

PRODUCT RESPONSIBILITY

# promoting moderation

Drinks company Diageo has ploughed its own furrow by developing television advertisements that encourage responsible consumption of its products. It believes the adverts will not only help tackle binge drinking but may avoid regulation and enhance the identity of its brands

An Irishman walks into a bar. It may sound like the start of a joke, but it's actually the beginning of a television advertisement about responsible drinking by beverage company Diageo Great Britain.

A first for UK television, the company-sponsored spot shows two different versions of the same evening unfolding: in one, the man spends the night pleasantly sociable; in the second, he ends up messily drunk and fighting. A closing message flashes up on the screen: 'don't see a good night wasted. Drink sensibly.'

To date the British drinks' industry has mostly chosen to work collectively to promote safe drinking. Diageo's advertising campaign shows this could be about to change, according to Kate Blakeley, head of corporate social responsibility. 'As a socially-responsible company we feel it's appropriate to produce stand-alone campaigns as well,' she says.

Produced by the advertising agency Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO, the 'Many Me' spot was aired throughout the month of May 2006. Alongside it ran a second advert entitled 'Mirror'. The two adverts were shown on prime time

television to ensure maximum impact. Targeted at men and women respectively, each communicated a safe drinking message in a style designed to appeal to a young adult audience.

The adverts both drew heavily on the concept of social capital. 'Among young people the approval of friends is extremely important, and doing anything to hurt them or incur their disapproval is to be avoided at all costs,' says Blakeley. The campaign certainly struck a chord with Diageo GB's targeted audience: two out of three said they would consider drinking sensibly as a result of seeing the adverts, according to a post-campaign assessment of 1000 viewers carried out by research company Millward Brown. Four out of five claimed that the television campaign had made them question their drinking habits.

The independent evaluation also highlighted overwhelming public support for efforts by the drinks industry to spread the safe drinking message. Only four per cent of those interviewed thought this was not necessary. Jean Collingwood, chief executive of the Drinkaware Trust, a UK-based charity that educates the public on safe drinking levels, says the results

## the company

With annual sales of almost £10billion (\$21bn) worldwide, profits of £2.1bn and more than 22,000 employees, Diageo owns and markets some of the best known alcoholic drinks brands, including Guinness, Johnnie Walker, Baileys and Smirnoff. One of the largest companies in the world, it:

- gave training on responsible drinking awareness to 4000 of its employees in 2006
- delivers responsible drinking messages to bar staff on bartending skills programmes set up in Singapore and India
- was one of the first companies to sign up to the UK government's 'v' initiative that will help create a million new community volunteers aged between 16 and 25
- is on the advisory group of The Thailand Business Partnership for Community Development, which is working on post-tsunami community development projects in Thailand
- had a community investment budget of more than £20m in 2006.

**two out of three said they would consider drinking sensibly as a result of the adverts**

demonstrate 'how companies can use consumer intelligence, insight and marketing skills to positively challenge and impact upon consumer behaviour'.

However, some critics have suggested that the adverts could have been harder-hitting, along the lines of the successful, although sometimes shocking, British anti-drink driving campaigns. Blakeley argues against that, saying that engagement on moderate drinking has to be at a different level. 'Research has shown that on this we need to talk to consumers like the adults that they are,' she says. 'That means highlighting the benefits of drinking in moderation.'

Alcohol Concern, the national agency on alcohol misuse, has welcomed the adverts as a 'counterweight' to the overtly positive messaging on alcohol consumption so often seen in ordinary drinks advertising. It has also called for a longer-term television campaign. 'To effect cultural change there needs to be a sustained investment in similar projects if the message of safe drinking is to get through,' says Frank Soodeen, a spokesperson for the charity.

Diageo GB agrees with this view, and in November it unveiled a second televised campaign to enhance its sensible drinking message, using new adverts. Blakeley points out that the company's television advertising has been accompanied by radio and print campaigns and that 'the adverts form part of an ongoing wider package of measures that Diageo GB



■ Diageo's television adverts present a safe drinking message in a style designed to appeal to a young adult audience

delivers to promote responsible drinking'. In addition, Diageo GB has appointed the twice Formula One world champion Mika Hakkinen as a responsible drinking ambassador.

Among its other publicity campaigns has been a drinking unit awareness programme called 'Know what's in it?' Run in partnership with the National Union of Students Services, the scheme seeks to communicate official sensible drinking guidelines to Britain's student population. Posters in bars, beer mats, and framed messages in toilets are used to remind students that alcohol is best enjoyed in moderation. To date, the programme has reached some 750,000 students at 55 universities.

Nor is its commitment restricted to the recent past. Ten years ago, Diageo GB voluntarily introduced a symbol onto its packaging to inform consumers of the alcohol unit level of each individual product. It was also one of the first UK beverage companies to introduce reminders about safe drinking on packaging.

Some question the logic of a consumer-goods company persuading buyers to limit the purchase of its products. But Diageo GB insists that promoting safe drinking is vital to its brand identity as a responsible company. 'As a leading alcohol producer we recognize we have an important role to play in encouraging people to enjoy drinks in moderation,' says Blakeley.

As a long-term business strategy it also makes sense. Government authorities, particularly in the field of public health, are concerned about the social implications of alcohol abuse. Negative media coverage of 'binge drinking' has also increased public awareness, and a recent study by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit estimated that 17 million working days in Britain are lost to hangovers and drink-related illness each year, with a total cost to employers of £6.4 billion (\$13bn) and to the National Health Service of £1.7bn. 'Binge drinking doesn't fit with the long term sustainability of our brands and is damaging in the short term,' says Blakeley. By being proactive, the

argument for industry self-regulation is strengthened. The alternative could be punitive regulatory action, with associated costs for the alcohol industry.

As such, Diageo GB has adopted an active policy on engaging government agencies. The company is a founding member of the industry-backed Portman Group, which looks at ways for drinks companies to promote responsible alcohol consumption, and has been involved in a number of joint public education activities, including the creation of an advisory website on sensible drinking levels.

Ultimately the success of such programmes relies on what individuals decide to do when they have a drink in their hands. 'Bringing about cultural change will take time and will require strong commitment from the industry, government and other parties to be effective,' says Blakeley. 'But the success of the anti-drink driving

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## comment DIAGEO



Diageo's advertising campaign demonstrates the company's commitment to promoting responsible alcohol consumption, and is an example of business engaging openly and positively with issues related to the use of its products. Diageo has voluntarily employed its expertise to raise awareness, has attempted to influence consumer behaviour, and acknowledges that a 'binge-drinking' culture poses a business risk.

### features of note include:

- the company recognizes its responsibility to encourage safe use of its products
- research showed that the targeted messages had a positive influence on consumer attitudes
- advertisements were supported by a wider campaign promoting government guidelines, in partnership with the National Union of Students Services.

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