



# THE SEVEN KEY MESSAGES OF THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY

Information for everyone who wants to be aware  
of the real intentions of the alcohol industry

# INTRODUCTION

The alcohol and tobacco industry sell products that can be dangerous to our health. For this reason, governments take action by, for example, raising taxes, enforcing age limits, prescribing warning labels and restricting advertising and sponsoring.

Literature shows that the “industry”—the alcohol and tobacco companies—have traditionally worked closely together, sharing information and concerns about regulation. They have used similar arguments to defend their products in order to prevent or delay restrictions being placed on them (Bond, et al. 2010).

The intention of this brochure is to inform professionals about the attempts made by the alcohol industry to influence alcohol policy globally and to subsequently arm them against the industry’s methods to prevent effective policies from being made.

If you have comments regarding this brochure or examples of the alcohol industry’s lobbying practices please send them by email to the European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing (EUCAM).

# THE SEVEN KEY MESSAGES OF THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY

Biased representation as a communication tool.

Alcohol is a product with advantages (taste, mood) as well as a considerable number of disadvantages (health problems, accidents, criminality etc. ). In recent years the disadvantages have become clearer as a result of scientific research. This fact alone is disconcerting for the alcohol industry. The alcohol industry, as well as the advertising and retail industries, want to present the image of alcohol exclusively as a tasty and healthy product. From the perspective of the alcohol industry, consumption is a natural part of a modern healthy lifestyle and in order to portray this image they often neglect to inform the consumer of the disadvantages of alcohol consumption.

## Alcohol producer Diageo:

"Alcohol has been a common source of pleasure for centuries and plays a traditional role in ceremonies and family celebrations in many societies. We are proud that so many people choose Diageo brands for simple enjoyment or to accompany great times in their lives. We all know that most consumers drink responsibly, but a minority misuse alcohol and cause harm to themselves and to society."

The increase in information alerting the consumer to the damage that alcohol can cause disrupts the pleasant picture that the alcohol industry has cultivated and disseminated over the years. Through practical experience and by means of example, this brochure explains how the alcohol industry tries to erase or minimize the negative side effects of its product. To that end the alcohol industry employs deliberate strategies to counter the negative effects of alcohol consumption at a global as well as at the national and local levels. This brochure will outline the strategies used by the industry to communicate its messages directly and indirectly to the consumer.

For politicians and health experts it is important that they reveal to the public the subversive messaging of the alcohol industry and do not fall prey to the industry's half-truths—or worse—out right lies. It is essential that experts have the best possible information about the harmful effects of alcohol consumption. The alcohol industry tries to prevent the information about the harmful consequences of consumption being made known by purposefully ignoring or denying the important and harmful effects of drinking. The result is that too often a highly glamorized and positive image is protracted to consumers in many societies.

## MESSAGE 1

# CONSUMING ALCOHOL IS NORMAL, COMMON, HEALTHY AND VERY RESPONSIBLE.

The image communicated by the industry: The regular consumer of alcohol is social, enjoys and is at the centre of a vibrant social life. Alcohol is a natural part of a life of health, luck and prosperity as well as good habits and traditions.

### Explanation:

To bring this message home, alcohol advertisements nearly always associate alcohol consumption with health, sportsmanship, physical beauty, romanticism, having friends and leisure activities. That alcohol is also related to serious health problems, traffic accidents, unemployment, violence, child abuse and suicide is something you will never see in advertisements.



website:

[www.stampedelightbeer.com](http://www.stampedelightbeer.com)

“Brewed for your  
active lifestyle”

Alcohol advertisements nearly always associate alcohol consumption with health, sportsmanship, physical beauty etc.



website:

[www.bacardi.com](http://www.bacardi.com)

“The spirit of Bacardi”

Advertisements are an example of the consumer being the centre of a vibrant social life

## MESSAGE 2

# THE DAMAGE DONE BY ALCOHOL IS CAUSED BY A SMALL GROUP OF DEVIANTS WHO CANNOT HANDLE ALCOHOL.

The image communicated by the industry:

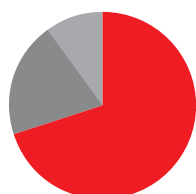
It is only a small group of individuals who abuse alcohol that cause problems such as crime, the spread of diseases, staff absenteeism, violence, sexual abuse and poverty. They are abusers of alcohol who must be dealt with individually. It is symbolic politics to think we can eliminate these problems by collective measures. Moreover, such measures would penalize the majority of individuals who are responsible consumers of alcohol.

### Explanation:

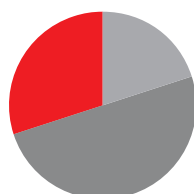
It is not the alcohol that is the problem, but the irresponsible behaviour of this group of drinkers that is highlighted as the cause of the above mentioned problems. The fact that the majority of individuals who consume high levels of alcohol are in fact ordinary, everyday citizens who are not social deviants is not the message the alcohol industry presents. Indeed, the message of the industry is that ordinary citizens drink responsibly and that 'bad' citizens drink irresponsibly and are the cause of any and all problems associated with high alcohol consumption. In reality the alcohol industry earns millions of euros on heavy drinkers. The industry claims that their marketing efforts only result in the 'responsible consumption of alcohol', but if that were indeed the case, the profits of the alcohol industry would plummet enormously.

In countries such as the US, UK, Canada and Australia, data has shown that approximately 50% of all alcohol is consumed during risky drinking (above the sensible drinking guidelines) or binge drinking (Baumberg, 2009). In other words, a large portion of the alcohol industry's profits is dependent on the risky drinkers.

#### {POPULATION}:



#### {ALCOHOL CONSUMED}:



■ moderate drinkers  
■ hazardous drinkers  
■ harmful drinkers

Depiction of the Pareto principle: 30% of all drinkers is responsible for 80% of the total alcohol volume consumed (Source: University of Southampton; presented by Nick Sheron at the conference Alcohol and Health; Amsterdam; 23 September 2010).

### The European Forum for Responsible Drinking (EFRD):

- Harm associated with alcohol abuse is largely related to high-risk drinking *patterns*.
- The vast majority of European adults consume alcohol responsibly and it is now widely recognized that patterns of drinking, and not simply *volume* of alcohol consumption, provide the best predictors of alcohol-related harm (<http://www.efrd.org/main.html>).

EFRD: The European Forum for Responsible Drinking (EFRD) is an alliance of Europe's leading spirits companies driving the industry's commitment to promote responsible drinking in the EU and encouraging industry to adopt responsible self-regulatory standards for commercial communications (quote website EFRD: [www.efrd.org](http://www.efrd.org))

### Heineken's Corporate Social Responsibility Campaign: "Know the signs"

Heineken teaches us how to recognize the signs preceding drunkenness. The five typologies presented in their campaign are: the Exhibitionist (the one who becomes too joyful), the Fighter (the one who becomes too aggressive), the Crier (the one who becomes melancholic and talks to anyone who is disposed to listen), the Groper (the one who disturbs others with inappropriate behavior) and the Sleeper (the one who can sleep anytime, anywhere after having consumed too much alcohol).

**The industry's main message: the problem is not the product (beer) rather the character of the drinkers. In the words of the industry: the normal and responsible drinkers use our product and the bad and irresponsible drinkers misuse our product.**

## 2 MATCH YOUR FRIENDS

- Select a character
- Match with friends who remind you of this character

THE CRIER

THE SLEEPER

THE GROPER













THE EXHIBITIONIST

THE FIGHTER

Select your friends who turns into **The Exhibitionist** after one too many to drink.

Remember: the friends you have already matched are not shown here.

▶ View All   Selected (7)   Not selected

 <div>Jun Loayza</div>	 <div>Steve Go</div>	 <div>Yme Bosma The Sleeper</div>	 <div>Marco Derksen Exhibitionist</div>
 <div>Ronald Ter Voert The Groper</div>	 <div>Swie Han</div>	 <div>Joost De Valk The Sleeper</div>	 <div>Erno Hannink</div>
 <div>Marc Van Der Chijs</div>	 <div>Yee-Mee Mok The Crier</div>	 <div>Mathijs Van Abbe Exhibitionist</div>	 <div>Diana Chitiva The Crier</div>



The five typologies presented in the campaign of Heineken.  
**Their message:** the character of the drinker causes the problem, not the beer.



## MESSAGE 3

# NORMAL ADULT NON-DRINKERS DO NOT, IN FACT, EXIST.

The image communicated by the industry:  
Non-drinkers do not genuinely matter and are not  
a part of contemporary culture and tradition.

### Explanation:

Only children under 16 years of age, pregnant woman and motorist are recognised by the industry as non-drinkers. The fact that in all societies there are large groups of non-drinkers, does not correspond with the image the industry seeks to propagate, namely that alcohol consumption is both normal and responsible. According to the industry non-drinkers are in fact less healthy. The message is: those who want to be socially accepted and healthy are better off drinking moderately. The industry will never openly condone excessive drinking, although an important part of their profit comes from excessive drinkers. The retailers, however, do promote excessive drinking through their pricing actions.

### Proportion of abstainers

The proportion of abstainers among the total adult population reported across countries ranged from a low of 2.5% in Luxembourg to a high of 99.5% in Egypt. Other examples of these figures included China 48.6%, Ireland 22.0%, Mexico 41.6%, and Romania 38.0% (WHO, 2004). Worldwide 45% of men and 66%

of women are abstainers of alcohol. In other words, on a global level more than half of the population (55%) does not consume alcoholic beverages (WHO, 2007).

### Are non-drinkers less healthy?

The research by Rehm and colleagues showed that many studies that compared the health condition of non-drinkers to drinkers are not reliable. Closer examination highlighted that the non-drinker group was less consistent as is often assumed. Many abstained from drinking *because* of health reasons and are therefore less healthy, *not* because of their non-drinking status (Rehm et al. 2008).

In Africa, non-drinkers are actively encouraged by the alcohol industry to drink. The implicit message of African advertising campaigns is that those who consume alcohol will have prosperity and Western richness. If you want to belong to this group of successful citizens you should drink the same way as successful Europeans do.



Two examples of advertisements  
in Kampala, Uganda (February 2010)



## MESSAGE 4

# IGNORE THE FACT THAT ALCOHOL IS A HARMFUL AND ADDICTIVE CHEMICAL SUBSTANCE (ETHANOL) FOR THE BODY.

The image communicated by the industry:

Alcohol is a tasty drink that is prepared with craftsmanship; the 'natural origin' of beer counts, wine is particularly beneficial for body and spirit, and with liquor, the age-long tradition guarantees the quality.

### Explanation:

The industry does not draw attention to the fact that alcohol (ethanol) is a detrimental, toxic, carcinogenic and addictive substance that is foreign to the body. Alcohol as a product is advertised as health promoting. Chemically, alcohol is a hard drug—a substance harmful to the body, which like heroin, can cause physical and mental dependence. The reality of the negative health effects is in direct contradiction to the industry's depiction of the consumer as responsible, social, happy and celebrating life with alcohol.

### Alcohol is carcinogenic

In February, 2007, 26 scientists from 15 countries met at the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in Lyon, France to reassess the carcinogenicity of alcoholic beverages and of ethyl carbamate (urethane), a frequent contaminant of fermented foods and beverages. No safe limit of alcohol use has been identified in relation with cancer. These assessments will be published as volume 96 of the IARC Monographs.<sup>1</sup> (Baan et al. 2007).

### Website Alcohol and Health in Belgium. Knowledge Institute Beer in the Netherlands

The website [www.bierengezondheid.be](http://www.bierengezondheid.be) (on beer and health) claims to be a unique website that brings together all the available scientific information about the effects of beer on health, through a single platform. The website spotlights international scientific research concerning the effects of moderate beer consumption on health, an area that has attracted growing interest in recent years.

The website is financed by the professional federation 'the Belgian Brewers', who are eager to inform visitors about the health benefits of moderate beer consumption.

In the Netherlands, the beer producers launched the so-called Knowledge Institute Beer. This institute suggests scientific objectivity. Prof. Dr. Arne Astrup, board member: "I joined the board of the Dutch Beer Knowledge Institute because I felt it is an interesting topic to work with health effects of a moderate beer consumption". (<http://www.kennisinstituutbier.nl/bestuur>) Prof. M. Katan (Free University of Amsterdam): "It is legitimate that brewers want to improve the image of beer, but scientists should not take part in this kind of actions". (Source: Dutch national newspaper Trouw, 3 October 2010).





## MESSAGE 5

# ALCOHOL PROBLEMS CAN ONLY BE SOLVED WHEN ALL PARTIES WORK TOGETHER.

The image communicated by the industry:

We can only solve alcohol problems together. We (the industry) feel greatly responsible for what can go wrong with our product and would gladly help to prevent adverse effects. Therefore we need to cooperate at all levels. The government, health institutions, and the industry need to join forces to reach the best common approach.

This key message was formulated in the so-called Dublin Principles in 1997 by the International Centre for Alcohol Policy ([www.ICAP.org](http://www.ICAP.org)), an international lobby organisation of the alcohol industry:

*“To increase knowledge about alcohol in all its aspects, the academic and scientific communities should be free to work together with the beverage alcohol industry, governments, and nongovernmental organizations”.*

### Explanation:

Meanwhile, many experts realize that cooperation with the alcohol industry does not provide solutions. Unfortunately, experts have come to this conclusion after wasting an inordinate amount of time discussing ineffective projects or measures. Indeed, an effective European-, national- or local-level alcohol policy requires a marked reduction in alcohol consumption and, obviously, that is not what the industry wants. Good, effective policies to combat alcohol consumption would require a higher excise-duty, no marketing or sponsoring, an increase in the drinking age to 18, a prohibition of the illegitimate sale of alcohol, and an increase, through a campaign, in the public's awareness of the damages that alcohol can cause (Babor et al, 2010; WHO, 2009).

But, the reality is that the industry is profit-driven and only thinks in terms of increased sales, which means, increased consumption. Profit and the interest of their shareholders weigh heaviest. Their alternative message is: It is not necessary to drink less alcohol but to drink it differently.

### Partnership Activities in Scotland

The Scottish Alcohol Industry promotes the view that the government and health bodies should work in 'partnership' with the industry suggesting that there is a 'common purpose'. Thus, the fundamental conflict of interest that exists between bodies who wish to see alcohol policy formulated by public health interests and trade bodies who depend on maximum volume sales to maintain profit levels is not acknowledged. In Scotland, the industry successfully negotiated an alcohol industry partnership initiative with Ministers that enabled a Diageo employee to be seconded to the government's Alcohol Policy team for two years. In addition, the industry partnership created Scotland's first Alcohol Awareness Week (AAW) the main focus of which is the provision of publicity material containing information about responsible drinking.

Source: Evelyn Gillan from the Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP; 2009).

## Membership in political working groups in Finland

Besides lobbying, official hearings and unofficial contacts to decision makers, the alcohol industry has recently found a new, far more effective way to influence the forthcoming policy changes.

Representatives of the alcohol industry and other branches of business that benefit from alcohol consumption have played an influential role in various political working groups.

Alcohol marketing working group (established by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health): Four out of six members were representatives of alcohol-related business.

Working group of warning labels (established by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health): Three out of six members of the team were representatives of alcohol-related business.

Working group on alcohol marketing restrictions (established by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health): Four out of nine members of the group were representatives of alcohol-related business.

Source: Anki Pulliainen, Friends of Temperance /Boozerebellion; Finland; [www.kannikapina.fi/english](http://www.kannikapina.fi/english); 2009.

## Partnership in Ghana and other African countries:

"In Africa, we've been working with governments, public health experts and non-government organisations to develop national alcohol policies to reduce alcohol-related harm." (SABMILLER)  
<http://www.sabmiller.com/index.asp?pageid=1156>



## MESSAGE 6

# ALCOHOL MARKETING IS NOT HARMFUL. IT IS SIMPLY INTENDED TO ASSIST THE CONSUMER IN SELECTING A CERTAIN PRODUCT OR BRAND.

The image communicated by the industry:

Advertisements do not make people drink more. Advertisements simply assist the consumer in choosing the best brand. In order to prevent a small group of producers or retailers from marketing indecent advertisements, we, the industry, have established effective rules. This system of self-regulation works globally and has excellent results.

### Explanation:

Meanwhile, research has indisputably demonstrated that alcohol advertisements are both attractive to young people and stimulate their drinking behaviour (Anderson et al., 2009; Science Group of the Alcohol and Health Forum; 2009). Yet the industry continues to flatly and publicly deny that advertising stimulates alcohol consumption (Bond et al; 2009). As a result of seeing attractive advertisements or positive image building through sponsorship young people begin to drink earlier in life. What's more, young people who already drink will drink more as a result of advertisements.

### Just deny science

After the Science Group of the Alcohol and Health Forum of the European Commission presented its 2009 report on the impact of alcohol marketing, the industry outright denied its conclusions. No wonder, since the conclusions confirmed that alcohol marketing influences the drinking behaviour of young people. ICAP (international lobby organisation of the alcohol industry) was represented in the Science Group but they immediately stated that ICAP was not responsible for the conclusions of the Science Group.

Source: Dutch national newspaper Trouw, March 12th 2009.

### Marketing only influences the choice for a brand

Helmut Wagner, director-general of the former Amsterdam Group (TAG), the European organisation of the alcohol branche: "Those campaigns (advertisements) make the brand well-known, but

do not incite young people to drink alcohol. First they decide that they want to drink something alcoholic, once in the store they choose for the Breezer, because they have heard about it in advertisements" (Advertisement Magazine Adformatie, The Netherlands; 2004).

### The Swedish alcohol industry: new guidelines to prevent legislation

Freedom of marketing is essential for the alcohol industry. Any attack from a government to restrict marketing is often answered by the industry with a serious offer to sharpen the existing self regulations. In 2009 the Swedish government wanted to restrict the volume of alcohol advertising. The Brewers of Sweden immediately launched improved guidelines concerning marketing and alcoholic beverages. This is their way of showing that they are a responsible stakeholder in this issue, since they have been proactive and have set up codes of conducts voluntarily, and therefore they are able to take the responsibility to self-regulate themselves (quote of IOGT, Sweden; 2009). Also in the Netherlands the industry always responds with a 'sharpening' of the code, after a possible marketing restriction initiated by the government. Close reading of the text of the new self regulation articles showed that many times a so called sharpening happened to be a clever way to make the regulations even more liberal. Adjustments in the self-regulation codes have proven to be effective strategies in postponing (effective) statutory regulations (quote of STAP, the Netherlands, 2009).

## MESSAGE 7

# EDUCATION ABOUT RESPONSIBLE USE IS THE BEST METHOD TO PROTECT SOCIETY FROM ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

The image communicated by the industry:

We as an industry feel partly responsible for certain problems which arise as a result of the abuse of our products. Thus, abuse of alcohol products must be fought and we will gladly contribute to this effort. We have the resources to persuade individuals to use our products responsibly and are willing to commit time and money to this effort. We invite Governments and institutions to make use of our experience.

### Explanation:

Recently the alcohol industry has felt pressured, and hence threatened, by calls for government to increase its attention to combat the problems that arise from alcohol consumption. Effective measures such as a higher alcohol excise-duty, establishing minimum prices, higher age limits and advertisement restrictions can reduce alcohol related harm and will therefore decrease the profits of the industry (Babor, 2003; Babor, 2010). The industry therefore does its best to persuade governments, politicians, and policy makers that the above mentioned measures would have no effect, are only symbolic in nature or are illegitimate. They claim that it is unfair that the large majority of responsible drinkers must suffer from measures that

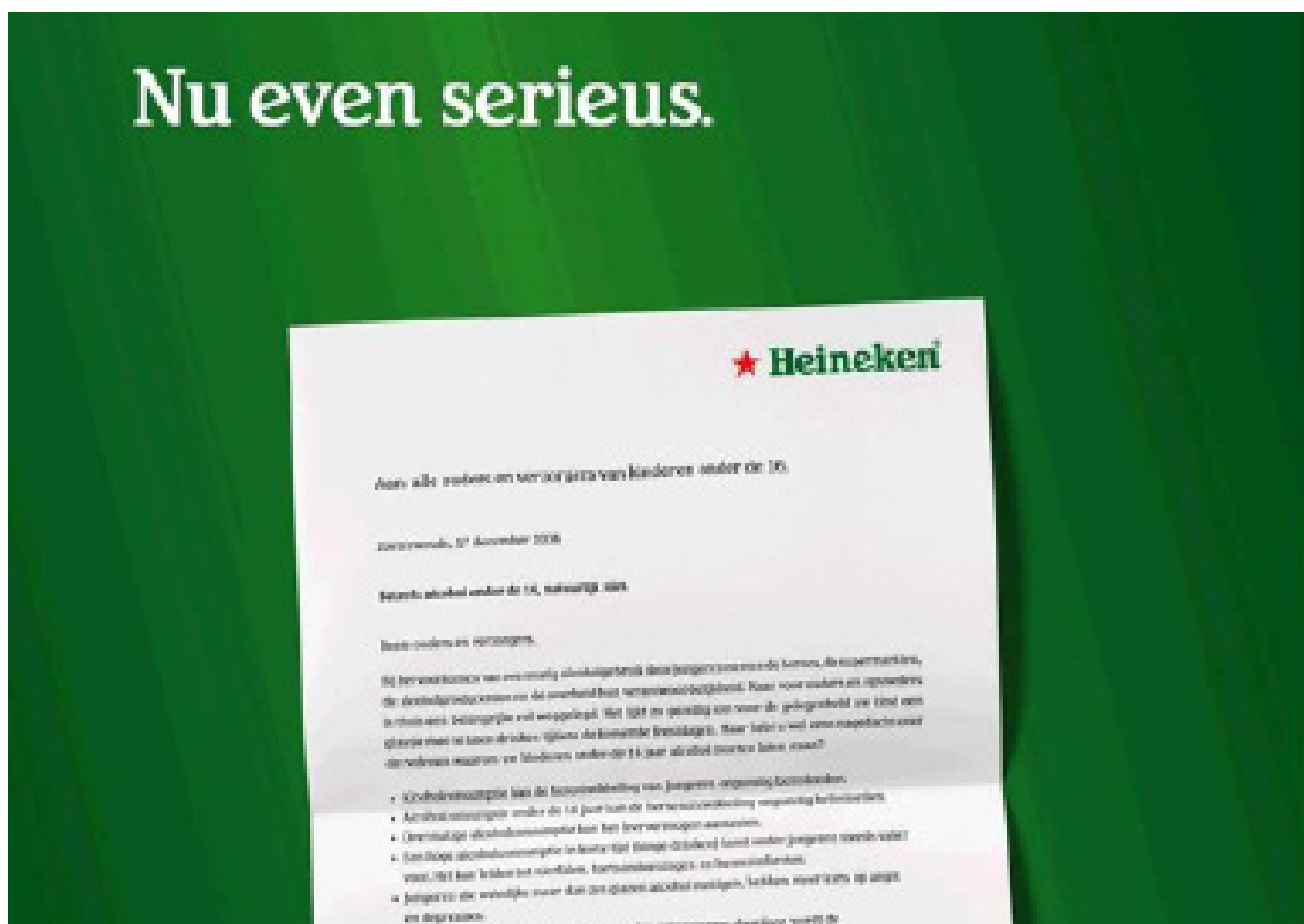
are only intended to impact a minority of abusers.

The industry argues that it has a better alternative—that raising awareness and providing information are the best weapons in the fight against alcohol abuse. However, based on scientific research, professionals are convinced that education alone will not change individuals' drinking habits (Giesbrecht, 2007; Gordon et al., 2006). According to the industry, responsible drinking needs to be promoted more strongly. In the meantime the industry has set up many goodwill campaigns ("Corporate Social Responsibility") to show that they have faith in this new approach. Unfortunately, there are many naive politicians who are impressed by the industry's campaign and believe that this will suffice.



### Lobby for ineffective measures in Scotland

Evelyn Gillan from the Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP, 2009): "The lobby of the Scotch Whisky Association (SWA), which is chaired by Diageo's UK Managing Director and the UK-based Wine and Spirits Trade Association (WSTA), encourages policy makers to concentrate on ineffective policies such as education and responsible drinking campaigns and to steer them away from more effective policies such as controls on price and availability".



- ^ Heineken warns in a letter ("To be serious") in the national Dutch newspapers (2008) to all the parents in the Netherlands not to give kids alcohol before they are 16. This is an example of a very visible CSR campaign to promote the 'responsibility' of Heineken. The inner message is that parents are primarily responsible for the damage alcohol can cause by children and not the industry.

## No structural measures in Switzerland

Another example of the industries' influence could be witnessed during the elaboration of the National Program Alcohol 2008-2012. The industry, as well as other interest groups and NGOs, were involved from the beginning and were shown the first draft which included structural measures (time restrictions on the sale of alcoholic beverages in supermarkets, higher beer tax, and restrictions on sponsoring of sport events). Shortly after the hearing with the industry, the confidential measures were released in the press and provoked a large public debate. The representatives of the industry used the media to openly criticize the head of the federal office of public health as well as the head of the alcohol unit. As a result, and stemming from the public pressure, the government decided to abandon all structural measures.

Source : Ruth Hagen, Addiction Info Switzerland; Lausanne ; 2010.

## Corporate Social Responsibility Campaign (CSR) in Thailand

Based on the monitoring of alcohol marketing campaigns by the alcohol industry in Thailand, it has been shown that the activities of CSR provide huge benefits to the alcohol industry there. One of the biggest benefits comes from the support and sympathy of the naive general public. Due to the international concern of the effects of Global Warming on the environment, the new and now most common tactic used by the alcohol industry is to promote the alcohol business as a "green" concept. For example, the Singha (Golf) Park in Khonkaen province has been claimed by Singha Corporation (a beer producer) as a model water conservation park where the environment and community are at the core of their concern. The 'Water for Life' campaign of Heineken Thailand is another CSR strategy used to promote their care for global warming under a concept of "Do a good deed for our beloved King". Another CSR campaign by Thai Beverage Co., Ltd. (Chang Beer) is the 'Unite to Fight the Cold'. Here, blankets with the brand logo (elephant) are donated to the poor in remote areas during winter. As a result, they have profited from a free one-page advertisement of their products and their social campaign in the newspapers.

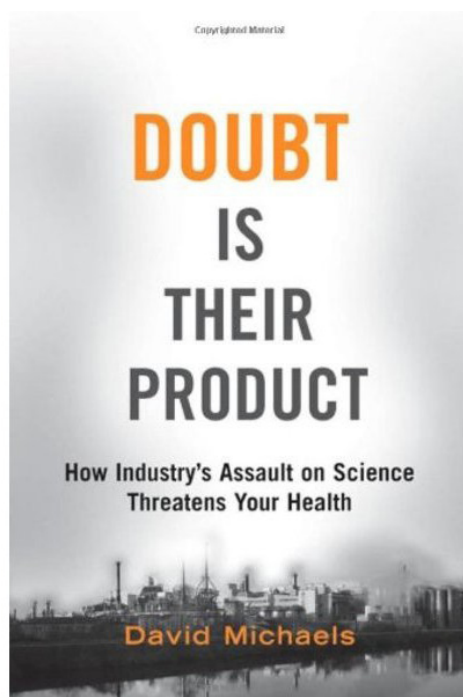


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For readers who want to read a book with a historical overview of successful industrial lobby we advise to read:



*Doubt is Their Product: How Industry's Assault on Science Threatens Your Health* is a 2008 book by David Michaels, published by Oxford University Press.

Michaels argues that for decades cigarette manufacturers knew that their product was hazardous to people's health, but they took necessary measures to protect their profits.[1] The industry and its scientists "manufactured uncertainty by questioning every study, dissecting every method, and disputing every conclusion".[1] In doing so the tobacco industry waged a campaign that "successfully delayed regulation and victim compensation for decades".[1]

The seven key messages of the alcohol industry  
is a product of a partnership of the following organizations

Addiction Info Switzerland (Switzerland)  
AV-OG-TIL (Norway)  
Boozerebellion; Friends of Temperance (Finland)  
Deutsche Hauptstelle für Suchtfragen (Germany)  
Dutch Institute for Alcohol Policy (STAP, The Netherlands)  
Eurocare Italia (Italy)  
IOGT-NTO (Sweden)  
Landsraadet (Denmark)  
Marin Institute – San Rafael (USA)  
State Agency for Prevention of Alcohol-Related Problems (PARPA; Poland)  
Vereniging voor Alcohol en andere Drugproblemen (VAD; België)

February 2011

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