

News Release

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Alcohol Commercials Bowl Over Responsibility Ads

Youth 60 times more likely to see TV ads promoting alcohol than industry-funded responsibility ads

Washington, DC - America's youth were 60 times more likely to see a commercial for an alcoholic beverage in 2001 than they were to see a responsibility ad purchased by the alcohol industry, according to [a new study released](#) today by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University.

Responsibility advertising includes any ads that warn against driving after drinking or encourage use of a designated driver, that advise viewers to drink responsibly, or that inform about the legal drinking age of 21.

"For two weeks the water-cooler conversation around the country has been who won and who lost the Ad Bowl at the Super Bowl," said the Center's executive director Jim O'Hara. "When it comes to alcohol advertising our research shows that America's families aren't even in the game.

"The facts show the alcohol industry's responsibility ad effort is meager and doesn't get the job done," O'Hara added. "The bottom line is that parents' messages of caution and responsibility are being undermined on television."

The Center is a public health group established to monitor and analyze the industry's marketing and its impact on youth.

In analyzing the specific responsibility ads, the Center found that:

- **Youth were 170 times more likely to see an ad promoting alcohol than an industry ad discouraging drunk driving.** Alcohol companies placed 172 product promotion ads for every drinking and driving prevention ad in 2001. While alcohol product ads reached 89% of underage youth who, on average, saw 245 product ads, responsibility ads reached only 47% of underage youth who, on average, saw three of these ads over the course of that year.

- **Youth were 93 times more likely to see an ad promoting alcohol than an industry ad discouraging underage drinking.** Alcohol companies placed 179 product ads for every legal drinking age ad in 2001. Again, alcohol product ads reached 89% of youth in 2001 who, on average, saw 245 product ads, but ads discouraging underage drinking reached only 56% of youth who, on average, saw this type of ad four times. The Center also found those of legal drinking age were twice as likely to see these ads as those who were not of age.

The alcohol industry spent \$811.2 million in 2001 to air 208,909 product ads, compared to 2,379 responsibility ads at a cost of \$23.2 million.

Alcohol companies have, by default, become the primary source of advertising that warns of the potential negative consequences of alcohol use and informs the public about the minimum drinking age of 21. Past efforts to include alcohol in the nation's anti-drug paid advertising campaign have failed.

In 2001 Congress commissioned the Institute of Medicine to develop a strategy to reduce underage drinking with a national media campaign as its centerpiece. That report is to be released in May 2003.

"The Institute of Medicine has a significant opportunity to change the national conversation on underage drinking," said Dr. David H. Jernigan, the Center's research director and author of the study. "Right now, that conversation on television - one of the most effective ways of reaching our kids - is an industry monologue. That has to change."

Out of all alcohol industry companies, only two broadcast legal-age drinking messages: Anheuser-Busch (\$12.2 million) and Coors (\$3.6 million). Both companies spent significantly more on product advertising than on legal-age drinking messages in 2001: Anheuser-Busch spent 20 times more, and Coors spent 51 times more on product messages than on a legal-age drinking message.

"Underage drinking is a major problem in this country, as it plays a part in the three leading causes of death among youth," explained Dr. Jernigan. "We owe our young people a strong public health message about the risks of alcohol abuse."

Background on the report: This report focuses on the amount and placement of responsibility advertising on television by alcohol companies in 2001 and the effectiveness of the delivery of this advertising to the underage and adult population. Additionally, this report analyzes how the levels of advertising and placement strategies compare to those of alcohol product advertising on television in 2001.

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