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## NEW TWITTER TOOL GIVES GREENLIGHT TO ALCOHOL BRANDS But Marketers Are Still Figuring Out How to Use It While Complying With Industry Self-Regulations

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In the race for attention from booze marketers, Twitter has lagged Facebook, which has inked high-profile ad deals with the likes of Heineken and [Diageo](#). But Twitter is making up ground, thanks in part to an age-checking tool being tested by big brands such as Coors Light.



Coors on Twitter

Twitter is making the changes in response to lobbying from the alcohol industry, whose revised marketing code requires brands to check ages before engaging fans on social media. At the same time, beer, wine and spirits marketers could soon face more scrutiny from the Federal Trade Commission, which is seeking digital-marketing data from alcohol advertisers for its next major study on booze marketing.

Age-gating has been smoother on Facebook because users enter birthdates when signing up. But checking birthdates on Twitter has been the digital Wild West. Some brands ask users to direct-message their birthdates, while others state that by following a brand the user is confirming he or she is 21. Diageo, meanwhile, has partnered with social-technology shop Syncapse to create its own age-gating tool. And some big brands stayed off Twitter altogether.

Twitter is partnering with social-media-management company Buddy Media on a new tool to bring uniformity to the process. "For now, we are testing this solution with a small group of advertisers. We will determine next steps after the conclusion of these tests," Twitter told [Ad Age](#) in a statement.

Here's how it works: When a fan clicks to follow a brand, he is sent a direct message with a link to a site that asks for date of birth. The user must fill out the form within 24 hours if he wants to follow the brand. Once a user is age-checked once, he does not have to repeat the process when following other booze brands.

[MillerCoors](#) recently began testing the tool with a new Coors Light handle and will soon debut Miller Lite on Twitter. The brewer is also paying for promoted tweets and trends, and to be featured in Twitter's "Who to follow" section. While MillerCoors uses Facebook to build communities, Twitter is better at "tapping into what people are interested in," said Steve Mura, the brewer's director of digital marketing. "You don't just follow your friends on Twitter. You follow things you are passionate about... and beer is a part of a lot of those great passion points," he said.

Heineken USA recently ran a paid Twitter ad for Dos Equis tied to Cinco de Mayo. And brand Heineken, which is participating in the Twitter age-tool [test](#), has run three paid Twitter ad programs.

Spirits marketer Beam, which has paid for Facebook ads since 2009, took the Twitter plunge last year, using the promoted trend "#mycostume," to link its Hornitos tequila to Halloween. Earlier this year, the marketer paid to promote Courvoisier on Twitter as part of a partnership with Shaquille O'Neal. Beam has found 60% of social-media conversations about its brands occur on Twitter, compared with roughly 30% on Facebook, said Andrea Javor, Beam's senior manager of digital and media.

Because Twitter advertising is so new for booze brands, marketers are still figuring out how to do it while complying with industry self-regulations. According to people familiar with them, Twitter's ad products are generally treated like display advertising, which means they must be placed in outlets where at least 71.6% of the audience is legal drinking age, according to the industry's code. According to ComScore data, 78.7% of Twitter users are 21 and older.

Public-health advocates say booze brands need to put more age checks into place, such as verifying ages against third-party databases that check personal identities against government-issued identification data. "Just telling somebody 'are you 21, click yes,' or 'put in a birthdate' ... that's not sufficient to get somebody in a bar and we don't think it ought to be sufficient to get people in the social-media sites," said David Jernigan, director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

A Twitter spokeswoman said: "We are trusting users to input their valid birthdate, and we have no plans to cross reference this with third-party data."

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