and services. These can be a useful source of income for the charity while, in turn, providing a valuable recommendation for the company. Endorsements can be persuasive tools but advertisements must make it clear whether or not individuals or organisations have been paid to give their views. Such paid-for recommendations should not be described as independent endorsements.



Price promises

"Lowest prices guaranteed", "Never knowingly undersold", "All prices matched". Price promises like these are familiar in today's ever-more competitive marketplace. But what do advertisers mean by them? And what do consumers understand from such claims?

In 1995 the ASA looked into several claims like these, often because competitors disputed them. Some advertisers claimed to guarantee the lowest prices and the ASA felt that it was reasonable for readers to assume that the same products were not available elsewhere for less. But without up-to-the-minute information on all of their competitors' prices, the advertisers could not always prove that their claims were accurate.

Other companies offered to 'match' competitors' lower prices. Promises of this type can be very attractive to consumers and are less likely to go wrong, but some advertisers still came unstuck by not explaining the terms of their offers properly and spelling out any conditions that exist.

The ASA expressed dissatisfaction with some advertisers who used over-enthusiastic language to describe their offers. General guidance was issued through an editorial in one of the ASA's monthly reports and the Copy Advice team has continued to advise individual advertisers on their choice of advertising claims. After all, it is in no-one's interest if price promises are misused. Consumers will soon lose faith if every advertiser claims to guarantee lowest prices.

A slim improvement in health advertising

The ASA keeps an eye on health, beauty and slimming advertising and regularly checks advertisements appearing at the beginning of the New Year when, traditionally, advertisers target consumers who have over-indulged during the festive season.

The results of the ASA's 1995 survey into these sectors were mixed. Of the 470 health and beauty advertisements checked, 77% were acceptable, 10% were not and 13% were borderline. The main issue was the use of 'cure' claims for products ranging from orthopaedic beds to impotency tablets; in most cases, products and treatments only relieve symptoms rather than cure conditions.

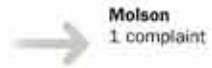
Claims for 'anti-ageing' products also caused the Authority some concern. Statements varied in strength and presentation, but the fundamental message was the same; that the product would help to achieve eternal youth. Some advertisers even said their product would actually regenerate skin tissue or enhance cellular repair.

Of the 174 slimming advertisements, 72 caused problems. The 'miracle' claims which were once so prevalent in the media have diminished but there is still cause for concern. However these findings represent a 41% improvement on the 1994 survey, a big step in the right direction.



Solgar

Vitamins cannot alleviate dietary problems associated with the depletion of the ozone layer



National Advertising Review 1995: During 1995 the ASA's research team concluded its most ambitious project yet: a survey of Code compliance for advertisements in national and regional press, magazines and on posters.



The results showed that 96% of advertisements in the press and 98% on posters are legal, decent, honest and truthful. While complaints indicate which advertisements cause individual consumer concern, research is conducted to put these concerns into some perspective.

The aim of the survey was to obtain a baseline figure for Code compliance. The 4% of advertisements that breached the Codes fell evenly into two groups. The first group covered technical breaches such as mail order advertisements that failed to indicate how long it takes for goods to reach the buyer. The second group related to more substantive breaches of the Codes such as obvious exaggerations under the rules for slimming products.

The sample

A representative sample of 6,082 advertisements was obtained from the examination of nearly 400 editions of 259 consumer titles. Advertisements were systematically selected from the national and regional press as well as a range of magazines. As expected, types of goods and services varied in different publications.

For example, 98% of advertisements for property services, such as estate agents, appeared in the regional press and the majority of financial advertisements appeared in the national press.

Levels of compliance

Each selected advertisement was examined against the Codes. 5,839 of the 6,082 advertisements presented no problems. Of the 243 advertisements that were a problem, 109 were technical breaches of the Codes. A third of these related to the sales promotion rules such as the failure to indicate the closing date for a promotion. Another third were mail order advertisements that raised problems under the rules for distance selling and list and database practice. The remaining third raised technical questions relating to a variety of rules; for example, many advertisements quoted VAT exclusive prices; advertisements in the consumer press should show prices inclusive of VAT.

Substantive breaches are less easy to categorise. They range from excessive performance claims in car advertising to miraculous claims for hair re-growth. 134 advertisements were classified as containing substantive breaches of the Codes.

Code section – 46.12

Advertisements should not depict activities or locations where drinking alcohol would be unsafe or unwise

ASA Council adjudication



46.12. Advertisements should not depict activities or locations where drinking alcohol would be unsafe or unwise. In particular, advertisers should not associate the consumption of alcohol with operating machinery, driving, any activity relating to water or heights, or any other occupation that requires concentration in order to be done safely.

Interestingly, some product categories which have historically given cause for concern did not appear in large quantities in the sample. For example, only 5% of the advertisements checked related to health, beauty and slimming products.

The research team does not usually attempt to examine subjective issues. An exception was made in this case, but none of the advertisements appeared to break the taste and decency provisions of the Codes.

As expected, the proportion of questionable advertisements was not evenly spread across the media; just over 5.75% of national press advertisements and over 10.25% of magazine advertisements caused problems. By contrast, under 3.5% of regional and local press advertisements broke the Codes. This compares well with the results of the two regional surveys conducted during the year. In September an industry audience in the Cambridge area and, in November a similar audience from around Leeds, were advised that fewer than 1% of their advertisements broke the Codes.

The most surprising result was that 26 of the 85 advertisements for alcoholic drinks broke the Codes. This gives a problem level of 30%. A more recent survey of alcoholic drinks' advertising showed the level to be 3.5% which is consistent with the three previous years' surveys. These conflicting results are interesting in that, traditionally, the ASA's alcoholic drinks' surveys are conducted in the run up to Christmas, whereas the national advertising review sample was obtained in October 1994.

Posters

In a parallel exercise, the research team carried out a check on a smaller sample of poster advertisements. This sample was equally encouraging with 98% of the 195 posters examined presenting no problems under the Codes. The 2% that did break the rules included car speed claims, an exaggerated health benefit claim for an olive oil, and an alcohol advertisement featuring a high performance motorbike.



Volvo

This approach did not denigrate BMW and readers would see the theme as humorous

Summary

The results of this survey will be used as a benchmark to check future Code compliance and the findings have been analysed to guide future research into product categories. For example, the next alcoholic drinks survey will take place in the summer months to test the discrepancy between this and previous surveys conducted around Christmas.

The CAP Year: The Committee of Advertising Practice writes and enforces the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion. CAP's members include the organisations that represent advertisers, agencies and the media. Virginia Matthews spoke to CAP's Chairman, Martin Runnacles.

"As an advertiser myself, I recognise that there is enormous pressure nowadays on agencies to create memorable work for their clients. But it's the very trend towards 'in your face' advertising that so often causes a real surge of emotion among both consumers and regulators."

The speaker is Martin Runnacles, CAP Chairman who well understands what he calls 'the commercial imperative' that can put parts of the industry at loggerheads with its own self-regulatory system.

But one year into his CAP chairmanship, Runnacles, described by his predecessor John Hooper of the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers both as efficient and highly tenacious, declares that his outspoken views about the behaviour of 'a couple' of advertisers and their agencies has, if anything, strengthened his resolve.

"Self-regulation," he declares, "continues to enjoy the great commitment of both CAP members and the ASA. "It is a system that works extremely well and one which the vast majority of our industry will fight to protect."

With a general election – and the possibility of a change in Government – looming on the not too distant horizon, it is little wonder that CAP has earmarked 1996 as the year in which complying with the Codes will be made a priority.

Referring to the contentious issue of industry awards, and the presenting of gongs to campaigns that have broken the Codes, Runnacles is firm: "I believe that the industry itself needs to exert more pressure on the minority who flout self-regulation," he says, "and we have told organisers that any ad that breaks the rules should not be entered into award schemes in the first place."

Runnacles is keen that CAP should not be seen as either old-fashioned or out of touch with today's aggressive marketplace. "CAP is a highly pro-active group of organisations representing the whole business," he says, "and its members include some of the industry's most influential voices."

1995 was about the bedding down of the new CAP Codes. In motoring and the environment, existing guidance notes were consolidated into the main Codes, the rules on advertising to children were extended and it was agreed that the food industry already had more than enough rules and regulations to digest.

As Marketing Manager of BMW, Runnacles was intensely interested in CAP's deliberations over car advertising, but he professes no qualms about the additions to the Codes.

While there are what Runnacles calls "those siren voices" who would like CAP to go far further in regulating motoring and food advertising – not to mention ads aimed at children – he is confident that CAP has got it "largely right".

Runnacles would like to acknowledge here the role played by Rita Clifton of Saatchi's in the food advertising review as well as the valuable work performed by Colin Hall, Chairman of the Sales Promotion and Direct Response Review Panel and Hugh Burkitt, Chairman of the General Media Review Panel – who has now handed over to Andrew Robertson of Abbott Mead Vickers. BBDO.

While much of Runnacles' time as CAP Chairman is taken up "being an industry policeman" he is at pains to stress that CAP also has a strong advisory role to play.

As he enters his second year as CAP Chairman, Runnacles is keenly aware of the need to get to grips with new media. At this stage, the Internet is, technically at least, a non-broadcast medium, and one which CAP and its Chairman will be keeping a close eye on in the months to come.

Virginia Matthews is the former consumer correspondent of the Daily Telegraph. She writes on consumer and marketing issues for a wide range of newspapers and magazines including the Financial Times and Marketing



Martin Runnacles started his career in advertising at J Walter Thompson before moving into brand management with Beecham Foods. After four years as Marketing Manager with Courage he has spent twelve years in the motor industry – the last five as Marketing Manager for BMW. He was appointed as Chairman of the Committee of Advertising Practice in January 1995

CAP Copy advice

With the introduction of the new Codes it came as no surprise that 1995 was an exceptionally busy year for the Copy Advice team.

During February, the telephone lines were buzzing constantly as advertisers, agencies and the media sought help with their copy. Things calmed down a little as the year progressed but enquiries remained at a reassuringly high level.

As well as giving advice on individual campaigns, the Copy Advice team issues written guidance on particular sectors when problems arise. This encourages the creation of a level playing field for all advertisers while helping to protect consumers from misleading advertising.

Flight prices

Flight companies were brought down to earth by their advertising of prices. All too often the ASA had upheld complaints from potential holidaymakers who'd found that bargain prices quoted by bucket shops were mysteriously unavailable at the time they wanted to travel. In conjunction with ABTA and IATA, guidelines were issued by the Copy Advice team. Complaints against flight advertisements have since noticeably diminished.

Advertising for books

Another area to benefit from written guidance was that of publishing. The advertising of books and magazines using claims for unproven theories has long been a grey area. It was tightened up in 1995 when the Copy Advice team produced clear guidelines on how far advertisers could go in making claims for such publications.

Greater media vigilance

By and large the media has shown a responsible attitude towards denying advertising space to misleading advertisements over the last year. Slimming advertisements containing outrageous claims, commonplace in the national press a few years ago, are now less frequently seen. Our research in 1995 showed a 41% improvement in the compliance of health, beauty and slimming advertisements and is encouraging to note that this is now the fastest-growing area of pre-publication advice.

While the publishers are to be applauded for their greater vigilance we look forward to even more improvement in 1996.

The ASA Worldwide: Some of the countries that the Authority has liaised with in 1995 are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Eritrea, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

The ASA has become internationally recognised for its knowledge, experience and success in regulating advertising in the United Kingdom. This increasingly higher profile has meant that ASA expertise has been in demand throughout 1995 to help promote the highest standards of advertising and self-regulation not only throughout Europe, but also in the international arena.

The ASA in Europe

The ASA, as one of the founder members of the European Advertising Standards Alliance, has been closely involved with

the development of new self-regulatory bodies in the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Slovak Republic. These countries successfully applied for membership of the Alliance in May 1995 and, by the end of the year, membership stood at eighteen countries. All countries of the European Union are members of the EASA except Finland, with whom negotiations are now underway. The procedure for dealing with complaints regarding cross border advertising has been operating effectively since it was established in 1992. 62 cases were examined and resolved by Alliance members under the cross border complaints procedure in 1995. 38 of these were dealt with by the ASA. Enquiries about this procedure are on the increase as awareness of the Alliance's success in providing consumer and industry redress develops.

It has been a busy and productive year for the Alliance thanks, in great part, to the efforts of Dr. Oliver Gray, Director General of EASA.

Christopher Ogden,
Vice-Chairman,
European Advertising
Standards Alliance, Deputy
Director-General, ASA

The Canadian Advertising Foundation differs in structure from the epitome of all self-regulatory bodies, the UK's Advertising Standards Authority, which assesses an automatic fee on all advertising expenditures in the UK, and so is well-funded and autonomous.

International Advertising
Age, September 1995

The UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the largest, most active and best financed self-regulatory system in the world.

International Journal
of Advertising
February 1996

The ASA and former Eastern Bloc countries

A great deal of international interest about the work of the ASA and the Alliance was expressed following Christopher Ogden's keynote speeches to multi-national audiences at both the World Federation of Advertisers Conference in Prague and the International Advertising Association's Global Conference in Budapest. As well as being Deputy Director-General of the ASA, Christopher is Vice-Chairman of the Alliance.

The UK self-regulatory system is very adaptable as a model for new and emerging advertising control schemes. The ASA has been approached by representatives from Russia, Poland, Latvia and Turkey, to name but a few, who have drawn on the ASA's expertise when examining the current systems operating in their respective countries. The ASA also met a delegation of media executives from the Ukraine and discussed ways of

regulating advertising in the challenging socio-economic situation in the former Soviet Union States.

ASA internationally

During the year, Matti Alderson, Director General of the ASA, was invited to speak to the Better Business Bureau's National Advertisers Division and the Children's Advertising Unit in New York.

A delegation of Brazilian congressmen and MPs visited the ASA to see how the UK system might be adapted to replace or improve their existing statutory framework. The hundreds of thousands of statutes in place in Brazil are so complex and cumbersome that they have become ineffective in terms of real consumer protection in that country.

In recent years, the ASA has also developed links with the South African ASA. South Africa joined the European Advertising Standards Alliance as a corresponding member in 1995.

Towards the end of the year, the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development showed great interest in using the European self-regulatory framework as a model for setting up systems for consumer protection around the world.

The ASA and the Alliance will continue to provide expertise and support for these initiatives so that effective systems of consumer protection develop in line with international advertising.

External Affairs

Playboy TV
14 complaints

Code section – 5.3

The fact that a particular product is offensive to some people is not sufficient grounds for objecting to an advertisement for it.

5.3 The fact that a particular product is offensive to some people is not sufficient grounds for objecting to an advertisement for it.

Educating the industry

The new Codes were at the heart of the Authority's external activities throughout the whole of 1995 and their launch, in a blaze of publicity in January, kick-started a co-ordinated communications strategy geared to informing the industry, the public and the media about the new rules.

The year began auspiciously with a special seminar for the industry chaired by Lord Rodgers and successfully illustrated, in a practical way, how the new Codes would affect advertising professionals from various sectors.

The great success of this event was consolidated throughout the rest of the year with other regional and special subject seminars. These included health and beauty, promotions and incentives, financial advertising, and a public relations seminar which explored the increasingly blurred boundaries between advertising and the world of public relations.

Altogether the Authority ran a total of 76 seminars during the year, many of them at the specific request of commercial companies, trade associations, consumer organisations and colleges.

And informing the consumer

Talking to, and advising, the public remains a priority and the Authority's dedicated enquiry service handled over 21,000 individual requests for information during 1995. Many of these resulted from the thousands of news articles in the press and on radio and television that were stimulated by the launch of the new Codes. Some enquires were stimulated by our successful 'Keeping Tabs on Ads' campaign, now in its third year, which has been expanded to cover more magazines and regional newspapers.

As always, we are extremely grateful to all those publishers who donate thousands of pounds worth of advertising space to us every year to keep the ASA and its work firmly in the public eye. Our thanks also go to the teams at Burkitt Edwards Martin and CIA Medianetwork who generously give us their valuable time and expertise to create and plan our advertising.

Making sure the Authority and its adjudications continue to appear in the headlines is crucial to the continuing effectiveness of self-regulation. Adverse publicity is still one of the most effective sanctions, as it generates – often extensive – negative coverage for those 'black sheep' advertisers who have misled or offended consumers. Such media coverage also greatly helps to reassure the public that the ASA is effective in protecting them from advertisements which do not adhere to the Codes.

Indeed, a whole series of high-profile campaigns came under press scrutiny during 1995, including those generated by Club 18-30, the British Safety Council, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, and the Playboy Channel.

Our constantly busy Press Office handled almost 3,000 diverse enquiries from journalists in 1995. They took every opportunity to make sure that the Authority's views were communicated clearly and effectively in the media where the ASA featured in 2,673 articles and 272 TV and radio broadcasts.

Two national newspapers invited people to complain and 56 more people did

ASA Council adjudication



Schools pack

In today's sophisticated consumer society, advertising literacy is more important than ever. The summer of 1996 will see the launch of a well-researched teacher resource pack which gives information on the ASA and the Codes produced in response to the many thousands of requests for information we receive each year from students and teachers. Designed to capture the imagination of students and to stimulate classroom debate, the teacher resource pack will tackle a wide range of advertising issues from environmental claims to children and advertising. Aimed primarily at 14-18 year old students, its content will dovetail with the national curriculum as well as other media and advertising related subjects.

ASA research

If standards of taste and decency are in a state of constant flux, how does the ASA decide whether an advertisement has broken the Codes' rules by causing 'serious or widespread offence'?

Aside from an accumulation of 35 years of invaluable experience in dealing with just such sensitive matters, the Authority takes note of independent surveys into public attitudes and, in addition, conducts its own qualitative research.

During 1996, we will be updating the findings of our 1990 survey on the portrayal of women in advertisements with a broader look at public attitudes to issues of taste and decency in advertising. Despite the fact that these attitudes are notoriously difficult to quantify, this research should give the Authority a measure of opinions about the prevailing standards of decency around the UK.

List of publications:

Legal Decent Honest Truthful – A consumer guide to the ASA

Advertising Under Control – The rules at a glance

Good Advertising – Guide to our pre-publication advice service

Complaints Procedure Leaflet

Background Briefings –

A series of summary sheets on specific areas of ASA activity

British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion – The rules

Monthly Report – The latest ASA complaint adjudications

On video:

ASA Investigated – How does the ASA deal with offensive or misleading advertisements? A short video is available on free loan. Ask for our video leaflet for further details.

Financial Report 1995

	'95 £	'94 £
Income		
Cash received from the Advertising Standards Board of Finance Ltd	2,859,091	2,737,198
Expenditure		
Salaries and staff costs (including direct marketing)	1,626,788	1,596,163
Rent and accommodation costs	194,455	269,887
Travel, subsistence and entertaining	50,140	50,393
Consultancy and professional fees	127,822	113,011
Council honoraria and expenses	53,787	53,852
Depreciation	95,882	107,278
Telephone, postage, printing, stationery and other general expenses	339,820	269,110
Advertising and promotion	197,238	156,647
Direct marketing function	186,506	108,729
Total	2,872,438	2,725,070
Interest receivable	43,918	30,052
Excess of expenditure over income for the year	30,571	42,180

Update 1994/95

Year to 31st December 1994

Last year's financial statement predicted expenditure of £2,726,702 and anticipated a pre-tax profit of approximately £42,000. Audited figures for 1994 reflect actual expenditure of £2,725,070 and a pre-tax profit of £42,180; profit after taxation was £28,557. Details of expenditure in 1994 are shown on the facing page.

Year to 31st December 1995

At the time of preparing this Report, audited income and expenditure figures for 1995 are not available. Provisional indications can, however, be given and these are provided below and on the facing page. Finalised accounts will be presented to the Council of the Authority at its Annual General Meeting in May 1996 and will be lodged subsequently with Companies House in the normal way.

Income

Compared with 1994, income received from the Advertising Standards Board of Finance Ltd., during 1995 rose by £121,893 (4.5%) to £2,859,091. Interest received rose by £13,866 (46%) and produced additional income of £43,918. The total income in 1995 was £2,903,009.

Expenditure

Overall expenditure in 1995 rose by £147,368 (5.4%) to £2,872,438 compared with 1994.

Significant increases in expenditure were in general and direct marketing advertising, which rose by £118,368 (44%) as a result of the production and distribution of the revised British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion and the consequent increased circulation of the ASA Monthly Report; consultancy and professional fees, which rose by £14,811 (13%) because of increased legal costs; leasing costs, which rose by £16,869 (83%) because of the installation of a new telephone switchboard; and postage, which rose by £11,642 (31.7%).

Significant decreases in expenditure were in premises costs, which fell by £75,432 (27.9%) because of a rebate in rates back-dated to 1991, and depreciation which fell by £11,396 (10.6%). Continued economy measures enabled other office and general expenses to be held at levels similar to 1993 and 1994.

Profit/loss

It is anticipated that the final accounts for 1995 will show a pre-tax profit of approximately £30,500 and a profit of £17,500 after taxation.



Expenditure account for the year ended 31st December 1995.

Registered office:
The Advertising Standards
Authority Ltd
2 Torrington Place
London WC1E 7HW
Telephone 0171 580 5555

Registered in England
No 733214

About the ASA: The Advertising Standards Authority promotes and enforces the highest standards in all non-broadcast advertisements in the UK. It acts independently of both the government and the advertising industry.



The Authority operates in the public interest and in co-operation with the whole of the advertising industry by ensuring that everyone who commissions, prepares, places and publishes advertisements observes the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion.

Together, the Codes require that advertisements and sales promotions should be:

- legal, decent, honest, truthful
- prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and to society
- in line with the principles of fair competition generally accepted in business.

The Codes are devised by the Committee of Advertising Practice. CAP members include advertising, sales promotion and media businesses. CAP provides a free and confidential pre-publication advice service for the industry.

If an advertisement or promotion breaks the Codes, advertisers are asked to amend or withdraw it. If they choose not to comply, a number of sanctions are available:

Adverse publicity

The ASA's Monthly Reports contain details of complaint adjudications, including the name of the advertiser, agency and the media involved.

The reports are circulated to the media, government agencies, the advertising industry, consumer bodies and the public. Published cases receive extensive media coverage.

Refusal of further advertising space

Media can be asked to enforce their standard terms of business that require compliance with the Codes. They may decide to refuse further space to advertisers.

Removal of trade incentives

Both advertisers and their agencies may jeopardise their membership of trade or professional organisations. This could result in the loss of financial and other trading benefits.

Legal proceedings

Ultimately, the ASA can refer a misleading advertisement to the Office of Fair Trading. The OFT can obtain an injunction in the courts to prevent advertisers using the same or similar claims in future advertisements.

All complaints must be in writing. Send us a copy of the advertisement and as much relevant detail as possible. Write to:

**The Advertising Standards Authority
2 Torrington Place
London
WC1E 7HW**

For further information, telephone our enquiry desk on 0171 580 5555. The enquiry desk is open from 10am to 4pm on weekdays.

→ **1995 ASA Staff:**

The ASA Council and CAP are served by a Secretariat of 60 people who carry out the day to day running of the office.

Operations Managers

Ailsa Chater
Joanne Poots

Complaints Managers

Niamh McGuinness
Mark Whitbread

Research Manager

Dominic Kellett-Bowman

**Information and
Projects Manager**
Linda Wheeler

Copy Advice Manager
David Poley

Systems Manager
Laura Fishman

Manager of External Affairs
Grahame Fowler

Office Manager
Christine Wood

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