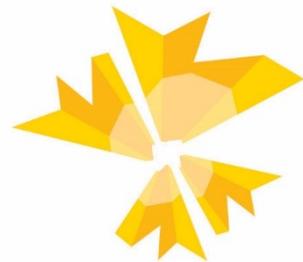


# CODE OF PRACTICE



THE ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED  
ADVERTISING AGENCIES OF HONG KONG  
香港廣告商會

**August 2021**

**The Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies of Hong Kong**  
Room 1906, Two Chinachem Exchange Square, 338 King's Road, North Point, Hong Kong

## **THE PURPOSE OF THESE STANDARDS**

The Code of Practice of The Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies of Hong Kong exists for three reasons:

- (i) to reassure advertisers who employ members of the Association that they are dealing with companies and individuals who subscribe to the Code of Practice and ethical conduct in line with their own business ethics and attitudes;
- (ii) to ensure the continuation of the advertising agency business in Hong Kong as a professional and profitable enterprise and the availability of a sufficient number of advertising agencies, offering a full range of services to meet the requirements of Hong Kong Industry and Commerce;
- (iii) to provide a basis for standards and business practices such as import duties, statutory charges and taxation that is common to both Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China. Providing this basis is both appropriate and timely, as clients of The Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies of Hong Kong increasingly require similar standards of professionalism in both markets.

The purpose of strengthening, clarification and uplifting of standards is:

- (i) to ensure that each member will carry on his profession and business in such a manner as to protect the public interest and uphold the dignity and interests of the profession, the Association and its members generally, and
- (ii) to force competition between advertising agencies into the area of upgrading the quality and extending the scope of their various services, rather than restricting such activities to meet a financial need.

Membership of The Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies of Hong Kong requires that a member company, individual or a partnership shall acknowledge acceptance of the Code of Practice either under Company Seal or personal signature.

**THE CODE OF PRACTICE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED ADVERTISING AGENCIES OF HONG KONG ARE AS FOLLOWS:**

**FEES, DUTIES AND TAXES**

1. Prior to undertaking any work, Members are required to have a clear understanding with advertisers about the service fees and government duties and taxes to be charged.  
All accounts rendered shall set out clearly and specifically the amount and nature of the service fee charged and any government duties, levies and taxes levied.

**DISCLOSURES AND COMMISSION SHARING**

2. (A) Member shall make full disclosure to the clients concerned of the rates of commission allowed to accredited advertising agents by media and suppliers.  
  
(B) Nothing in this Code of Practice shall prohibit a member sharing any part of his remuneration (commission, discounts and/or service fees) with any other member of The Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies of Hong Kong. Since the Association is set up to improve standards in the advertising industry, remuneration sharing with non-Association members is not in accordance with the Association's Code of Practice.

**PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE**

3. The Hong Kong Code of Advertising Standards as subscribed to by The Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies of Hong Kong is binding on all its members, and is set out on the back page of this document.
4. Each member shall carry on his profession and business in such a manner as to protect the public interest and uphold the dignity and interests of the profession, the Association and its members generally.
5. Members shall compete on merits and expertise and should not discredit or disparage a competitor agency or its work or by circulating harmful rumors about another agency or engage in any other unethical competitive practices of similar nature. Member shall not continue to press a claim for business after being told by an advertiser that the advertiser already employs an agency with which he is satisfied as this may amount to inciting a breach of contract.

6. Members shall not include their own names or their initials or symbols or in the case of joint members the name or the initials of the firm or any of its members or symbols in advertising prepared or handle for advertisers, but such advertising shall be wholly devoted to the service of the advertiser.

#### **DIRECT MAIL/DIRECT MARKETING**

7. All members involved in Direct Mail and Direct Marketing should comply with the Use of Personal Data in Direct Marketing and Provision of Personal Data for Use in Direct Marketing under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486). Members are recommended to read the Guidance Note on Direct Marketing published by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data at its official website.

#### **NEW BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS**

8. Members shall be governed by the following standard of professional practice in relation to new business presentations:
  - (A) Where an advertiser requests a written document derived solely from sources within an agency, explaining the agency and its personnel, samples of work, asking for evidence of understanding of the advertiser's marketing situation, leading to a positioning statement, and devoid of the purchase of any paid out side advice or services, this document shall generally be submitted to the advertiser free of charge.
  - (B) Where a member agency provides creative ideas in any form to a prospective advertiser, whether for a fee or free of charge, the agency should make it clear that the advertiser is not entitled to use any part of the creative work so submitted (subject to agreement between the parties to the contrary) and copyright in respect of such creative work remains in the agency.

A suggested form of wording for inclusion in such materials is as follows.

"The copyright for all purposes, in all materials in the following document remains the property of (The Advertising Agency) unless specific written contractual arrangements are made to the contrary."

## **CODE OF ADVERTISING STANDARDS**

The Association endorses and supports in spirit as well as the letter, such codes of advertising standards as are laid down by the laws of Hong Kong. The Association is also a self disciplining body. Any member found to have contravened or failed to comply with the provisions of this Code will be penalised in accordance with Rules 9, 10, 11, 12 and 58 of the Rules of the Association. The Code below represents, briefly, the minimum standards to which the Association subscribes, and these are to be read in conjunction with prevailing Ordinances on the subject of advertising. The word "Advertisement" shall be construed throughout this Code in its broadest sense to embrace any form of advertising.

The general principle which will govern all advertising is that advertising shall be legal, decent, honest and truthful.

### **(A) PRESENTATION**

- (i) An Advertisement shall always be truthful about what is offered and shall not be liable to mis-interpretation by implication or because of omissions.
- (ii) No advertisement shall contain statements or visual presentations offensive to accepted standards of public decency and good taste.
- (iii) Advertisements must comply with the laws of Hong Kong.
- (iv) Advertisements shall be clearly identifiable as advertisement to avoid confusion with editorial matter and personal opinions, and should not be made to appear like them.
- (v) Special production techniques or substitute materials used in advertisements to depict the advertised product shall not be used unless the resultant picture presents a fair and reasonable impression of the product and its effects.

## **(B) DESCRIPTIONS AND CLAIMS**

- (i) No advertisement shall contain any descriptions, claims, or illustrations which directly or by implication mislead about the product or service advertised and in particular regarding the following matters:

### For Products

- a) quantity (which includes length, width, height, area, volume, capacity, weight and number), size or gauge;
- b) method of manufacture, production, processing or re-conditioning;
- c) composition;
- d) fitness for purpose, strength, performance, behaviour or accuracy;
- e) availability;
- f) compliance with a standard specified or recognized by any person;
- g) price, how price is calculated or the existence of any price advantage or discount;
- h) liability to pay duty on them under the laws of Hong Kong, generally or in specified circumstances;
- i) testing by any person and results thereof;
- j) approval by any person or conformity with a type approved by any person;
- k) a person by whom they have been acquired, or who has agreed to acquire them;
- l) their being of the same kind as goods supplied to a person;
- m) place or date of manufacture, production, processing or re-conditioning;
- n) person by whom manufactured, produced, processed, or re-conditioned;
- o) other history, including previous ownership or use;
- p) availability in a particular place of-
  - (1) a service for the inspection, repair or maintenance of the goods; or
  - (2) spare parts for the goods;
- (q) warranty given in respect of the service or spare parts referred to in paragraph (p);
- (r) the person by whom the service or spare parts referred to in paragraph (p) are provided;
- (s) the scope of the service referred to in paragraph (p)(1);
- (t) the period for which the service or spare parts referred to in paragraph (p) are available;
- (u) the charge or cost at which the service or spare parts referred to in paragraph (p) are available;

### For Services

- a) nature, scope, quantity (including the number of occasions on which, and the length of time for which, the service is supplied or to be supplied), standard, quality, value or grade;
  - b) fitness for purpose, strength, performance, effectiveness, benefits or risks;
  - c) method and procedure by which, manner in which, and location at which, the service is supplied or to be supplied;
  - d) availability;
  - e) testing by any person and the results of the testing;
  - f) approval by any person or conformity with a type approved by any person;
  - g) a person by whom it has been acquired, or who has agreed to acquire it;
  - h) the person by whom the service is supplied or to be supplied;
  - i) after-sale service assistance concerning the service;
  - j) price, how price is calculated or the existence of any price advantage or discount.
- (ii) Special attention should be paid to the advertising of food and drugs, precious and semi-precious metals, medical products, financial products where specific requirements are laid down by the law.

### **(C) SUBSTANTIATION**

- (i) All descriptions, claims and comparisons which relate to matters of objectively ascertainable facts should be capable of substantiation.
- (ii) No advertisement claim expressly stated to be based on, or supported by, independent research or assessment should be made, unless the member is in possession of evidence of such independent research or assessment.

### **(D) TESTIMONIALS**

- (i) Testimonials used in advertisement shall be the testimony of competent, impartial persons containing no misstatement of facts or misleading implications and should reflect the current opinion of the authors. An advertiser shall not use fictitious testimonials, or testimonials originally given for products other than that currently offered by the advertiser. This will include testimonials making statements or claims which the advertiser knows to be incorrect. Members should ask the advertiser to supply a copy of the supporting evidence for any testimonial claim.

- (ii) Where an identifiable picture of a person is used in conjunction with a quotation commending an advertised product, the person shown should be the person whose words are quoted.

#### **(E) IMITATION**

Devices or methods of advertising likely to create confusion in the minds of people as between products or services shall not be used. This relates to imitation of a competitor as to trade marks, trade names, packaging designs, labelling of products, copy, layout, illustrations, advertising slogans, visual presentation, music or sound effects as to be likely to mislead or confuse.

#### **(F) COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING**

Substantiated competitive claims inviting comparison with a group of products or other products in the same field are permissible under certain circumstances, provided that:

- (i) It should be made clear with what the comparison is being made and that the differences being compared are true and can be proven.
- (ii) The subject matter of the comparison should not be presented to suggest a better bargain is being offered than is truly the case. Different weights, sizes, units of measurements, qualities and prices prevailing at different times, natural vs substitute products should be taken into account and comparisons made on an equivalent basis.
- (iii) Comparisons in all cases should be substantiated and supportable by research and/or other statistical evidence.
- (iv) Members should be aware of the legal implications of making comparisons between branded goods and named services rather than generic product groups or services.
- (v) Members should abide by principle that the comparison being made is fair and reasonable and that presentations in words and images do not disparage competitors or their products or services.

## **(G) DISPARAGING ADVERTISING**

Whilst advertising which compares one product to a group of products is allowable in certain circumstances (see above) the Association does not permit its members to indulge in disparaging advertising. Disparaging advertising can be defined as advertising which seeks to compare a product or service to similar or other products or services in a way which is misleading, derogatory, false in implication or in fact. Advertising which implies that a competitive product is not fit for purpose is not allowable.

Care should be taken when creating comparative advertising that facts are manifestly true and that proof is available of the comparative differences. When considering whether advertising is disparaging, the net effect of the total communication will be taken into account.

## **(H) SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL TERMS**

- (i) All quotations from laboratory data statistics and containing scientific terms shall be taken from competent sources. Excerpts of data which distort or fail to disclose the true test results shall not be used in support of claims. Pseudo-scientific terms shall not be used in advertisements to make claims appear to have a scientific basis they do not possess.
- (ii) Testimonials by medical doctors, dentists, paramedical personnel including nurses, pharmacologists, physiotherapists, radiographers, and medical and dental technologists should not be used. Nor should any suggestion be made that a product or method of treatment is recommended generally by doctors, or approved by a particular hospital, unless the advertisement is intended only for publication in a bona fide medical journal.
- (iii) Special care should be taken where medical preparations, alleged cures and treatments are involved. Members are recommended to read the following for further clarification:
  - Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap. 138)
  - Undesirable Medical Advertisements Ordinance (Cap. 231)
  - Medical Registration Ordinance (Cap. 161)
  - Antibiotics Ordinance (Cap. 137)
  - Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134)
  - Supplementary Medical Professions Ordinance (Cap.359)

## **(I) NUTRITION/DIETARY CLAIMS AND WEIGHT LOSS ADVERTISING**

- (i) Advertisement of specific claims for the nutritional value of food must be substantiated by sound scientific evidence.
- (ii) Advertisement of dietary supplement should not suggest that they are only means to enhance normal good health.
- (iii) Presentation of doctors, dentists, veterinary surgeons pharmacists or other supplementary medical professionals giving the impression of professional advice or testimonials of such persons should not be used unless substantiated by evidence that professional advice has been obtained from recognized organization of the relevant profession.
- (iv) Advertisements of products, services and establishments offering treatment which aims at weight loss or reduction of body fatness should not be made unless the advertisements indicate that they are adjunct to a balanced diet to achieve the effect. Further, the advertisement:
  - (a) must not be addressed to juvenile or directed at obese
  - (b) the effectiveness of products or services is substantiated by sound evidence
- (v) Members are recommended to read the following for further information:
  - Undesirable Medical Advertisements Ordinance (Cap. 231)
  - Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132)

## **(J) TOBACCO AND TOBACCO RELATED PRODUCTS ADVERTISING**

- (i) Members are cautioned to comply with the requirements under the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) and the Television Advertising Standards.
- (ii) Advertisements for certain tobacco related products, e.g. smoking accessories should only target adult audience.
- (iii) No children or juvenile shall participate in presentation of advertisements relating tobacco related products.

## **(K) ALCOHOL ADVERTISING**

- (i) Advertisements of alcoholic drinks shall not associate drink with driving or dangerous machinery; specific warnings however may be used in these circumstances.
- (ii) Advertisements should not suggest that drinking has therapeutic benefits or convey the message that drinking is a prerequisite to relaxation.
- (iii) Advertisement themes to induce purchasing of certain brands because they have a higher alcoholic content shall not be used.
- (iv) Advertisement of alcoholic drinks shall be directed only to adult audience.
- (v) No children or juvenile shall participate in presentation of advertisements relating to alcohol, unless they form part of the natural background.

## **(L) FINANCIAL ADVERTISING**

- (i) Any term indicating that the deposits will be absolutely secure or repayment of any deposits is secured should not be used in relation to advertisements for deposit and savings facilities.
- (ii) Advertisements of lending facilities or credit services shall not mislead viewers as to the terms of the loan services.
- (iii) Advertisements for investment products requiring authorization by the Securities and Futures Commission, e.g. unit trusts, mutual funds, mandatory provident fund products, etc. should not be made unless they are authorized by the Securities and Futures Commission.
- (iv) Members are recommended to read the following for further information:
  - Companies Ordinance (Cap. 622)
  - Insurance Companies Ordinance (Cap. 41)
  - Banking Ordinance (Cap. 155)
  - Securities and Futures Ordinance (Cap. 571) and various Codes issued by the Securities and Futures Commission
  - Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Ordinance (Cap. 485)

## **(M) REAL PROPERTY ADVERTISING**

- (i) Specific descriptions, demonstrations and claims should be substantiated.
- (ii) Advertisements should not contain misrepresentation relating to the location, size, value or available transport facilities.
- (iii) Lowest selling price should be stated as such and should not create an impression to viewers that it is the average price.

## **(N) ADVERTISEMENTS TO CHILDREN**

- (i) Advertisements directed to the primary attention of children shall contain nothing, in illustration or otherwise, which might result in harm, physically, mentally or morally, or which exploits their natural credulity. In particular, such advertisement shall avoid the portrayal of any of the following:
  - a) the commission of any crime, acts of violence or cruelty or sexual acts;
  - b) circumstances of agony or anguish;
  - c) children acting dangerously or showing a disregard for safety  
e.g. playing on the road, leaning out or climbing heights unattended, lighting fires or explosives, dealing with power supplies or complicated machinery, or handling unsafe material and chemicals.
- (ii) Advertisements should not encourage children to make themselves a nuisance in order to persuade others to buy the advertised products; nor should it suggest to children that if they did not buy the advertised product, or encourage others to do so, they will be failing in their duty, or lacking in their loyalty or liable to be held in contempt.
- (iii) Approximate prices of the goods portrayed in advertisements directed to children should be indicated.
- (iv) The sizes of the goods intended for children should be realistically portrayed in the advertisement.
- (v) Members shall comply with the comprehensive Television Advertising Standards on advertising to children for advertising in all media.

**(O) PRICE CLAIMS**

Advertisements shall not contain exaggerated, fictitious price comparisons, non-existent discounts or savings, or employ list prices known to be false or not current. All prices quoted shall be accurate and incapable of misleading by distortion or undue emphasis.

**(P) FREE GIFTS**

Except where the law prohibits use of the word "free" in advertising, goods or services offered without cost or obligation to the recipient may be unqualifiedly described as "FREE". The term "FREE" can also be used conditionally where the offer requires the recipient to purchase some other item - provided all terms and conditions are accurately and conspicuously disclosed in immediate conjunction with the use of term "FREE" and further provided that the article or service required to be purchased is not increased in price or decreased in quality or quantity. However, if the so-called free item is not an accessory, extra or duplicate but an essential component part of an article normally sold as a complete unit, then the term shall not be described as free in the advertisement.

**(Q) GUARANTEES**

The word "Guarantee" is to be used according to its legal meaning. Wherever used, the terms of the guarantee are to be clearly stated - or information given as to where the full terms can be obtained.

**(R) SPECIAL CLAIMS**

An advertisement shall not contain any reference calculated to lead the public to assume that the product advertised has some special ingredient unless the qualities and properties of this ingredient can be scientifically established. The use of hyperbole or frank exaggeration primarily intended to amuse or direct attention is permissible provided they are clearly to be seen as humorous or hyperbolic and are not likely to be understood as making literal claims for the advertised product.

**(S) MAIL ORDER ADVERTISING**

- (i) Advertisers shall be prepared to meet any reasonable demand created by their advertising and shall readily refund in full money to buyers who can show reasonable cause for

dissatisfaction with their purchase or delay in delivery.

Samples of goods advertised shall be available at the advertiser's place of business for public inspection during normal business hours.

(ii) All mail order advertisements shall contain the following information:

- a) the name and address of the advertiser;
- b) whether the advertiser will accept a return of the goods, and conditions of refund;
- c) the period within which the advertiser undertakes to fulfil orders.

(iii) Advertisements for articles made of precious metals shall state the amount and fineness of the metal involved in the pieces on offer.

#### **(T) SWITCH SELLING (BAIT ADVERTISING)**

Advertisers shall ensure that merchandise of the quality, specification or price advertised is available prior to the advertising of such merchandise and that an adequate quantity or number of such goods shall be available to meet reasonable public demand having regard to the nature of the merchandise. Where it becomes clear that the advertised product is no longer available or can be supplied at that price, immediate action should be taken to ensure that any further advertisements for the products are promptly amended or withdrawn.

#### **(U) INSTRUCTIONAL COURSES**

Advertisers offering courses of instruction in trades or subjects leading up to professional or technical examinations shall not imply the promise of employment, or exaggerate the opportunities of employment or remuneration alleged to be open to those taking such courses; neither shall it offer unrecognised "degrees" or qualifications.

#### **(V) SUPERSTITION AND FEAR**

Advertisements shall not be framed in a manner as to exploit the superstitious or unduly play on fear to induce people to purchase goods or services.

#### **(W) GREEN CLAIMS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIMS**

They apply to communication in various forms including but not limited to statements,

symbols, labels and pictures of a product, service or organization touching upon environmental friendly attributes such as recyclability, sustainability, energy and water efficiency.

The claim should be:

- (i) relevant to the environmental impact and reflect the genuine benefit to the environment;
- (ii) presented truly and accurately (such as the scale, scope, life cycle and limits of the environmental impact); and
- (iii) capable of substantiation.

The claim should not focus on issue of low significance or omit significant information that can likely mislead consumers.

## **(X) SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET**

This Code of Practice applies to advertising on social media and the internet. Advertisements should be evaluated in the same way as on television and printed media.

Advertisements shall be clearly identifiable as such and must not be disguised or appear like personal opinions or editorial content.

If a party who endorses any product or service of the advertisers is not acting independently, for example, if the party is paid or sponsored to do the endorsement, disclosure should be made about such relationship.

The disclosure should be:

- (i) clear, simple and conspicuous in terms of location, font size and colour;
- (ii) straightforward, easily read and understood by consumers;
- (iii) displayed as early as is reasonably possible with minimal scrolling or clicking.

## **(Y) SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Advertising as far as possible should show social responsibility, and in particular:

- (i) Advertisements should not disparage sectors of the society, whether by sex, race, creed, status or disability.
- (ii) Advertisements should neither encourage nor condone violent or anti-social behaviour.
- (iii) Where the context admits, advertisements should seek to encourage civic duties and consideration for the public, e.g. throwing an emptied can or cigarette butt into a bin.

**(Z) INDIRECT ADVERTISING AND PRODUCT PLACEMENT/SPONSORSHIP**

Members when dealing with indirect advertising or product placement/sponsorship should always refer to the comprehensive Television Advertising Standards in ascertaining whether or not such indirect advertising or product placement/sponsorship complies with the Standards.

**(ZA) NATIONAL SECURITY LAW**

The Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the HKSAR came into force on 30 June 2020. Members are cautioned not to do any act or engage in any activity which would contravene any provision of this legislation.

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