

Advertising standards

The Advertising Standards Agency annual report has announced that 2003 was a record year for complaints, with almost 14,300 complaints being made about particular adverts.

- 1 Describe one of your favourite advertisements to your partner. What is the product? What do you like about the ad?
- 2 Scan the news report. List the names of any companies mentioned in the report.

True or misleading?

In the UK alone, no less than 1,700 advertisements were changed or withdrawn last year, according to figures released by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). The main sectors for objections were adverts for holidays and travel. Complaints about text message marketing rose by more than 500% to 393, up from 65 in 2002 and 6 in 2001. More and more companies now use mobile phone text messages to target consumers.

The best a man can get

Adverts from both Wilkinson and Gillette claimed that their shaving system is 'the best' – but how can both products be the best? A Dutch court ruled that both companies can make the claim, as members of the public will not necessarily believe them! The judge said that some exaggeration is permissible, as long as it's not misleading in nature, because it will be sceptically received by the average consumer.

The fastest PC in the world

Complaints have been made about the claim made by Apple that their Power Mac G5 is 'the world's fastest personal computer'. After tests were performed, the ASA agreed with

the complaint, ruling that the G5 was not the fastest computer 'in all circumstances for all applications'.

Targeting children

Further controversy surrounds food advertising targeted at children. Obesity is rising and in the UK about 40% of TV advertising during children's programmes is for food – fast food, cereals, snacks and soft drinks. Some parents feel bullied into buying products which they feel are not good for their children. In the US angry parents have brought lawsuits against some of the world's largest alcohol companies, including Heineken and Bacardi, as health groups link a surge in underage drinking to aggressive advertising.

Complete truth in advertising may be an impossible ideal. As adverts becomes more demanding of our attention and as we become more critical, complaints will no doubt continue to rise. So, more and more companies will face the challenge of advertising their products in a way we find acceptable.

- 3 Read the whole report and summarise the advertising problems that the companies in exercise 2 are facing.

- 4 Identify which word in each list does not collocate with the word: '(an) advert'

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|---|----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1 | (a) magazine | (b) TV | (c) full-page | (d) consumer | (e) front-page | (f) job | advert |
| 2 | (a) to carry | (b) to publish | (c) to run | (d) to ban | (e) to surge | (f) to create | an advert |
| 3 | (a) aggressive | (b) travelling | (c) discrete | (d) misleading | (e) controversial | (f) good | advert |

- 5 Discuss the following questions in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

- (a) Do you agree with text message and email advertising?
- (b) Do you agree that 'some exaggeration is permissible, as long as it is not misleading'? Can you think of an advertisement which makes exaggerated claims? Can you think of an advertisement which is misleading?
- (c) Should advertising targeted at children be limited? Justify your answer.