

DROPS IN THE BUCKET:

Alcohol Industry “Responsibility” Advertising on Television in 2001

Executive Summary

“...no one can match the alcohol industry’s long-term commitment to public-service advertising that discourages underage drinking, along with warning adults to drink responsibly.”

— Jeff Perlman, executive vice president-government affairs and general counsel, American Advertising Federation, December 19, 2002¹

Alcohol abuse is the leading drug problem among America’s youth. Youth alcohol-related motor vehicle deaths have risen in the past two years, despite a decline in the number of young people reporting drinking.² Alcohol continues to be closely associated with the

three leading killers of kids: motor vehicle crashes and other unintentional injuries, suicides and homicides.³

Efforts to have alcohol included in the federal “drug czar’s” anti-drug campaign have been defeated twice in Congress, although the federal anti-drug campaign has included some alcohol Public Service Announcements (PSAs) developed by other organizations in its “match” with networks, that is, in time slots donated by the networks. By default, therefore, alcohol companies have become the primary source of educational messages about alcohol abuse on television.

Following on its recent reports on alcohol advertising in national magazines⁴ and on television,⁵ the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY)

commissioned Virtual Media Resources (VMR), a media planning and research firm in Natick, Massachusetts, to analyze the alcohol industry’s televised “responsibility” ads in 2001, using the same standard data sources and methodologies employed by media planning and buying professionals. While many alcohol ads include brief or small voluntary warnings (which research has found to be ineffective⁶), “responsibility ads” for the purposes of this report had to have as their primary focus a clear, unambiguous message about drinking responsibly, not drinking and driving, or discouraging underage drinking.

The alcohol industry placed 208,909 commercials promoting alcoholic beverages on television in 2001, compared to 2,379 responsibility ads. In auditing these ads, the Center on Alcohol

¹ J. Gaffney, “New Alcohol Study Refuted By Industry,” *MediaDailyNews*, 19 December 2002, <http://www.mediapost.com/dtls_dsp_news.cfm?newsID+190256&newsDate=12/19/2002> (20 Dec 2002).

² National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Traffic Safety Facts 2001: Young Drivers*, (Washington, DC: National Center for Statistics & Analysis, 2002), 4; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Notice to Readers: Alcohol Involvement in Fatal Motor-Vehicle Crashes—United States, 1999-2000,” *MMWR Weekly*, 30 November 2002, <<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5047a8.htm>> (20 Dec 2002).

³ American Medical Association, “Research and Facts about Youth and Alcohol,” <<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/3566.html>>, (20 Dec 2002).

⁴ Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, *Overexposed: Youth a Target of Alcohol Advertising in Magazines*, (Washington, D.C.: Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, 2002). Available at <<http://camy.org/research/files/overexposed0902.pdf>>.

⁵ Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, *Television: Alcohol’s Vast Adland*, (Washington D.C.: Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, 2002), Available at <<http://camy.org/research/files/television1202.pdf>>.

⁶ RJ Fox et al., “Adolescents’ attention to beer and cigarette print ads and associated product warnings,” *Journal of Advertising* 27 (3): 57-68 (1998).

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The Center on
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Marketing and Youth finds the following:

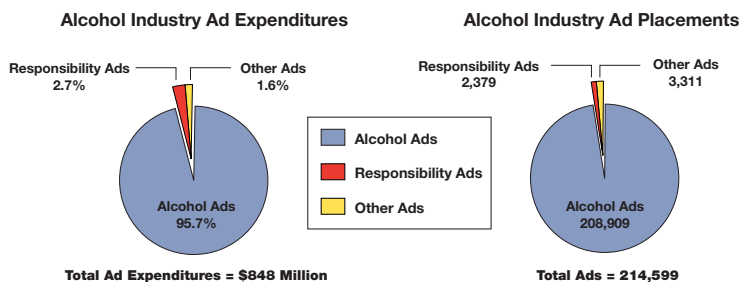
1. All told, alcohol companies placed more than 87 product promotion commercials in 2001 for every ad about not driving after drinking or not drinking before age 21. Spending on responsibility advertising accounted for less than 3% of the industry's television advertising budget.
2. Alcohol companies placed 172 product promotion commercials on television in 2001 for every drinking and driving awareness ad. More than twice as many adults⁷ were exposed to these drinking and driving awareness ads as youth.
3. Alcohol companies placed 179

product promotion commercials on television in 2001 for every legal drinking age ad, and again more than twice as many adults were exposed to these ads discouraging underage drinking as youth.

In 2001, the alcohol industry spent a total of \$811.2 million on measured

television advertising for products, \$23.2 million on responsibility TV advertising (ads about not drinking and driving and about the legal drinking age), and \$13.4 million on other corporate, community and civic TV advertising.⁸ Responsibility TV advertising represented 2.7% of expenditures and 1% of ad placements in 2001.

Figure 1: Alcohol Industry Television Advertising in 2001



Source: Competitive Media Reporting (CMR)

⁷ For the purposes of this report, "adults" are defined as persons age 21 and above, and "youth" are persons ages 12 to 20.

⁸ Examples of ads in this category included seasons' greetings ads and sympathy ads related to the events of September 11, 2001.