

Guidance on Ads for Video Games and Films

Background

CAP offers guidance on the interpretation of the British Code of Advertising, Sales Promotions and Direct Marketing (the CAP Code), in relation to non-broadcast marketing communications, and BCAP on the interpretation of its Radio Advertising Standards Code and TV Advertising Standards Code. CAP and BCAP Guidance is intended to help advertisers, agencies and media owners interpret the Codes but is not a substitute for those Codes. Guidance reflects CAP or BCAP's intended effect of the Codes but neither constitutes new rules nor binds the ASA Councils in the event of a complaint about an advertisement that follows it.

For pre-publication advice on specific non-broadcast advertisements, consult the CAP Copy Advice team by telephone on 020 7492 2100, by fax on 020 7404 3404 or by e-mail on advice@cap.org.uk. For advice on specific radio advertisements, consult the Radio Advertising Clearance Centre (RACC), www.racc.co.uk, and for TV advertisements, Clearcast, www.clearcast.co.uk.

Guidance

Advertisers and media owners share a common responsibility for ensuring that ads for video games and films are responsible, taking into account the content of the advertisement and the context in which it is placed.

- **Content and context:** a medium's content and context (for example, that of a publication or channel) should be considered when placing an ad. Information, such as reader and audience profiles and surrounding editorial content, should be taken into account when considering which images to use.
- **Age-rated products:** ads should be suitable for the medium in which (and, if relevant, the time at which) they appear. An age-rating given to a product by the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) or PEGI (Pan European Game Information) does not necessarily reflect the suitability of an ad for that product.
- **Time of broadcast:** the content of an ad should be carefully considered before deciding when it should be broadcast. It should not be assumed that, because an ad will be broadcast after 9.00pm, "anything goes". Care should be taken to ensure that the content of an ad is suitable for the intended audience, based on both the audience figures for broadcast times and the content of the programmes around which it is broadcast. The ASA upheld complaints about a TV ad for a film that had been given a 7.30pm restriction by Clearcast and had been broadcast in line with that restriction. The ASA considered that the ad, which was broadcast during a programme likely to be watched by children with their parents or guardians, contained menacing images and was unsuitable to be broadcast until after 9.00pm, when young children were less likely to be watching (Momentum Pictures, 9 May 2007).

The BCAP Television Code gives this guidance:

“Ex-kids” restriction will avoid children up to 4 years old;

After 9.00pm restriction will avoid most 5 to 8 year olds;

Later restriction (such as 11.00pm) will avoid most 9 to 11 year olds.

- **Condoning or glorifying violence:** ad content, including text or voice-overs, that could condone or glorify violence should be avoided. The ASA upheld a complaint about a poster that included the text "Grittier and nastier in tone than anything you've seen before, the violence here is visceral, brutal and very, very real". The ASA considered that the text, in conjunction with the image of a woman being held hostage by two men, glorified violence and was likely to cause serious or widespread offence (Eidos Interactive Ltd, 9 April 2008).
- **The depiction of fighting:** video games and films may involve fighting, which might be reflected in ads. Game content (either as real gameplay or simulated), or film content, depicting scenes of graphic or realistic violence should be used with caution.
- **The realism of violence:** the ASA has upheld complaints about violence in ads in which the content involves realistic human characters involved in graphic, brutal or sustained violence. Violence depicted in some ads could be deemed totally unacceptable, regardless of when they are broadcast (Sega Europe Ltd, 17 September 2008).
- **Graphic depictions of violence:** care should be taken to avoid graphic depictions of violence (realistic or stylised) in untargeted media such as posters; consideration should be given to exactly where an ad will be placed. The ASA would, for example, take a dim view on ads containing violence, guns or knives if they appeared near a school or where children were likely to see them. Events in the news and media should be considered sensitively. The ASA upheld complaints about a poster that appeared in London Underground stations, including Stockwell, at the time of the inquest into the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes. The ad contained the strap-line "There's nothing wrong with a little shooting as long as the right people get shot". Although it did not uphold complaints that the poster glamorised violence, the ASA considered that the ad's placement in Stockwell Underground Station was likely to cause serious or widespread offence (Lions Gate UK Ltd, 17 December 2008).
- **Violent acts:** even if an ad does not show a violent act in progress, care should be given when implying that a violent act has taken place or is about to take place. The ASA upheld complaints about a poster that showed a gagged female character with tears down her face while two men stood behind her, one holding a gun, suggesting that she was being held against her will (Eidos Interactive Ltd, 9 April 2008).
- **Direct or implied violence:** care should be taken with radio ads that contain direct or implied violence. Although without visual images, the sounds of people in pain, fear or suffering can distress listeners, especially children. The ASA upheld complaints about a radio ad for a horror film broadcast across several commercial radio stations during the morning school run (Lions Gate UK Ltd, 7 February 2009).
- **Shocking images:** the use of shocking images in any medium to draw attention to a product should be avoided. The ASA upheld a complaint about violence in a

video game ad that, although tongue-in-cheek, glorified violence and was likely to cause fear and distress, especially if viewed by children (Midway Games Ltd, 16 January 2008).

- **Guns and weapons:** careful consideration should be given to how guns and weapons are depicted in ads. Care should be taken not to show the impact of violence and the use of realistic-looking human characters being shot or injured should be used with extreme caution. The ASA has upheld complaints about the depiction of guns in ads for films, especially those in which the character points the gun straight out towards the viewer (Universal Pictures International UK & Eire Ltd, 3 September 2008, and Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd, 21 November 2007).
- **The use of nudity:** the gratuitous use of nudity can cause serious or widespread offence. Some nudity is considered to be acceptable if it is directly relevant to the product being advertised, for example toiletries or lingerie. But it is likely to be considered unacceptable if the images are graphic or not relevant to the product or service being advertised. Special care should be taken when using nudity in untargeted media, such as posters, because it could be seen by children or by those likely to be offended.
- **The use of explicit sexual images and innuendo:** special care should be taken when selecting a medium for placing an ad that includes sexual images, allusions to sexual intercourse or innuendo.
- **References to drugs:** care should be taken when referencing drugs in ads. If images of drugs are directly relevant to the content of the product being advertised, extreme caution should be exercised to avoid being socially irresponsible or condoning drug use.
- **The use of non-game footage:** care should be taken to avoid misleading consumers if an ad includes images or sounds that are not representative of actual gameplay. The ASA has upheld complaints about ads that implied scenes – which were specially designed for the ads, did not feature in the games themselves and were superior in nature or quality to the content of the games themselves – were representative of gameplay (Activision (UK) Ltd, 22 February 2006).

Relevant information

Adjudications

[Sega Europe Ltd - 17 September 2008](#)

[Midway Games Ltd - 16 January 2008](#)

[Universal Pictures International UK & Eire Ltd - 3 September 2008](#)

[Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd - 21 November 2007](#)

[Eidos Interactive Ltd - 9 April 2008](#)

[Lions Gate UK Ltd - 17 December 2008](#)

[Lions Gate UK Ltd - 7 February 2007](#)

[Momentum Pictures - 9 May 2007](#)

Relevant AdviceOnline Entries

[Drugs](#)

[Fear and Distress](#)

[Sexual Violence](#)

[Social responsibility](#)

[Taste and Decency: General](#)

[Taste and Decency: Language](#)

[Taste and Decency: Sex, sexual orientation and sexism](#)

[Taste and Decency: Nudity](#)

[Video games and Films](#)

[Violence and anti-social behaviour](#)

[Weapons: General](#)

[Weapons: Knives and martial arts weaponry](#)

Audience indexing

[Advertising Guidance Note No.5](#)

ASA Compliance Survey

[Video Game Advertising Survey](#)

Useful links

CAP Copy Advice Team
www.copyadvice.org.uk

Clearcast
www.clearcast.co.uk

Radio Advertising Clearance Centre
www.racc.co.uk

The British Board of Film Classification
www.bbfc.co.uk

Pan Europe Game Information
www.pegi.info

22 July 2009