

How Big Alcohol Abuses “Drink Responsibly” to Market Its Products

ENJOY RESPONSIBLY

WHAT PART OF DRINK RESPONSIBLY DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?

The perfect way to enjoy Patrón is responsibly

drink smart®

Think Wisely.
Drink Wisely.

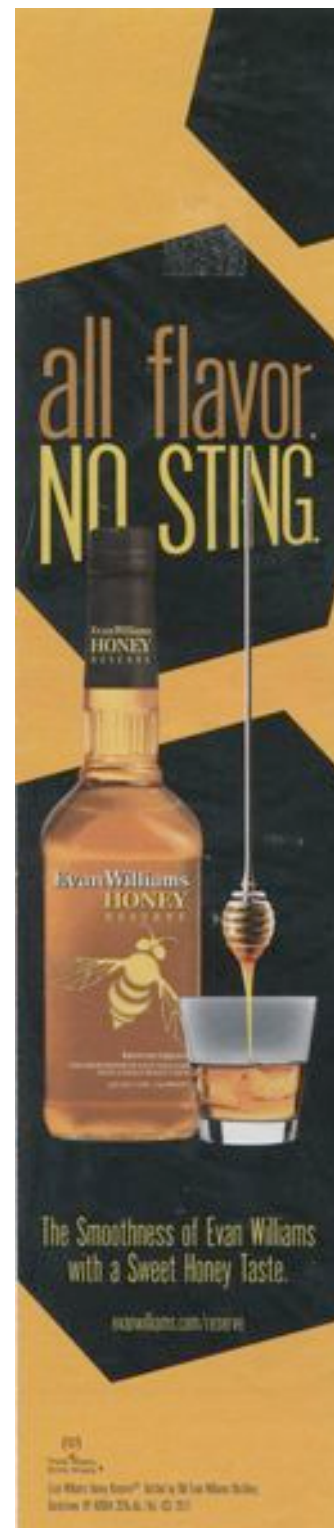
How Big Alcohol Abuses “Drink Responsibly” to Market Its Products

Executive Summary

“Drink responsibly” messages function as one tool in the alcohol industry’s marketing toolbox to promote, grow loyalty to and build credibility for its brands. The “drink responsibly” slogan also serves as a public relations distraction for alcohol corporations fighting evidence-based, effective policies such as increasing alcohol taxes, restricting alcohol advertising, and maintaining state control of alcohol sales. There is no evidence to show that “drink responsibly” messages are an effective strategy for reducing alcohol consumption or related harm. Much like Big Tobacco’s anti-smoking campaigns, alcohol industry facades like “drink responsibly” are counterproductive and could backfire, increasing intent to use the product instead of decreasing alcohol-related harm.

To stop the industry’s cynical, self-serving “drink responsibly” charade, we offer these recommendations:

- Industry should stop including “drink responsibly” messages in any of its advertisements and promotional materials.
- State and local agencies should refuse “drink responsibly” messages, materials, and related industry funding.
- Alcohol prevention and public health advocates should also refuse “drink responsibly” messages, materials, and related industry funding. Instead, they should organize to advance alcohol policies that effectively reduce alcohol-related harm.
- State attorneys general should investigate the possibility that alcohol companies are engaging in misleading and/or deceptive marketing by using “drink responsibly” messages.



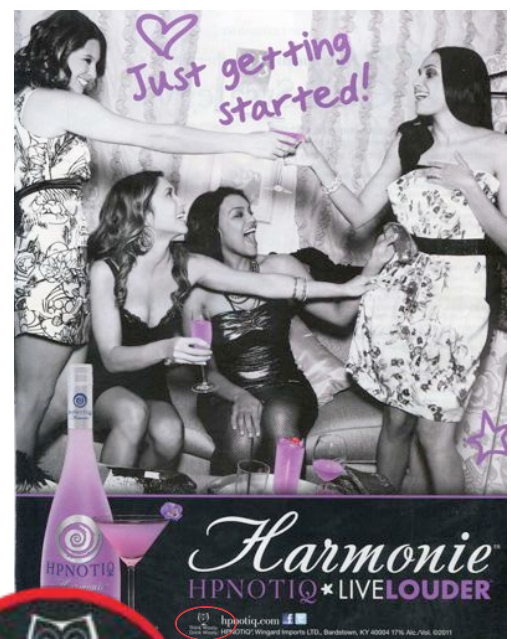
How Big Alcohol Twists “Drink Responsibly” to Market Its Products

When effective, evidence-based alcohol policies are brought into public discussion by community stakeholders, the resounding industry chorus is the same: “But we support ‘responsible drinking’ campaigns.” The alcohol industry and its producers, wholesalers, and retailers use “drink responsibly” as a rallying cry to influence public opinion in legislative hearings, press releases and interviews, and through its own promotional materials. Over the years, the industry has tried to convince the public that telling people to “drink responsibly” is the best it can do to prevent alcohol-related harm. Yet that is not the case—there are much more effective alcohol policies to reduce alcohol consumption and related harm, including: increasing alcohol prices; restricting alcohol advertising; and state monopolies on alcohol distribution and sales, to name a few. This begs the question: What purpose do “drink responsibly” messages serve, and why do alcohol

corporations keep using them? Alcohol industry promotion of “drink responsibly” messages gained attention in the early 1980s with Anheuser-Busch’s “Know When to Say When” ads about designated drivers. Other, similar messages from Big Alcohol in those early years included “Think when you drink” (SABMiller) and “Now/Not now” (Coors). These advertisements, often referencing drunk driving, focused upon behaviors of individual drinkers and were similar to public service announcements, but from the industry itself.¹ While \$15 million was spent on a full-fledged Anheuser-Busch marketing effort in 1990 that included “Know When” print ads, point-of-purchase promotions, celebrity endorsements and designated driver/taxi programs, that budget paled in comparison to the \$459 million advertising budget that year.² Since then, advertisements promoting alcohol consumption in general, and brands in specific, have increased exponentially along with their advertising budgets. Along the way, “drink responsibly” messages have been embedded into the campaigns advertising alcohol brands. Research from fields such as public health, communication studies, and marketing and advertising has outlined the many drawbacks to “drink responsibly” messages.^{3, 4, 5, 6}

Various versions of alcohol education and public service messages such as “drink responsibly” have had little to no impact on reducing alcohol-related harm.⁷ “Drink responsibly” messages are notably absent from the results of reviews of the most effective policies and programs to reduce alcohol-related harm.⁸ And yet, alcohol corporations continue to tout these voluntary messages as a useful public health measure.

Given the lack of evidence regarding “drink responsibly” messages as an effective method of reducing alcohol-related harm, and the industry’s continued use of these messages, we decided to examine what “drink responsibly” currently looks like in alcohol brand ads.



What We Did

We conducted a limited, descriptive examination of “drink responsibly” messages in advertisements found in the September/October 2011 issues of forty-one magazines with a high proportion of youth marketing exposure.^{9,10} We looked for the top-selling beer brands (Bud Light, Budweiser, Coors Light, Miller Lite, Natural Light, Busch Light, Busch, Miller High Life, Keystone Ultra, and Michelob Ultra) and the top-selling spirits brands (Smirnoff, Bacardi, Captain Morgan, Jack Daniel’s, Absolut, Crown Royal, Jose Cuervo, Grey Goose, E & J, and Jim Beam),¹¹ as well as alcopop (flavored malt beverages) brands.

We analyzed the frequency, location, size, and content of “drink responsibly” messages from beer, spirits and alcopops brands found in all alcohol advertisements in the selected issues. We compared the size of the “drink responsibly” messages (if present) to the size of the entire advertisements containing the messages. Percentage of ad space was calculated by using quad-ruled paper (4 squares per inch) to measure the size of the “drink responsibly” message in relation to the total size of the ad.

We also reviewed branded Facebook pages and YouTube channels for the alcohol brands listed above. We looked for industry “drink responsibly” messages and advertisements placed on these social media platforms.



What We Found

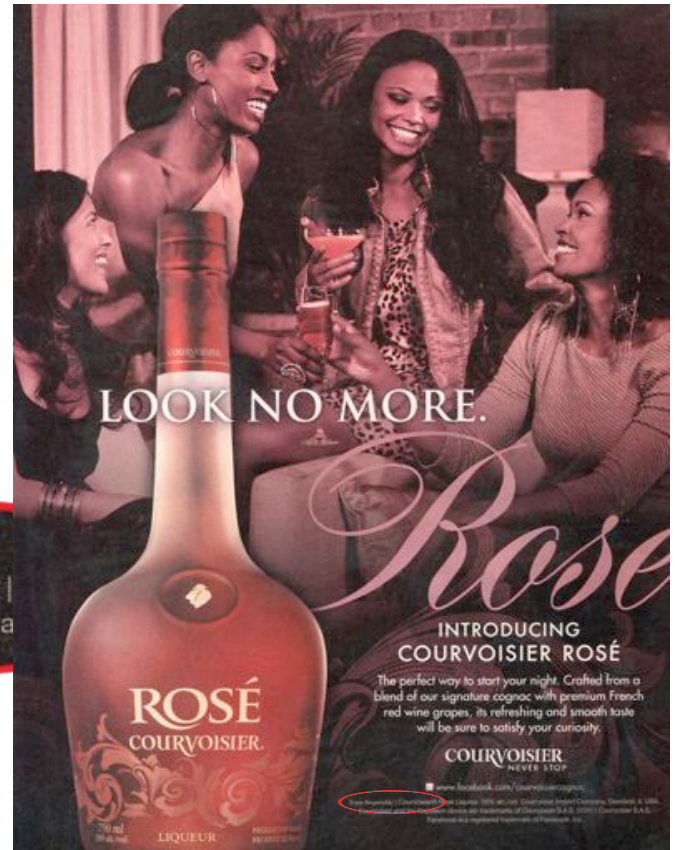
Twenty of the forty-one magazine issues in our review contained sixty-three alcohol advertisements. Four of the sixty-three ads did not contain any “drink responsibly” messages. (Terlato Wines, Don Q, and Nuvo Liqueur) A fifth ad promoted the industry-sponsored “We Don’t Serve Teens” campaign, and did not contain any “drink responsibly” messages. The remaining fifty-nine ads (94%) contained “drink responsibly” messages

We identified numerous problems with the “drink responsibly” messages contained in these ads, including:

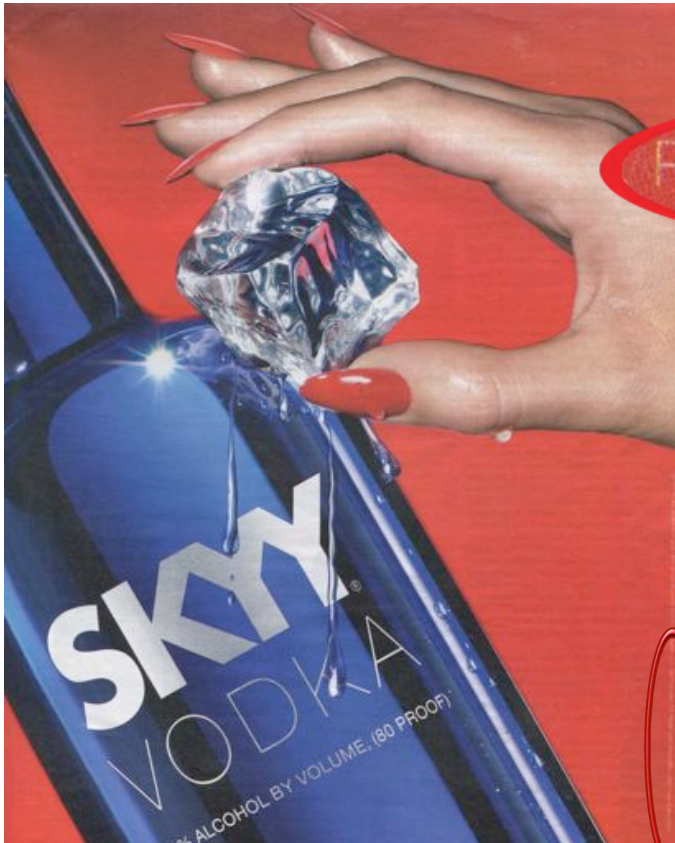
- Messages blended into the background so that they virtually disappeared.
- Messages were tiny in relation to the size of the entire ads.
- Commands promoting drinking were used in conjunction with the vague “responsibly” term, and used in conjunction with the alcohol brand names.
- Several brands used their own graphic logos associated with the “drink responsibly” tag lines, and some were trademarked.

The “Drink Responsibly” Game: Hide the Message

The placement of the “drink responsibly” messages was very similar throughout the ads we reviewed. The messages were found in obscure locations such as along the left, right, or bottom edges of the ad, and often hidden in the binding of the magazine. Messages placed in the binding were not immediately visible, unless the reader pulled both pages away from each other and strained the binding to open the magazine far enough to see the text. The text was often hidden within images of similar colors. Many messages were faded and/or lacked color contrast, e.g. message text layered on top of a background in a similar color.



The "Drink Responsibly" Game: Hide the Message



Please enjoy responsibly.

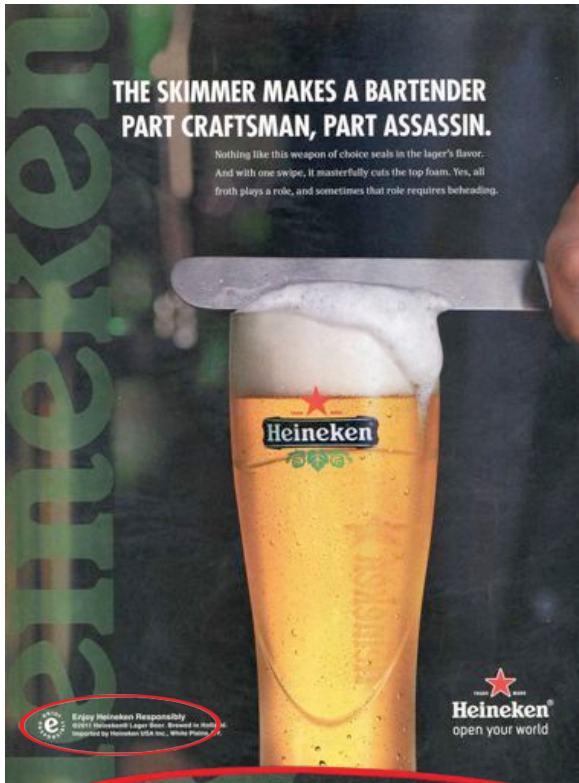
The size of the "drink responsibly" message text also contributed to the concealment of the "drink responsibly" messages. The font size was usually less than 8 points, essentially unreadable. The minimum ad space dedicated to "drink responsibly" messages was in SKYY vodka ads, with 0.05% of the total ad space. The maximum ad space given to "drink responsibly" messages was a Bacardi ad, with 4.23% of the total ad. The average proportion of space given to "drink responsibly" messages out of the total average inches of space in alcohol ads was less than one percent (0.36%).



ENJOY RESPONSIBLY TOGETHER

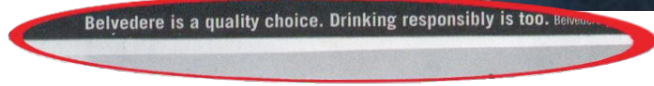
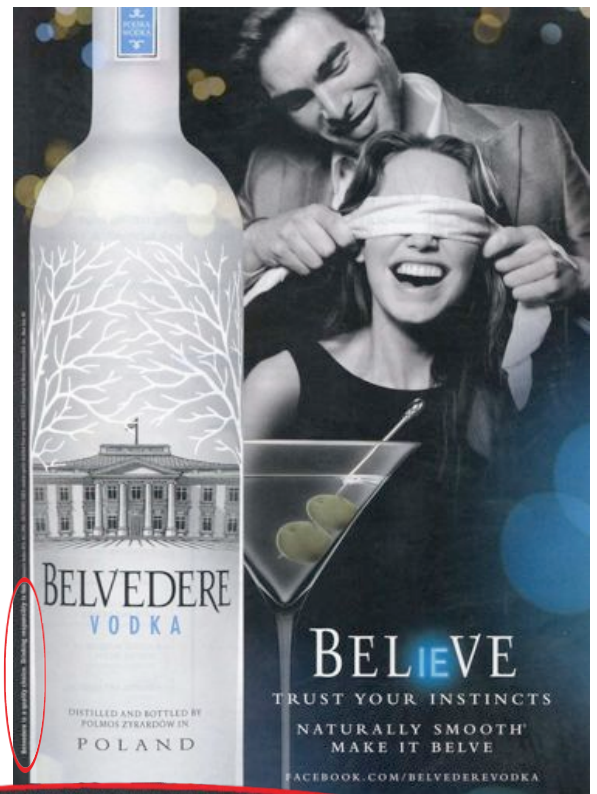
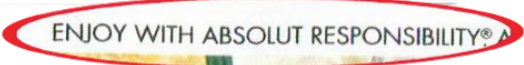
© 2011 Bacardi and the Bat Device

Branded Messages



Many ads inserted the product brand names into the “drink responsibly” messages. Some examples included:

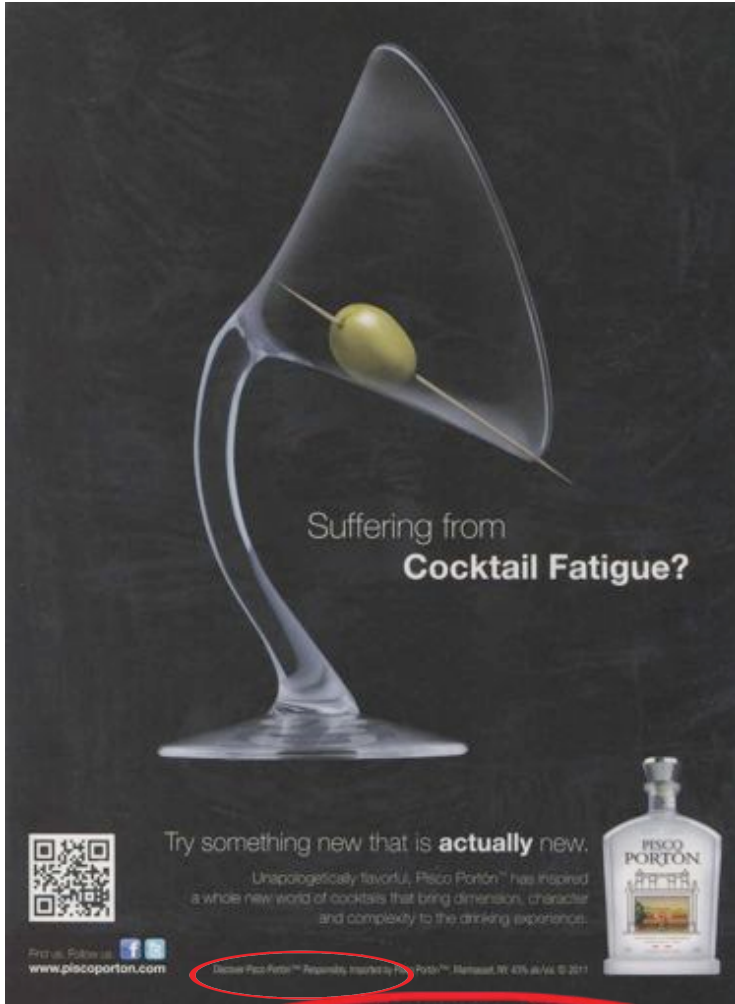
- Enjoy Heineken responsibly.
- Enjoy with Absolut responsibility.
- Belvedere is a quality choice. Drinking responsibly is too.



Branded Messages

Additional examples of branded "drink responsibly" messages:

- Discover Pisco Porton responsibly.
- The perfect way to enjoy Patrón is responsibly.



Discover Pisco Porton™ Responsibly. In

The perfect way to enjoy Patrón is responsibly. © 20

Corporate “Drink Responsibly” Logos and Trademarks

Several of the largest alcohol companies have created graphic logos to accompany their “drink responsibly” messages. We also found the epitome of brand marketing disguised as prevention: Companies that have trademarked their own “Drink Responsibly” logos.

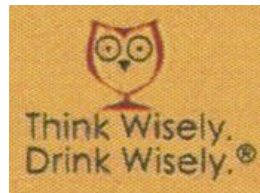
Heineken



MillerCoors



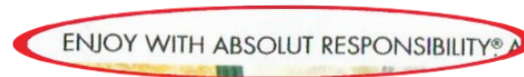
Heaven Hill Distilleries



Beam Global



Pernod Ricard



Most of the “drink responsibly” messages we reviewed on Facebook and YouTube continued the themes of tiny formatting/layout, vague drinking commands, and overall brand promotion that were found in the magazine ads. However, Bacardi and Diageo also placed sports celebrities as spokespersons for branded “drink responsibly” ads on Facebook and YouTube. One of the world’s top professional tennis players, Rafael Nadal, was the face of Bacardi’s “Champions Drink Responsibly” ad, and professional racecar drivers asked users to sign a pact to not drink and drive in Diageo/Johnnie Walker’s “Join the Pact” ad. The Bacardi and Johnnie Walker brands featured prominently throughout both of the ads.



Alcohol companies bury diminutive “drink responsibly” messages out of sight by using faint, low-contrast, tiny type, also known as mouseprint.¹² The industry combines “drink responsibly” directives with extensive product branding, even creating special logos and trademarking them. The messages, celebrities and the surrounding ad content serve to promote the alcohol products, rather than protecting public health and safety. These messages enhance the corporate images, which can strengthen brand preference, deflect blame, and diminish support for external regulation, all of which are important to advance alcohol industry sales and profits.¹³

A recent review suggested that industry “drink responsibly” messages may actually promote drinking.¹⁴ Alcohol companies may have taken notes from the tobacco industry on this topic. “Drink responsibly” messages sound remarkably similar to Big Tobacco’s own anti-smoking campaigns from the late 1990’s such as “Think. Don’t smoke.” Youth with higher levels of exposure to the “Think. Don’t smoke.” industry message were more likely to express an intent to smoke in the near future.¹⁵ Similar to the tobacco industry messages in their tone and focus on individuals, Big Alcohol’s “drink responsibly” messages likely contribute to the same effect: More young people intending to use the product, and doing so in the near future.



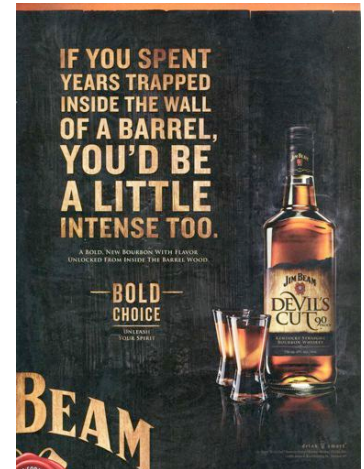
The advertisement features a central image of a green bottle of Skinnygirl Margarita next to a margarita glass filled with a drink and a lime wedge. The bottle has a red cap and a label with the Skinnygirl logo and the word "MARGARITA". The background is white with a red horizontal band across the middle. In the top right corner, there is a small illustration of a woman in a red top and black skirt holding a cocktail shaker. Below this, the text "Skinnygirl COCKTAILS" is written. In the red band, there is a quote: "Best Margarita ever! Real flavor and not overly sugary. Yum! I have a new favorite cocktail. -Veronica, CA". Below the glass, the text "Everyone agrees. Nothing is as good as the original." is written. At the bottom, the slogan "LOW CALORIES. ZERO GUILT." is displayed. In the bottom left corner, there is small text: "Visit us at Facebook.com/SkinnygirlCocktails", "Skinnygirl Margarita. Made with Tequila, Natural Flavors and Coconut Liqueur. 12.75 fl. oz. ©2011 Skinnygirl Cocktails. Fort Washington, PA (Per 1.2 oz Average Alcohol Content) 37.5% Alcohol/Calories 145g, Protein 0.07g, Fat 5g". In the bottom right corner, the "drink smart" logo is visible.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The alcohol industry abuses vague “drink responsibly” messages by twisting them into public relations tools to promote its products. Companies use “drink responsibly” messages to essentially excuse the pro-drinking, pro-brand themes of the alcohol ads. The industry also glorifies its “drink responsibly” messages as an effective public health tactic, without providing evidence to support this claim. With verbs such as “drink,” “party,” and “fiesta,” as well as brand-specific, trademarked logos, “drink responsibly” messages are a misleading and deceptive joke played on the general public.

The obvious problems in “drink responsibly” messages would not be improved if the messages were bigger, or if the industry spent more money to promote them. The main purpose of “drink responsibly” messages would still be to promote alcohol brands. There is really no way to make improvements to this alcohol industry charade.

“Drink responsibly” messages and materials function solely to promote, grow loyalty to and build credibility for alcohol brands. “Drink responsibly” also serves as a public relations distraction for alcohol corporations fighting evidence-based, effective measures such as alcohol taxes, advertising restrictions, and state control of alcohol sales. To stop the industry’s cynical, self-serving charade, we offer these recommendations.



Industry should stop disguising its alcohol promotion as public service, and:

- Stop including any “drink responsibly” messages in any of its advertisements and marketing materials.
- Stop characterizing brand/product press and media as anything but what it is: advertising to increase sales.

Alcohol prevention and public health advocates should steer clear of “drink responsibly” messaging and materials.

- Schools, coalitions, and community agencies should refuse industry funding, messages, and materials that promote “drink responsibly” messages.
- Schools, coalitions, and community agencies should not use “drink responsibly” as a health-promoting message.
- Instead, advocates should organize to implement alcohol policies that effectively reduce alcohol-related harm.

Government should stop allowing industry to engage in this charade.

- State and local agencies should refuse industry-generated advertisements and promotional materials containing “drink responsibly” messages.
- State and local agencies should stop using “drink responsibly” messaging in any of its own materials.

State attorneys general should investigate the possibility that alcohol companies are engaging in misleading and/or deceptive marketing by using “drink responsibly” messages.

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Vision

Alcohol Justice envisions healthy communities free of the alcohol industry's negative impact.

Mission

Alcohol Justice, the industry watchdog, promotes evidence-based public health policies and organizes campaigns with diverse communities and youth against the alcohol industry's harmful practices.

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