

**News Release**  
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## **Underage Youth Have Easy Access to Alcohol Web Sites**

*Games, Downloads, Interactive Attractions Create Cyber Playground; Content Popular with Youth Concentrated on Beer, Distilled Spirits Web Sites; B-Roll Available*

**Washington, DC** - Despite alcohol industry marketing codes promising to limit access to only legal-age adults, nearly 700,000 in-depth visits to alcohol company Web sites in the last six months of 2003 alone were from young people under the drinking age, according to [a report released today](#) by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) at Georgetown University. CAMY conducted this analysis using underage site visitation\* data supplied by comScore Media Metrix.

### **The report also found:**

- The majority of parental control software programs, described by the alcohol industry as critical to limiting underage access, are, in fact, largely ineffective at preventing youth from visiting these sites.
- Alcohol Web sites feature an array of video games such as car races, air hockey and pinball, as well as downloadable customized music, interactive accessories and other content considered attractive to youth. The majority of this content is concentrated on Web sites for beer, distilled spirits, and "malternatives," the usually sweet-tasting alcohol drinks that are sometimes produced as joint ventures of beer and distilled spirits companies.

"These alcohol Web sites are a virtual cyber playground with no adult supervision," said Jim O'Hara, executive director of the Center. "Once again, the alcohol industry's marketing codes are not protecting our youth."

"If a community found out that a local liquor store or bar was this ineffective at policing itself, there would be an immediate uproar and demand for accountability. The alcohol industry is failing in its responsibilities to America's parents and children."

### **Key findings from the study include:**

**Alcohol Web sites attract large numbers of underage youth.** In the first publicly released analysis of underage traffic on alcohol Web sites, comScore Media Metrix, a leading Internet

audience measurement service, provided data to the Center showing that between July and December 2003, 683,588 in-depth visits, or 13.1% of all in-depth visits to 55 branded alcohol sites were initiated by underage persons. The vast majority of the in-depth visits - 611,800 - occurred at 22 sites, according to the analysis by comScore. The analysis also revealed that sites in the distilled spirits and beer categories received the highest percentages of such visits from underage persons, at 15.2% and 12.8%, respectively.

A site-level analysis revealed that two distilled spirits Web sites led in the percentage of underage, in-depth site visits. One site - [www.bacardi.com](http://www.bacardi.com) - received almost 60% of its in-depth visits from underage persons, and a second site - [www.skyy.com](http://www.skyy.com) - received nearly half of all in-depth visits from underage persons. Two beer Web sites led in the absolute number of in-depth site visits initiated by those under the legal age. Both sites - [www.budlight.com](http://www.budlight.com) and [www.budweiser.com](http://www.budweiser.com) - each received more than 90,000 in-depth visits from underage persons.

**Features with youth appeal concentrated on beer, distilled spirits Web sites** Since an initial report in 1997 by the Center for Media Education (CME), policymakers have been concerned about content on alcohol company Web sites that could be attractive to underage youth. In reviewing these sites in October and November 2003, CAMY found video games such as a water-balloon toss, pinball, car races, shooting aliens and air hockey, as well as customized music downloads and IM (instant messaging) accessories in abundance. These features were clearly concentrated on the beer and distilled spirits Web sites.

Games were featured on 10 of 15 beer Web sites, seven of 19 distilled spirits sites and four of 12 maltalternative sites reviewed. Visitors to 10 beer sites, 11 distilled spirits sites and eight maltalternative sites were able to download screensavers or wallpapers.

In contrast, only one of 28 wine Web sites featured a game (a wine user's profile), and screensavers or wallpapers were available for downloading on only five wine Web sites.

**No effective "carding" on the Internet** While the vast majority of the alcohol Web sites reviewed by the Center asked users to affirm they were 21 or older or to state their birth date, data demonstrate that this does not prevent underage users from accessing the sites. To determine whether parents can control their children's access to these sites, the Center, using parent volunteers in seven states and the District of Columbia, reviewed how effectively eight leading parental control software packages worked in blocking access to the sites. The Center found that 76% of the alcohol brands eluded parental controls half the time or more.

"This report makes clear the need for the federal public health service to monitor the alcohol industry's practices and shine a spotlight so parents and policymakers can know what is happening, as the Institute of Medicine has recommended," said O'Hara.

In its landmark report, *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility*, published in September 2003, the IOM called on the Department of Health and Human Services to monitor the advertising and marketing practices of the alcohol industry and to report its findings periodically to the Congress and the public.

As the Internet has grown in popularity among teenagers in the last decade, policymakers have repeatedly shown concern about the appeal and attraction of alcohol Web sites to underage youth. Both CME and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have reviewed alcohol Web sites in the past and raised concerns about the appeal of these sites to underage youth. As a result of these concerns, the Beer Institute and the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS) revised their advertising codes in 1997 and 1998, respectively.

\* In-depth visits, reported by comScore Media Metrix, have been defined by CAMY as visits that resulted in more than two page views. This distinction has been used to eliminate from the analysis visits initiated by persons who were deterred by a Web site's age verification process, and thus viewed fewer than three pages.

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