

Alcohol advertising by other means

Any crackdown on liquor advertising will be undermined by the internet and social media, says Yoav Tchelet, of dotJWT, the digital division of advertising agency JWT.

He says government's proposed Control of Marketing of Alcoholic Beverages Bill will force brands to sidestep the law and undertake "stealth" marketing. Digital initiatives "are set to have a crucial role to play in sustaining brand awareness, especially if traditional above-the-line advertising channels are eventually closed to alcohol brands".

In the US, alcohol brands such as Miller Coors are becoming increasingly active on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Miller recently debuted its Light variant on Twitter.

The maker of Jim Beam bourbon has advertised on Facebook since 2009 and took the Twitter plunge last year.

Courvoisier cognac has promoted itself online through former basketball star Shaquille O'Neal, while hip-hop music mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs promotes French vodka Cîroc on Twitter.

Strategic planner Sam Beckbessinger, of the Quirk digital agency, says online opportunities will depend on the extent to which the SA government regulates advertising. "It could regulate the internet as well," she says. "Countries such as Russia have regulated online advertising, but online marketing is broader than advertising.

"If online advertising is regulated, social media is likely to be exempt. It is more about building a community and is driven by what people are actually looking for rather than paid ads on websites," she says.

The move to the internet

One drawback of digital media is the inability to reach mass audiences with a single message. Online communication is becoming tailored for individual users.

Even without a ban on alcohol advertising, Beckbessinger says marketers and budgets will continue to move to the internet. "We expect to see growth in online video, media tablets and smartphones. With digital you're not just trying to push a message, you're engaging, building connections and relationships."

Adrian Botha, director of the Association for Responsible Alcohol Use, doubts that government can regulate online marketing without infringing on freedom of expression.

"China has been able to do it," he says. "But how would government restrict access to websites in the US, for instance? I don't think they'd be able to put up firewalls in SA. There are too many websites from all over the world that people can access."

Tchelet says marketers are already considering their options while they wait for government to make up its mind on liquor advertising. "Many of them are already taking up the challenge," he says. "They have come up with a host of creative campaigns using 'under-the-radar' executions that entertain, inform and engender brand loyalty."

One of digital's advantages is that it allows marketers to profile consumers more accurately. "This can create a platform for a much more mutually rewarding relationship with consumers."

Source: *Financial Mail* via I-Net Bridge

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