

# Digital Guiding Principles

Self-Regulation of Marketing Communications  
for Beverage Alcohol

Beer, Wine and Spirits  
Producers' Commitments to  
Reduce Harmful Drinking

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# About the Digital Guiding Principles

The *Digital Guiding Principles* (DGPs) have been developed as part of the Beer, Wine and Spirits Producers' Commitments to Reduce Harmful Drinking ([www.producerscommitments.org](http://www.producerscommitments.org)). The Commitments address targeted actions in five key areas, one of which involves work dedicated to strengthening and expanding marketing codes of practice.

To this end, the Commitments' signatories pledged to develop a set of global guiding principles for alcohol beverage marketing in digital media. The DGPs are the result of the signatories' collective efforts to deliver on this pledge.

September 30, 2014 marks the launch of the first-ever set of global guidelines for beverage alcohol producers to require the content of any online marketing and social media use to meet the same high standards that apply to traditional marketing activities.

# Introduction



Codes of practice for the self-regulation of marketing communications for beverage alcohol operate at company and sector levels and as part of national self-regulatory codes. They have evolved over many decades to reflect developments in the marketplace and the cultural norms of the wider society, including progressively incorporating provisions dedicated to digital marketing communications.

Indeed, it is well known that the unprecedented level of interactivity brought by digital advertising has enhanced brand communications worldwide. However, those recent transformations in advertising practices give rise to the need to adapt self-regulation provisions and structures to address this ever-evolving means of communication.

From the respect of users' privacy to the promotion of responsible drinking practices via online communications, all alcohol beverage marketing codes of practice should include appropriate digital-specific provisions and thus ensure that all alcohol beverage marketing communications reflect the same high standards of social responsibility, whatever the device and whatever the media.

Marketing codes of practice vary according to country and product to reflect local cultures, lifestyles, traditions, and national contexts. The purpose of this document is therefore to provide guidance wherever alcohol beverage self-regulation codes of practice are being established or enhanced, by helping to define common core principles of responsible marketing communications which apply specifically to digital media.

In November 2011, the sponsor companies of the International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP) approved the *Guiding Principles – Self-Regulation of Marketing Communications for Beverage Alcohol*,<sup>1</sup> a set of key principles designed to ensure that alcohol beverage marketing communications are socially responsible (see Appendix 1).

And in 2012, we made a collective commitment as leading global producers of beer, wine, and spirits to build on our long-standing efforts to reduce harmful drinking through the Beer, Wine and Spirits Producers' Commitments ([www.producerscommitments.org](http://www.producerscommitments.org)). In recognition of the serious effects that the harmful use of alcohol can have, we wish to demonstrate our support of international efforts to improve health and social outcomes for individuals, families, and communities through the Commitments.

<sup>1</sup> International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP). (2011). *Guiding Principles: Self-Regulation of Marketing Communications for Beverage Alcohol*.

The Commitments address 10 action areas over five years (2013-2017). The key areas being addressed are:

- **Reducing underage drinking**
- **Strengthening and expanding marketing codes of practice**
- **Providing consumer information and responsible product innovation**
- **Reducing drinking and driving**
- **Enlisting the support of retailers to reduce harmful drinking**

In Action Area 4 of the commitment to strengthen and expand marketing codes of practice, we commit to develop a set of global guiding principles for alcohol beverage marketing in digital media that will require the content of online marketing to meet the same high standards that apply to our traditional marketing activities. With respect to digital “social media sites,” where we are engaged in direct interaction with consumers, we also commit to put in place, where possible, controls to limit underage access and operate a user age-affirmation mechanism. In doing so, we will invite relevant social media providers to work with us to achieve this.

The *Digital Guiding Principles* (DGPs) are based on an extensive analysis of existing alcohol-specific marketing self-regulation codes. These *Digital Guiding Principles* complement the *ICAP Guiding Principles* by providing guidance specifically dedicated to digital marketing communications. The two documents should therefore be read in conjunction.

#### **The Commitments Signatory Companies are:**

- **Anheuser-Busch InBev**
- **Bacardi Limited**
- **Beam Inc.**
- **Brewers Association of Japan**
- **Brown-Forman Corporation**
- **Carlsberg**
- **Diageo**
- **Heineken**
- **Japanese Spirits & Liqueurs Makers**
- **Molson Coors**
- **Pernod Ricard**
- **SABMiller**
- **UB Group**



Japan Spirits & Liqueurs  
Makers Association



Pernod Ricard



# Implementation

In adopting these *Digital Guiding Principles*, we will adapt our internal practices to reflect the high-level standards laid out in this document. For this reason, a period of transition will be agreed upon before launching the third party compliance audits to which we committed as part of the Commitments.

A number of provisions included in the *Digital Guiding Principles* are by nature subject to the technical feasibility and practicality provided by digital platforms and social media operators.

Digital marketing communications are in a state of continuous evolution. These *Digital Guiding Principles* will therefore be reviewed and updated periodically so as to reflect the developments in digital marketing communications.

# Scope

The *Digital Guiding Principles* are relevant to all branded alcohol beverage digital marketing communications (paid and unpaid), including but not limited to advertising and marketing communications on websites such as social network sites and blogs, as well as mobile communications and applications, where the content of those communications is under the control of alcohol beverage companies' marketers.

# Definitions

## **AGE-AFFIRMATION**

Mechanism by which a user is required to provide his/her full date-of-birth (DOB) and country of residence (and province/state wherever appropriate) to affirm he/she is of Legal Purchase Age (LPA). Age-affirmation processes may vary according to the available technology.

## **DIRECT INTERACTION**

Direct interaction is triggered whenever a user is provided with the ability to directly and actively engage with the brand, beyond just viewing or listening to content (e.g., sharing content, posting content, responding to a direct digital marketing communication).

## **DIRECT DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

Direct digital marketing communications cover all marketing communications whereby a brand engages directly and personally with a user, for instance using either this user's private e-mail address or mobile phone number.

## **CONTROL**

Alcohol beverage companies have control when:

- they are the authors of the content, or
- such content is produced and authorized for use on their behalf and they control the platform on which such content is placed, or
- they are not the authors of the content (e.g. UGC) but they control the platform on which such content is placed.

As a consequence, User Generated Content placed on third party platforms which is neither owned nor controlled by an alcohol beverage company does not fall under the control of alcohol beverage companies. As such, it is not covered in the *Digital Guiding Principles'* scope.

## **LEGAL PURCHASE AGE (LPA)**

The Legal Purchase Age is the minimum age required to buy alcohol. It is locally defined and varies across countries. Should no local LPA exist, or should a breakdown of the respective local LPA not be available, 18 years old should be used as a fallback.

## **USER GENERATED CONTENT (UGC)**

All content – including text, videos, and images – produced by individual users not associated with the advertiser.

## **FORWARDABLE CONTENT**

All branded digital content – including static, streaming, and downloadable – which can be forwarded and shared by a user to/with other users.

## **RESPONSIBLE DRINKING MESSAGE (RDM)**

Message featured in alcohol beverage marketing communications advocating responsible drinking. Its content and design may vary from one alcohol beverage company to another.

## **PERSONAL DATA**

Any information relating to an identified or identifiable individual (data subject).<sup>2</sup>

## **LANDING PAGE**

The landing page is any web page which serves as the entry point for a website or a particular section of a website.

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<sup>2</sup> Definition extracted from the [2013 OECD Privacy Framework](#).

# The Digital Guiding Principles

## 1. MINORS

### a. Age-affirmation mechanism

#### **Principle**

Whenever alcohol beverage marketing communications actively engage a user to directly interact with a brand, alcohol beverage companies should use an age-affirmation mechanism to check that this user is over LPA.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Implementation**

Where possible, age-affirmation should be based on a combination of date-of-birth (DOB) and country of residence (and province/state wherever appropriate). This information can be provided either by asking the user directly or through any technological settings which automatically recognize both or either of these.

If the age-affirmation mechanism used includes a “remember me” option, an additional notice should be included on the age-affirmation page reminding the user to consider the appropriateness of accepting this option if the computer is shared with other users below LPA.

Whenever a user’s access is denied through an age-affirmation mechanism, this user should be sent an appropriate message and/or be redirected to an appropriate alcohol-related social aspects website. Users should not be able to easily back click and re-enter a different date of birth.

In case the digital platform on which alcohol beverage marketing communications are placed allows direct interaction but does not provide any age-affirmation mechanism, alcohol beverage companies should consider the following three conditions below before placing their digital marketing communications:

- the platform’s audience in the country for which the marketing communication is intended should meet the stated audience composition targets, where at least 70%<sup>4</sup> of the audience is of LPA;

<sup>3</sup> Unless user is being referred from a platform which requires similarly rigorous age-affirmation standards.

<sup>4</sup> Or any other local applicable rules on placement.

- an age disclaimer or statement should be placed reminding users that the content is intended for LPA users only;
- the platform should provide a mechanism to remove or moderate inappropriate UGC.

## b. Placement of alcohol beverage marketing communications

### **Principle**

Whenever they do not actively engage a user to directly interact with a brand, alcohol marketing communications should only be placed in media which can reasonably be expected to meet stated audience composition targets, where at least 70%<sup>5</sup> of the audience is of the legal purchase age (LPA).

## c. Forwardable content and content sharing

### **Principle**

Whenever alcohol beverage companies' controlled digital platforms have the functionality to allow content sharing, alcohol beverage companies should include a Forward Advice Notice (FAN) on the platform, clearly stating that the content should not be forwarded to anyone under LPA in the country of viewing.

### **Implementation**

The Forward Advice Notice should be visible, or accessible through a visible link, on all alcohol beverage company-controlled platforms (and/or directly in digital marketing communications) designed for sharing content, such as social media pages, mobile applications, and direct digital marketing communications.

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<sup>5</sup> Or any other local applicable rules on placement.

## 2. RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

### a. The Responsible Drinking Message

#### **Principle**

Alcohol beverage digital marketing communications and/or alcohol beverage company-controlled digital platforms should include a clearly visible Responsible Drinking Message (RDM) which explicitly advocates responsible drinking.

#### **Implementation**

Wherever applicable, the RDM should be placed on the landing page.

Alcohol beverage marketing communications may include a visible responsibility tab as an alternative or in addition to the RDM (e.g., on social media pages).

### b. User Generated Content (UGC)

#### **Principle**

User Generated Content (UGC) posted on alcohol beverage company-controlled digital platforms should be moderated on a regular and frequent basis so as to comply with the *Guiding Principles*.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Implementation**

Alcohol beverage companies' marketing codes of practice should include a statement indicating the frequency with which they monitor UGC on their company-controlled digital platforms.

Wherever they allow UGC, alcohol beverage company-controlled digital platforms should include community guidelines stating their UGC policy, which can be included in the above mentioned responsibility tab.

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix for the Guiding Principles.

### 3. TRANSPARENCY

#### **Principle**

Alcohol beverage digital marketing communications should not misrepresent their commercial purpose.

#### **Implementation**

Alcohol beverage companies should not improperly promote a brand using marketing techniques that falsely imply they are an ordinary consumer.

### 4. PRIVACY

#### **Principle**

Alcohol beverage companies should respect user privacy.

#### **Implementation**

With regards to direct digital marketing communications, alcohol beverage companies should require consumer consent prior to sending direct digital marketing communications. They should also provide an easy way to opt out of receiving direct digital marketing communications.

With regards to the collection and use of data, alcohol beverage companies should abide by the laws and regulations regarding data collection of the country of activity. They should also feature data privacy statements regarding the collection and use of personal data on their company-controlled websites that they encourage users to read.

## Guiding Principles

### *Self-Regulation of Marketing Communications for Beverage Alcohol*

#### INTRODUCTION

There are many codes of practice for the self-regulation of marketing communications for beverage alcohol: they operate at company and sector levels and as part of national self-regulatory codes which also apply to other products and services. Some are relatively recent, while others have evolved over many decades to reflect developments in the marketplace and the cultural norms of the wider society.

Marketing codes of practice vary according to country and product to reflect local cultures, lifestyles, and traditions and national contexts. However, they have at their core a number of near-universal provisions regarding social responsibility, fairness, and decency. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to countries seeking to establish or enhance marketing self-regulation codes of practice for alcohol beverages, by helping to define these common core principles.

Marketing self-regulatory codes are an important demonstration of the industry's commitment to ensuring its marketing communications are socially responsible. While the overwhelming weight of evidence indicates that moderate consumption of alcohol by adults is generally compatible with a balanced and healthy lifestyle, excessive or irresponsible consumption can have negative consequences for the drinker and others. For this reason, alcohol beverage companies are mindful that society expects their marketing communications to be legal, truthful, honest, and consistent with prevailing cultural standards of good taste and social responsibility.

The term "**marketing communication**" has been adopted from the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Consolidated Code of Marketing Communication Practice and is defined as follows:

Advertising as well as other techniques...and should be interpreted broadly to mean any form of communication produced directly by or on behalf of marketers....

Where they appear without qualification, the words "marketing communications" refer specifically to marketing communications for beverage alcohol.

The Guiding Principles were approved in November 2011 by the sponsors of the International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP): Anheuser-Busch InBev, Asahi Breweries, Bacardi-Martini, Beam Inc., Brown-Forman Corporation, Diageo, Heineken, Molson Coors, Pernod Ricard, SABMiller, and UB Group.

#### THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

##### *1. Responsible Marketing Communications*

Alcohol beverage marketing communications should

- be legal, decent, honest and truthful, and conform to accepted principles of fair competition and good business practice;
- be prepared with a due sense of social responsibility, not using themes, images, symbols, or portrayals likely to be considered offensive, derogatory, or demeaning;
- comply fully with relevant national self-regulatory codes;
- respect human dignity and integrity;
- avoid any association with violent, aggressive, hazardous, illegal, or antisocial behavior;
- avoid any association with, or reference to, drugs or the drug culture.

##### *2. Responsible consumption*

Alcohol beverage marketing communications should

- portray only moderate and responsible consumption by people of legal age to consume alcohol beverages;
- avoid condoning or trivializing excessive or irresponsible consumption or intoxication;
- avoid portraying abstinence or moderate consumption in a negative way.

### 3. Health and safety aspects in marketing communications

Alcohol beverage marketing communications should not

- suggest that alcohol beverages can prevent, treat, or cure illness or resolve personal problems;
- present alcohol beverages as a stimulant, sedative, or tranquilizer;
- depict or be addressed to at-risk groups, e.g., pregnant women;
- portray or encourage drinking prior to or during activities requiring sobriety or a high degree of skill or precision, such as controlling a motor vehicle or operating machinery.

### 4. Minors<sup>1</sup>

Alcohol beverage marketing communications should

- avoid the use of themes, icons, music, games, or characters that appeal primarily to minors;
- avoid showing minors (or people likely to be perceived as minors) drinking alcohol beverages;
- be placed only in media which can reasonably be expected to meet stated audience composition targets, where at least 70% of the audience is of the legal purchase age.

### 5. The effects of alcohol

Alcohol beverage marketing communications should not

- mislead consumers about the nature and strength of alcohol beverages;
- present high alcohol strength as a principal basis of appeal;
- suggest that alcohol beverages can enhance physical, sporting, or mental ability;
- present alcohol beverages as necessary for social success or acceptance;
- present alcohol beverages as a means of removing social or sexual inhibitions, achieving sexual success, or making an individual more sexually attractive.

<sup>1</sup> Minors are defined as those below the legal purchase age (LPA), i.e., the age at which national legislation permits the purchase or consumption of alcohol beverages (in countries where these ages are not the same, the higher age applies). In countries where there is no LPA, minors are defined as those below the age of 18.

## CODE IMPLEMENTATION<sup>2</sup>

Once a self-regulatory code has been drafted and adopted, whether at national, sectoral, or company level, means of implementing it should be put in place. An essential element is a clearly-defined procedure for handling and resolving complaints. This procedure should be transparent and readily accessible, so that interested parties, including members of the public, know how to complain about marketing communications which they consider to breach the code.

It is important that the complaint-handling procedure is impartial and seen to be so, however, the form which the procedure takes can be adapted to suit individual circumstances and type of code.

<sup>2</sup> For further information, refer to the **International Guide to developing a self-regulatory organisation – International edition** (<http://www.easa-alliance.org/page.aspx/267>). This guide is accompanied by the **Alcohol Module**, which relates specifically to self-regulatory systems for marketing communications for alcohol beverages.



International Center for Alcohol Policies  
Analysis. Balance. Partnership.

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*The International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP; [www.icap.org](http://www.icap.org)) is a not-for-profit organization supported by major international producers of beverage alcohol. Established in 1995, ICAP's mission is to promote understanding of the role of alcohol in society and to help reduce harmful drinking worldwide. ICAP's efforts to foster dialogue and partnerships in the alcohol policy field are shaped by its commitment to pragmatic and feasible solutions to reducing harm that can be tailored to local and cultural considerations and needs. ICAP has been recognized by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) as a non-governmental organization in Special Consultative Status.*

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