

## **ASAS Advisory on Children's Code for Advertising Food and Beverage Products**

### **Preamble**

The Ministry of Health (MOH) convened the Taskforce for Obesity in 2008 to review international best practices and develop key strategies to prevent and control obesity in Singapore. The review was completed in 2009 and one key recommendation was to strengthen local food marketing standards for children. This recommendation is in line with the resolution passed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2010, which urged Member States to introduce controls on the marketing of foods and beverages to children in view of the growing scientific evidence that advertising influences children's food preferences, purchase requests and consumption patterns.

The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS), which is an advisory council under the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE), is working with the MOH, Health Promotion Board (HPB), Singapore Manufacturing Federation (SMF) and Food Industry Asia (FIA) to put in place a long-term framework for advertising of food and beverage products to children.

ASAS, having consulted the MOH, HPB, SMF and FIA, now draws up the following advisory to ensure that:

- a. marketing communications for food and beverage products should support the food and nutrition policies of the Government;
- b. marketing communications for food and beverage products do not encourage over-consumption of any food or beverage product and should support balanced diets and healthy lifestyles among children; and
- c. advertisers and marketers develop and maintain a sense of social responsibility in advertising and marketing food and beverage products in Singapore.

This Advisory must be read in conjunction with the *Singapore Code of Advertising Practice (SCAP)* and applicable legislation.

## **1. Principles**

- 1.1 Special care should be taken in marketing communications of food and beverage products addressed to children or young people. The way in which children perceive and react to advertisements depends on their age, experience and the context in which the message is delivered. Marketing communications that are acceptable for young teenagers will not necessarily be acceptable for young children. The ASAS will take these factors into account when assessing the suitability of advertisements.
- 1.2 Marketing communications to children should be designed and delivered in a manner to be understood by those children. Marketing communications shall not be misleading or deceptive in relation to any nutritional or health claims, shall not be ambiguous or provide a misleading sense of urgency, nor feature practices such as price minimisation inappropriate to the age of the intended audience.
- 1.3 Explicit guidelines and interpretation shall be provided by ASAS on a case-by-case basis. In interpreting the Advisory, emphasis will be placed on compliance with both the principles and the spirit of the Advisory. The guidelines provide examples, which are by no means exhaustive, of how the principles are to be interpreted and applied.
- 1.4 In adjudicating on complaints, the ASAS will consider:
  - (a) The extent to which the medium employed has a primary appeal for children, i.e. the extent to which children are the express target group for the medium employed; and
  - (b) The extent to which the advertising tools and techniques used are designed to appeal primarily to children.
- 1.5 In adjudicating on complaints, the ASAS is vested with discretion to ensure a commonsense outcome. It should be emphasised that a product with a special appeal for children can never in itself be regarded as marketing.

## **2. Definitions**

- 2.1 For the purpose of this Code:
  - (a) a “child” is a person 12 years old or younger.
  - (b) “food and beverage products” means any food and beverage products advertised in Singapore, including advertising of meals or

individual menu items by restaurant owners and other food service providers.

- (c) “Common Nutrition Criteria” is the common nutrition profile for food and beverage products that is endorsed by the HPB and will be adopted by all companies for food and beverage marketing communications targeted primarily at children – with effect from January 2015. (Until 31 Dec 2014, Company Specific Criteria will be adopted by individual companies as a guide.)
- (d) “marketing communications” include advertising as well as other means, such as promotions, sponsorships and direct marketing, and should be interpreted broadly to mean any communications produced directly by or on behalf of marketers intended primarily to promote products or to influence consumer behaviour. However, the following are not included in the scope of this Advisory:
  - (i) The product itself, including its packaging,
  - (ii) Ordinary display in store/ at point of sale, and
  - (iii) Sponsorship, where this only entails the use of the sponsor's name and/ or trademark.
- (e) “food and beverage marketing communications primarily addressed to children” are marketing communications, which as set out in Section 1.4 of this Code, having regard to their placement, as well to the theme, visuals and language used, are targeted primarily at children.
- (f) a “premium” is anything offered, other than the product itself, without additional cost or at a reduced price, and is conditional upon the purchase of the advertiser's regular product or service.
- (g) “child-dedicated television” includes programmes on channels on both free-to-air and subscription television that specifically target children.
- (h) “child-dedicated publications” includes all print media that specifically target children.

### **3. Guidelines**

- 3.1 All food and beverage products promoted in marketing communications that are primarily addressed to children in any media must meet the common

nutrition criteria endorsed by the HPB. Details of the above can be found on the website of the ASAS at [www.asas.org.sg](http://www.asas.org.sg).

### 3.2 Diet and Lifestyle

Marketing communications for food and beverage products primarily addressed to children shall be responsible in the manner in which the food and beverage products are portrayed:

- (a) They should not encourage or promote unhealthy eating or drinking habits.
- (b) They should not actively encourage children to eat excessively throughout the day or to replace main meals with confectionery or snack foods.
- (c) They should not undermine the role of parents or caregivers in guiding dietary and lifestyle choices.
- (d) They should feature quantities of food or portion sizes that are responsible and relevant to the scene depicted. They should not suggest that a portion intended for more than one child is to be consumed by a single individual, or that an adult's portion may be consumed by a small child.

### 3.3 Pressure to Purchase

Marketing communications for food and beverage products primarily addressed to children must be prepared with a due sense of responsibility:

- (a) They should not imply that children are likely to be ridiculed, inferior to others, less popular, disloyal or have let someone down if they or their family do not use the advertised product.
- (b) They should not urge children to buy the food or beverage product, or persuade others to buy the products for them, via "high pressure" and "hard sell" techniques. Words or the tone adopted in the advertisement should not cajole, pressure or bully children or their parents into buying the food or beverage product.
- (c) They should not encourage children to make a nuisance of themselves to parents, caregivers or others.
- (d) They should not feature prices with words such as "only" or "just", which implies a level of affordability that may not be true.

### 3.4 Promotional Offers

Marketing communications of food and beverage products addressed primarily to children and that feature promotional offers must be prepared with a due sense of responsibility:

- (a) They should not create an undue sense of urgency in children or encourage the purchase of excessive quantities for irresponsible consumption.
- (b) They should ensure that the product is significantly featured and should not encourage children to eat or drink a product only to take advantage of a promotional offer. The product should be offered on its merits, and the offer should serve only as an added incentive.
- (c) Premiums
  - (i) Marketing communications for collection-based promotions or premiums must not urge children or their parents to buy excessive quantities of the product. They should not directly encourage children only to collect the premiums, or unduly emphasise the number of items to be collected. The closing dates for premiums should enable the whole set to be collected without having to buy excessive or irresponsible quantities of the product within a short timeframe. Children should not be urged to buy the product in a hurry.
  - (ii) Marketing communications for premiums should not give children a false impression about the nature or content of the product.
  - (iii) Marketing communications for premiums should not give children a false impression that the premium, and not the product, is the item being advertised.
  - (iv) Marketing communications for premiums must clearly state the terms and conditions, as well as limitations.
  - (v) Marketing communications for premiums should not encourage children to consume the product in excess in a bid to obtain the premium.

### 3.5 Popular Personalities

- (a) “Brand equity characters” are characters that have been created by the advertiser and have no separate identity outside their associated

product or brand. For the purpose of this Advisory, such brand equity characters are not included in the definition of Popular Personalities.

- (b) Marketing communications for food or beverage products primarily addressed to children must be prepared with a due sense of responsibility:
  - (i) They must not use popular personalities or celebrities (live or animated) primarily popular among children in advertisements and marketing communications to promote or endorse the product, or premium, in such a manner as to extol the virtue of the advertised product or undermine a healthy diet.
  - (ii) They must not suggest that consumption of the product would enable children to resemble an admired figure or role-model. They must also not suggest that the non-consumption of the product would imply that the children are not being loyal to the figure or role-model they admire.
  - (iii) Popular personalities or celebrities (live or animated) well known to children may present factual and relevant statements about nutrition and health.
  - (iv) Popular personalities or celebrities (live or animated) that are primarily popular among children should not be used to endorse food and beverage products that do not meet the common nutrition criteria endorsed by HPB.