

# RADIO DAZE:

## Alcohol Ads Tune in Underage Youth

### Executive Summary

Through the years and every passing fad, radio has continued to be a basic fact of life for youth in the United States. Consider this: 99.2% of teenagers (defined as ages 12-17) listen to radio every week—a higher percentage than for any other age group—and 80.6% listen to radio every day.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of a week, the average teenager will listen to 13.5 hours of radio.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, he or she will spend 10.6 hours per week watching television, 7.6 hours online, and 3.3 hours reading magazines for pleasure.<sup>3</sup> For African-American and Hispanic teenagers, radio's influence is even more impressive, with average teens listening for 18.25 and 17.75 hours a week respectively.<sup>4</sup>

The Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth commissioned Virtual Media Resources (VMR) to audit alcohol radio

advertising in 2001 and 2002 and to conduct a case study of alcohol radio advertising in December 2002 and January 2003 to validate the audit findings. In analyzing the results of the audit and case study, the Center finds that the alcohol industry routinely overexposed youth<sup>5</sup> to its radio advertising by placing the ads when and where youth were more likely than adults to hear them.

In analyzing the sample from 2001-2002, the Center specifically finds:

- **Youth heard more radio ads for beer, “malternatives” and distilled spirits.** Radio ads for beer, for the so-called low-alcohol refreshers<sup>6</sup> popularly known as “malternatives” or “alcopops,” and for distilled spirits were more effectively delivered to youth than to adults.

- **Youth heard substantially less radio advertising for wine.** Ads for wine were overwhelmingly more effectively delivered to adults than to youth, showing how advertisers can target an adult audience without overexposing youth.

- **Alcohol ads were placed on stations with “youth” formats.** Seventy-three percent of the alcohol radio advertising in terms of gross ratings points (GRPs)<sup>7</sup> was on four formats —Rhythmic Contemporary Hit, Pop Contemporary Hit, Urban Contemporary and Alternative—that routinely have a listening audience of 12- to 20-year-olds greater than the proportion of 12- to 20-year-olds in the population of a particular market.

- **Alcohol ads were aired when youth listen most.** Youth were overexposed

<sup>1</sup> Radio Advertising Bureau, *Radio Marketing Guide & Fact Book for Advertisers*, 2002-2003 ed. (New York: Radio Advertising Bureau, 2002), 4-5; Arbitron, Fall 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Radio Advertising Bureau, 8; Arbitron, Fall 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Teenage Research Unlimited, Spring 2002, Wave 39.

<sup>4</sup> Radio Advertising Bureau, 9, 10; Arbitron, Fall 2001.

<sup>5</sup> For this report, unless otherwise noted, youth are defined as persons ages 12-20, and adults are defined as persons ages 21 and over.

<sup>6</sup> Many of the beverages in this category contain 5% alcohol, more than most beers.

<sup>7</sup> GRPs are used to measure the total audience exposed to advertising. For instance, 1,000 GRPs may mean that 50% of an audience heard an ad an average of 20 times over a given period, or that 80% of that audience heard an ad an average of 12.5 times over that period. See Appendix A for how GRPs were calculated.

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The Center on  
**Alcohol Marketing and Youth**

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Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth  
Georgetown University  
2233 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., Suite 525  
Washington, D.C. 20007  
(202) 687-1019  
www.camy.org

to alcohol radio advertising during two of the four “dayparts”<sup>8</sup> monitored. The two dayparts that did not consistently overexpose youth were morning “drive-time” (6 a.m. to 10 a.m., Monday through Friday), a time typically listened to by weekday commuters and office workers, and weekday daytime (10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Friday).

- **Overexposure by brand was extensive.** Sixty-three of 160 alcohol brands delivered more radio advertising to underage youth than to adults of legal drinking age, and 20 of the 160 brands even delivered more radio advertising to youth than to young adults ages 21-34, an age group the alcohol industry routinely describes as its target audience.<sup>9</sup> Across all brands, 39% of the 87,094 radio ads were more likely to be heard by youth than by adults.

- **Youth in African-American and Hispanic communities were overexposed.** These findings were also seen in the African-American and Hispanic radio audiences. For instance, Hispanic youth heard 34% more beer and ale advertising on radio than Hispanic adults, and as much beer and ale advertising on radio was delivered to African-American youth as to African-American adults.

## Why the Concern

The consequences of underage drinking are real and tragic. Alcohol use plays a substantial role in all three leading causes of death among youth—unintentional injuries (including motor vehicle fatalities and drownings), suicides and homicides.<sup>10</sup> Children who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more

likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who wait until the age of 21.<sup>11</sup> Underage drinking in the United States is marked by abuse. The vast majority of the alcohol consumed by young people is for the purposes of intoxication: 92% of the alcohol drunk by 12- to 14-year-olds and 96% of the consumption by 15- to 17-year-olds and 18- to 20-year-olds is done when drinkers are having five or more drinks at one time.<sup>12</sup>

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has noted that, “while many factors may influence an underage person’s drinking decisions, including among other things parents, peers and media, there is reason to believe that advertising also plays a role.”<sup>13</sup> Research studies have found that exposure to and liking of alcohol advertisements affect young people’s beliefs about drinking, intentions to drink, and actual drinking behavior.<sup>14</sup>

## Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth

[www.camy.org](http://www.camy.org)

The Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University monitors the marketing practices of the alcohol industry to focus attention and action on industry practices that jeopardize the health and safety of America’s youth. Reducing high rates of underage alcohol consumption and the suffering caused by alcohol-related injuries and deaths among young people requires using the public health strategies of limiting the access to

and the appeal of alcohol to underage persons.

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## Virtual Media Resources

Virtual Media Resources (VMR) is a media research, planning, market analysis

and consulting firm based in Natick, Massachusetts, serving communications organizations and marketers in a wide variety of market segments and media. VMR was established in 1992 to provide an independent research firm serving advertising agencies and marketers, and has grown to service over 100 clients across the U.S. and Canada, in retail, publishing, finance, automotive, public health and other fields.

<sup>8</sup> A daypart is a segment of a radio station’s broadcast day, usually split up on weekdays into time periods of morning (6 a.m. to 10 a.m.), midday (10 a.m. to 3 p.m.), afternoon (3 p.m. to 7 p.m.), and evening (7 p.m. to midnight).

<sup>9</sup> See e.g., Howard Riell, “Half Full or Half Empty?,” *Beverage Dynamics*, 112, no. 3 (May 1, 2002): 8; Rebecca Zimoch, “Malternatives: A new brew rides to the rescue,” *Grocery Headquarters* 68, no. 4 (April 1, 2002): 83; Sarah Theodore, “Beer’s on the up and up,” *Beverage Industry* 92, no. 4 (April 1, 2001): 18.

<sup>10</sup> Laura Kann et al, “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 1999,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 49 (2000): 1-96.

<sup>11</sup> B.F. Grant and D.A. Dawson, “Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey,” *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9 (1997): 103-110.

<sup>12</sup> Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, *Drinking in America: Myths, Realities, and Prevention Policy*, prepared in support of the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program, U.S. Department of Justice (Calverton: Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Federal Trade Commission, *Self-Regulation in the Alcohol Industry: A Review of Industry Efforts to Avoid Promoting Alcohol to Underage Consumers* (Washington, D.C.: FTC, 1999), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Joel Grube, “Television alcohol portrayals, alcohol advertising and alcohol expectancies among children and adolescents,” in *Effects of the Mass Media on the Use and Abuse of Alcohol*, eds. S.E. Martin and P. Mail (Bethesda: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism), 105-121; S.E. Martin et al, “Alcohol advertising and youth,” *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* 26, no. 6 (2002): 900-906.

## About This Report

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VMR adhered to industry-standard methodologies in conducting this analysis, using standard industry sources including Media Monitors (MMI), a service that provides advertising occurrence information in 19 radio markets; Arbitron Ratings, a service that provides audience estimates on almost every radio station in approximately 300 markets across the United States; Video Monitoring Services (VMS) and Broadcast Verification Service (BVS), which track radio ads' first occurrences and repeating occurrences, respectively; and Miller Kaplan Associates (MKA), a firm that reports radio advertising expenditures in 32 markets.

Because of the sheer number of radio stations in the United States and the economics of media research, there is no comprehensive monitoring service that provides data—in terms of either audience estimates or ads—for all of them. VMR analyzed a major market sample, drawn by MMI, of alcohol radio ads in 2001 and 2002 that tracked the actual placement of 87,094 ads in 19 leading markets across the nation and integrated these data with audience information from Arbitron to assess who listened to what, when. In addition, VMR then conducted an in-depth analysis of 11,712 ad placements for five alcohol brands in 63 markets from December 15, 2002 to January 31, 2003. This case study confirmed and amplified the findings from the nationwide sample.

MMI, the most comprehensive available source for monitoring radio advertising occurrence data, does not differentiate among ad message types and makes no distinction between product and non-product advertising messages, such as so-called responsibility ads or corporate goodwill ads. Similarly, the most reliable source for radio advertising expenditures, MKA, does not distinguish among message types, but only reports total brand or parent company expenditures within each market. Therefore, all alcohol radio advertising from June 2001-December 2002 for which the “first occurrence” was captured by VMS was analyzed. Of the 788 unique radio commercials for alcohol that were tracked by VMS over this period, there were 20, or 2.5% of the total, that may be classified as non-product advertising. This analysis suggests that the proportion of alcohol ads tracked by MMI that may be non-product ads is minimal. MMI also does not monitor Spanish-language radio stations in its principal monitoring database, and thus this report analyzes only the exposure of Hispanic populations to advertising on English-language as opposed to Spanish-language outlets.

More detailed information about these sources and the methodology used to create this report is included in Appendix A. It is critical to note, however, that these sources reflect a conservative estimate of youth exposure to alcohol advertising on radio; because of limita-

tions on the number of markets sampled, the monitored dayparts, and the frequency of monitoring, the actual scope of alcohol advertising is substantially greater than what is reported here. We estimate that the actual amount of radio advertising for alcohol is approximately eight times what is reported by MMI within the 19 sampled markets.<sup>15</sup>

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Former President, Simmons Market Research Bureau and the Traffic Audit Bureau; former Vice President, Arbitron Ratings

Joni Sims

Media Researcher and Consultant; former Partner, Ogilvy & Mather/Mindshare; former Senior Client Executive, Nielsen Media Research

Michael Siegel, MD, MPH

Associate Professor, Boston University School of Public Health

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<sup>15</sup> Within the three markets that monitor until 11 p.m., the proportion of youth GRPs after 7 p.m. is 21%. These markets represent 48% of youth alcohol GRPs within the 19 measured markets. If the GRPs in the remaining markets were adjusted to reflect a comparable proportion of 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. ad occurrences (dividing the total GRPs by .79), and GRPs in all markets were then multiplied by 7 (since only one day per week is sampled by MMI), the resulting total youth 12-20 GRPs for 2001-2002 would be 40,579, or eight times the sampled total. This estimate does not reflect GRPs for any weekday advertising after 11 p.m., which is not monitored by MMI in any market, or for stations not sampled by MMI.