

Decision of the ADVERTISING REGULATORY BOARD

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| Advertisers | Cider House (Pty) Ltd and Signal Hill Products (Pty) Ltd |
| Consumer/Competitor | Consumer |
| File reference | 3915 - Strongbow |
| Outcome | Upheld |
| Date | 29 May 2025 |

The Directorate of the Advertising Regulatory Board has been called upon to consider a consumer complaint against a television commercial promoting the Strongbow Gold Apple cider.

Description of the advertising

The commercial features a worker sitting at a desk piled high with files, hunched over a laptop. The words *“THEY SAID”* and *“NEVER”* appear separately on his two computer monitors whilst the words *“DAY DREAM”* appear as an inflatable behind him. He mutters *“Eish! Yoh!”* under his breath and starts typing as he sees another worker approaching him. The second worker leans over his desk and contemptuously says *“Get it done! Day dreamer!”* The scene changes, first to some fast-paced music in the background and what appears to be a firewall type of placards that fills the screen bearing the words *“WARNING”* and *“NEVER STOP PLAYING”*. The scene then changes back to him, still at his desk, which is now clear of piled up files, smiling, holding a paper airplane which suddenly changes into a bottle of the advertised brew. He sits back, leaning on his chair, feet up on the desk, watching some revelry happening in front of him in what appears to be an open plan office. All visible computer monitors screens show the time to be 17:00.

A male voice states *“Strongbow. Never stop playing. Not for sale for persons under the age of 18”* and the following wording appears on the screen beside two cans of the advertised brew, towards the end of the commercial:

“STRONGBOW”

“NEVER STOP PLAYING”

Directors: GD Schimmel (CEO) K Denalane (Chair)

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“NEW DRIP”

“SAME GOLD”

The wording “*NOT FOR SALE FOR PERSONS UNDER THE AGE OF 18*” is constantly on the screen as a bottom strip throughout the commercial.

Complaint

The Complainant is of the opinion that the commercial promotes drinking in order to manage stress at work.

Response

The Advertiser stated that:

- The campaign in question is anchored in the brand platform: “*Never Stop Playing.*” This ethos is rooted in the insight that, in a world full of social pressure and conformity, staying true to oneself and finding joy in life is both refreshing and liberating. It is not about escapism or coping; it’s about self-expression and maintaining a sense of playfulness despite societal expectations.
- In the commercial, the opening scene clearly establishes a monotonous office setting where the protagonist is discouraged from daydreaming, highlighted by a colleague's stern comment and a literal pile of work. This setting represents the creative and emotional restrictions often faced in modern environments.
- Rather than turning to the advertised brew to “cope,” the protagonist maintains his individuality. The transformation of a paper airplane into a bottle of the advertised brew is symbolic. It represents the merging of his imaginative spirit with the end of the workday, marked clearly by the clock striking 17:00. This signifies leisure time, not workplace consumption or using alcohol to manage stress.
- The commercial concludes in a more vibrant, liberated setting where characters are playful, reflecting the campaign’s theme of not letting the pressures of modern life stifle creativity and joy.

Key Clarifications:

- No implication of alcohol as a coping tool: The character’s escape is imaginative, not alcohol-driven. The advertised brew appears only after the close of business hours, reinforcing responsible consumption during leisure time.

- No claim of success through alcohol: The commercial does not show the protagonist achieving success, social standing, or resolution of problems through drinking.
- Creative metaphor, not literal solution: The metaphor of "*Never Stop Playing*" encourages embracing joy and imagination, not using alcohol to overcome adversity.

Application of the Code of Advertising Practice

The following clause of the Code of Advertising Practice (the "Code") was considered in this matter:

- Alcohol Industry Communication Code of Conduct - Clause 1.4.1 of Appendix A.

Decision

Having considered all the material before it, the Directorate of the ARB issues the following finding.

Clause 1.4.1 of the Alcohol Appendix states, "Commercial Communications should not imply that drinking resulted in business, social, professional, academic, athletic, financial, or other personal success, nor that drinking can solve personal problems, overcome inhibitions, shyness or social barriers, or enable social acceptance."

The Directorate must therefore consider whether the commercial implies that alcohol can solve personal problems – in this case, work stress and frustration. There are restrictions around the advertising of alcohol products, as alcohol addiction is a vice and can lead to professional and social harm, so the Directorate considered very carefully whether the commercial does in any way promote drinking as a way of managing stress at work. The Directorate notes that when it comes to advertising for alcohol, or similar products, it needs to take a narrow view in order to protect vulnerable consumers struggling with addiction.

The commercial features a man who appears to be highly stressed because of his piled-up desk, as well as apparent verbal pressure from a man who appears to be his superior or at most, his colleague. His mood, however, changes the moment the clock strikes 17:00, and he is seen, still in his office, smiling and appearing to be happy, whilst a bottle of the advertised brew miraculously appears. He sits back leaning in his chair, feet on the desk, watching some revelry happening in what appears to be an open plan office.

The Advertiser states that rather than turning to the advertised brew to “cope,” the protagonist maintains his individuality. The transformation of a paper airplane into a bottle of the advertised brew is symbolic. It represents the merging of his imaginative spirit with the end of the workday, marked clearly by the clock striking 17:00. This signifies leisure time, not workplace consumption or using alcohol to manage stress.

The Directorate, however, wishes to point out that there is a distinction between what the intended message is through the production of a commercial (or any advertising or promotional message), and the perception that it creates to the viewers out there whose perception is their reality. It is therefore not about the intended communication, but how the message is received and decoded.

In observing the commercial, the Directorate is of the opinion that there is an implication that the office worker’s mood changed, and his stress levels went down, as soon as his office hours were over – even though he is still in the office – due to a bottle of the advertised alcoholic beverage landing in his hand, putting a smile on his face as he gazes at it. Clause 1.4.1 of the Alcohol Industry Communication Code of Conduct Appendix clarifies, *inter alia*, that commercial communications should not imply that drinking can solve personal problems.

The Directorate is also of the view that the commercial does not to portray a healthy situation where a person unwinds after work, enjoying a sundowner with friends, in a non-office setting, even if still at his company’s premises. The worker is portrayed still sitting at his now cleared desk, with his computer monitors all showing the time to be “17:00”. The fact that there are other computer monitors in the foreground where the revelry is taking place is also proof that the dancing and joyful behaviour is a work office based event. It is unclear if the revelry is intended to be real or something that the character is imagining, but it does imply that the workers jumped directly into drinking and dancing as soon as they downed their tools, seemingly to ease the stress related to their workload or emotionally draining work environment.

The revelry is in fact cut with a brief glimpse of what is presumably the “real” scene, and not his imagination, which seems to show that people are still working in the background:



It is also noted that there is nothing in the commercial to support the story line that it is the character's individuality that is saving him. The only indication we have of this alleged individuality is when he starts drinking at the first moment that work is over,

There is nothing healthy or encourageable about cracking open your first drink at 5pm, while still at your place of employment. The Directorate is of the view that the communication of this commercial is overwhelmingly that if you have a terrible job that you hate, you will feel better if you drink the advertised product.

Based on the above, the Directorate believes that the commercial implies that drinking helps to manage work-related stress, and therefore finds that the commercial is in contravention of Clause 1.4.1 of Appendix A, the Alcohol Industry Communication Code of Conduct.

Sanction

The Advertiser is required to:

- Withdraw the commercial in its current format. The process of withdrawing the claim must be actioned with immediate effect.
- The process of withdrawing the commercial must be completed within the deadlines stipulated in Clause 15.3 of the Procedural Guide. In the case of a television commercial, immediately as deadlines permits.
- The commercial may not be used again in its current format.
- The Advertiser is reminded that in terms of Clause 15.5 of the Procedural Guide, offending advertising is to be withdrawn from every medium in which it appears.