ALCOHOL ADVERTISING – THE FACTS

A critical review of PR and marketing strategies of the alcohol industry
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Preface

In this report, The Blue Cross takes a closer look at the global alcohol industry and its PR and marketing. We have examined the nature of the companies behind production, distribution and marketing of alcohol products. Furthermore, we have examined possible motives behind the comprehensive marketing and promotion. Last, but not least, we present an in-depth analysis of the underlying message and tactics present in virtually all alcohol advertising.

Some people will probably be surprised in discovering that what is portrayed by the alcohol industry as a small, local brewery, is in fact owned by giant multinational corporations. We, who have prepared this report, hope it may help demonstrate that alcohol advertising can not be equated with other forms of television and newspaper advertising.

In The Blue Cross’ opinion, the strategy and practice consistently emerging from the alcohol industry’s PR and marketing bear witness of a cynical industry whose main objective is to maximize sales and, thus, profits. Only to a limited extent does the alcohol industry consider the fact that every year, harmful use of alcohol inflicts great suffering on both society and individuals.

Children and young people who are daily exposed to other people’s substance abuse and the women and men who are treated annually for alcohol abuse by The Blue Cross have a different story to tell. They do not recognize themselves in the glamorous look presented in marketing materials from the alcohol industry.

This report is The Blue Cross’ contribution towards counteracting the very questionable form of marketing that, in many cases, targets the most vulnerable individuals in society, namely children and adolescents. The report has been made possible in a cooperation between International Blue Cross (IFBC) and Blue Cross Norway.

Anne Babb,
General Secretary,
International Blue Cross,
Bern 2013

Jan Elverum,
General Secretary,
Blue Cross Norway,
Oslo 2013
What is the alcohol industry?

In Norway, alcohol sales are strictly regulated, and only the state owned Vinmonopolet is allowed to sell alcohol with more than 4.7 percent by volume over the counter. Therefore, Norwegian grocery stores are only allowed to sell beer, cider and alco pops. This fact, and along with the fact that Norwegian law prohibits alcohol to be sold through special promotions, means that alcohol sales constitute a much smaller percentage of grocery sales than in many other countries.

License to sell alcohol is considered an important prerequisite for the hotel and restaurant industries. Hotels, pubs, nightclubs and other licensed premises are therefore a key part of the alcohol industry.

Another key part of the alcohol industry in Norway is importers and wholesalers. They import beers, wines and spirits from manufacturers abroad, and distribute the products to Vinmonopolet and licensed restaurants and bars. In Norway, family-owned companies have traditionally dominated this part of the industry, but in recent years large multinational alcoholic beverage manufacturers have taken over a growing share of the market.

The global alcohol manufacturers constitute the largest power in the alcohol industry. Through massive marketing efforts and strong brands, these manufacturers have been the main drivers behind the world's alcohol consumption. To a great extent, these are large listed companies, whose main objective is to maximize profits for their owners. While public health authorities and the World Health Organization (WHO) are working to reduce alcohol consumption, global alcoholic beverage producers' goal is to sell as much alcohol as possible to as many people as possible, including expansion into new markets that can ensure future growth and earnings.

In addition, journalists – including food journalists and writers – do have a significant influence on alcohol consumption. Even though these are on the outside of the alcohol industry, their role and significance is important. This is especially true in Norway and other countries where advertising bans restrict the alcohol industry's possibility for marketing activities for their products.

Photo 1: Boaz Yiftach / FreeDigitalPhotos.net
The alcohol giants

The world’s largest alcoholic beverage manufacturers are keen on sharing their history and origins. However, the image of small local breweries and distilleries, where production started 100 and 200 years ago is far from today’s reality, and must be interpreted and understood as pure branding.

The alcohol industry has undergone tremendous consolidation. The sixties and seventies were characterized by a series of mergers and acquisitions, which formed the basis for large companies. In the eighties, the regional consolidation continued and companies started operating internationally, and during the nineties, the alcohol industry became global.

The world’s 20 largest breweries have since 2000 been involved in more than 280 mergers and acquisitions, with a total transaction value of more than 80 billion dollars. Today, the four largest breweries control more than 50 percent of the global beer market. Similarly, wine and spirits are dominated by two major players, Diageo and Pernod Ricard.

The result of this is that today’s global alcoholic beverage market is dominated by a handful of multinational giants with enormous operational and financial resources. These resources are spent on advertising and marketing, expansion into new markets and influencing various government alcohol policies worldwide.

In 2008, sales in the global market for spirituous drinks were $834.9 billion (Datamonitor, 2009) – approximately five times Norway’s state budget revenues in 2010 – hence, there is little doubt that there are huge monetary values on the hands of the alcoholic beverage giants.

The table below shows an overview of the ten largest alcoholic beverage manufacturers in the world. For the sake of comparison, we looked at how Norwegian companies are placed on the list: Statoil (60.), DnB NOR (212.), Telenor (291.), Yara (595.), Norsk Hydro (724.) and Orkla (1030.), (rank in brackets). The largest alcoholic beverage manufacturers are without doubt giant global companies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Market value</th>
<th>Turnover in 2010</th>
<th>Profit in 2010</th>
<th>Well-known brands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>96.</td>
<td>Anheuser-Busch</td>
<td>$90.6 billion</td>
<td>$36.8 billion</td>
<td>$4.1 billion</td>
<td>Budweiser, Stella Artois, Beck’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>256.</td>
<td>SABMiller</td>
<td>$52 billion</td>
<td>$14.2 billion</td>
<td>$1.9 billion</td>
<td>Urquell, Peroni, Miller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>276.</td>
<td>Diageo</td>
<td>$47.3 billion</td>
<td>$14.6 billion</td>
<td>$2.4 billion</td>
<td>Smirnoff, Johnnie Walker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>413.</td>
<td>Heineken Holding</td>
<td>$13 billion</td>
<td>$21.6 billion</td>
<td>$967 billion</td>
<td>Heineken, Amstel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>439.</td>
<td>Pernod Ricard</td>
<td>$23.9 billion</td>
<td>$8.7 billion</td>
<td>$1.1 billion</td>
<td>Absolut, Havana Club, Chivas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>477.</td>
<td>Carlsberg</td>
<td>$16 billion</td>
<td>$10.8 billion</td>
<td>$960 million</td>
<td>Carlsberg, Tuborg, Ringnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>658.</td>
<td>Asahi Breweries</td>
<td>$8.9 billion</td>
<td>$13 billion</td>
<td>$654 million</td>
<td>Asahi Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>706.</td>
<td>Kirin Holdings</td>
<td>$13.7 billion</td>
<td>$22.6 billion</td>
<td>$140 million</td>
<td>Kirin Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>719.</td>
<td>Grupo Modelo</td>
<td>$19.8 billion</td>
<td>$6.9 billion</td>
<td>$805 million</td>
<td>Corona, Modelo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>901.</td>
<td>San Miguel</td>
<td>$8.7 billion</td>
<td>$6.7 billion</td>
<td>$446 million</td>
<td>San Miguel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The world’s largest alcohol producers (Forbes)
The strategies of the alcohol industry

A review of annual reports of the 24 largest alcoholic beverage manufacturers in the world (Babor et al., 2010) reveals that all companies essentially have concurrent strategic objectives.

Common strategies among the 24 largest alcoholic beverage manufacturers in the world:

- Resume focus on core business – alcohol production
- Global marketing of «premium brands» at a higher price
- Investments in new markets in countries with emerging economies
- Acquisition of / investments in the largest local competitor, followed by a merger of international and local brands
- Consolidation after mergers / acquisitions and investment of achieved cost savings in increased marketing of the brands
- Investment in programs for social responsibility (CSR)
- Support for free trade agreements and challenge of trade barriers

An important key feature is that the alcohol industry is making large-scale investments in developing countries and countries with rapidly growing economies. A main objective for this is that alcohol consumption in the industrialized countries has stabilized, these markets having reached a level of saturation. To ensure continued growth, the alcohol industry will therefore pursue new markets. Developing countries have growing economies, as well as a growing middle class and high population growth among young adults, the main target group for the alcohol industry.

An evident example of this is found in Diageo’s Annual report 2005. Diageo writes that sales of spirits in the so-called BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – increased by resp. 21, 51, 26 and 78 percent compared to the previous year. In comparison, global sales growth was only 3 percent that year, clearly delineating why the alcohol industry is investing in these new markets.

Branding and marketing are the most important strategic tools for the alcohol industry. David Jernigan, director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, and an advisor to WHO for alcohol-related issues, points out that «in the alcohol industry, image, price and marketing strategy are just as important as market volume». Marketing contributes to creating so-called «premium brands», in which brand images are tailored to appeal to different segments of the population. The enormous importance of marketing is reflected in the proportion of revenue used for so-called «brand investments».

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manufacturer</th>
<th>Marketing expenses</th>
<th>Share of total turnover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heineken</td>
<td>1,985,000,000 USD</td>
<td>12.6 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diageo</td>
<td>2,246,000,000 USD</td>
<td>15.5 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pernod Ricard</td>
<td>3,367,000,000 USD</td>
<td>17.0 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While alcohol advertising is prohibited in Norway, such advertising is widespread in most countries. Traditional media, like TV, radio and magazines, are important channels for promoting alcohol beverages. You get a clear picture of the volume of this advertising if you take a look at one of the many American and British lifestyle magazines, in Norway being sold a. o. places at Narvesen. A common feature of alcohol advertising is that the ads often allude to sexual and social stereotypes. Humor, social success, physical attractiveness, romance, adventure, music, and having celebrities recommending the products, are all frequently used advertising elements, while negative consequences of alcohol use are totally absent from the ads.

Alcohol advertising is particularly effective in new markets where regulations are weak. In their annual report from 2006, Diageo states that the company, by increasing their marketing budgets by 28 percent, achieved a sales growth of 14 percent in markets outside the U.S. and Europe, while the increase in the world, totally was only 6 percent. When growth occurs in countries with little or no marketing regulation, it illustrates how questionable the alcohol industry’s deliberate efforts in developing countries are.
Concealed advertising

Paid alcohol advertising is, however, only the tip of the iceberg. Renowned alcohol researcher David Jernigan estimates that only between one third and half of the total expenditure on alcohol advertising takes place in traditional and measurable media channels (Jernigan, 2006). A very important marketing channel for the alcohol industry is the sponsorship of sports, music and other cultural events. By being present here, alcohol manufacturers and their brands get direct access to venues where people are enjoying themselves and their leisure time the most. A major goal for these activities is getting alcohol brands associated with people's favorite sport, favorite team or favorite band.

Carlsberg Brewery was the main sponsor for the 2004 UEFA European Football Championship (Euro 2004). In addition to advertising exposure, the contract granted Carlsberg exclusive liquor license at the venues. Carlsberg themselves claim that their logo was exposed on television broadcasts, on an average of 16 minutes per game, and that the sponsorship resulted in a total increase of Carlsberg's brand awareness by 6 percent worldwide (Carlsberg Group, 2006).

Heineken recently had a similar contract as main sponsor of the UEFA Champions League, while Budweiser was the sponsor for the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. TV broadcasts from major soccer championships and tournaments are broadcast throughout the world, including countries like Norway, where alcohol advertising is prohibited. Or, as put by manager for sports sponsorships at Heineken, Hans-Erik Tuijlt: «The beauty of this package is you get to advertise in countries where you would not normally advertise.» (Ewing, 2007)
This is how alcohol beverages are marketed in Norway

The Norwegian advertising ban is an effective stopper for alcohol advertising in traditional Norwegian media. However, it does not prevent the alcohol industry from conducting extensive indirect marketing of its products through its own product launches, product placements on events, reality TV and sports and celebrity events, and from pushing the products at associated places like bars, clubs and events such as after-ski at Norwegian ski resorts.

In promoting such events, the alcohol industry utilizes social media like Facebook and blogs. One way of achieving promotion is inviting prominent bloggers and opinion makers, who have broad and loyal reader groups, especially among young people, which is the main target audience for the alcohol industry’s marketing activities.

One example of such events is the introduction of Roberto Cavalli Vodka, launched at a grand-scale party at the exclusive restaurant Onda in Oslo, October 29 2011. The blog Oslo Nights, which in its own wording covers «what is happening within fashion and design in Oslo and Norway», presented coverage loaded with pictures of the event (Oslonights.no). The blog states that the «award-winning vodka was launched at Onda last Sunday, in cooperation with Crianza Vinimport and Lifestyle Norway».

Pictures from the event show, among other things, guests in front of an advertising wall where the manufacturer’s and the importer’s names are printed. In our opinion, this is an evident example of illegal alcohol marketing, and thus a breach of the advertising ban.

Consequently, alcohol advertising reaches Norwegian consumers on a broad scale through social media, in spite of the advertising ban. Part of this practice is clearly illegal, but the authorities lack adequate resources to investigate this kind of marketing. In practice, the alcohol industry is effective in circumventing the Norwegian advertising ban.
The truth about the alcohol industry’s PR and marketing

On the following pages you will find what The Blue Cross has chosen to call «The truth about the alcohol industry’s PR and marketing». In this regard, The Blue Cross would like to thank EUCAM (European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing), an association of voluntary organizations that monitors the alcohol industry’s marketing and lobbying activities. EUCAM is carrying out extensive mapping and documentation of the alcohol industry’s marketing activities, and part of the documentation we present on the following pages come from their report, The Seven Key Messages of the Alcohol Industry (EUCAM, 2011).

Facsimile 4: From EUCAM’s report

The overall strategy and practice consistently emerging from the alcohol industry’s PR and marketing bear witness to a cynical industry whose main objective is maximizing sales and, thus, profits.

In a time where there is imminent risk that Norwegian consumers, within a relatively short time, will be exposed to alcohol advertising on Norwegian television channels broadcasting from abroad, The Blue Cross believes it to be important to reveal the truth about the alcohol industry’s marketing techniques. Our clear opinion is: This is a type of advertising we do not need, and which is not desirable to have present on Norwegian TV.

The Blue Cross encourages Norwegian consumers, politicians and responsible officials to form their own opinion about this subject. Nine important reasons why The Blue Cross strongly opposes alcohol advertising in Norway:

1. The alcohol industry normalizes alcohol use and underrates the risk elements of alcohol use
2. The alcohol industry trivializes alcohol abuse and the harmful effects of alcohol
3. The alcohol industry marginalizes abstinence and glorifies alcohol use
4. The alcohol industry denies that alcohol is harmful and addictive
5. The alcohol industry claims that it is working to resolve alcohol related problems
6. The alcohol industry denies that alcohol marketing contributes to increased alcohol consumption
7. The alcohol industry attempts to balance its advertising with awareness campaigns about responsible drinking
8. The alcohol industry misrepresents PR and marketing as being social awareness campaigns
9. The alcohol industry undermines national and international alcohol policies
The alcohol industry normalizes alcohol use and underrates the risk elements of alcohol use

The alcohol industry presents alcohol use as an inevitable part of everyday life. Use of alcohol is part of a normal, healthy and successful lifestyle, and represents the link to social dimensions and traditions.

This attitude is reflected in alcohol advertisements, where alcohol almost exclusively is associated with happiness, beauty, sports, romance, friendship and leisure activities. Well-documented disadvantages of alcohol, such as serious health problems, unemployment, traffic accidents, violence, abuse, death and suicide are of course totally absent in alcohol advertising.

Facsimile 5: Advertisement for Absolut Vodka

Facsimile 6: Advertisement for Captain Morgan
The alcohol industry trivializes alcohol abuse and the harmful effects of alcohol

A general statement from the alcohol industry points out that most people have no problems dealing with alcohol, and also expresses that only a small group of deviants represents abuse and injuries. By doing so, the alcohol industry is trying to describe alcohol abuse and alcohol-related problems as a marginal phenomenon. Based on this, the alcohol industry claims that an alcohol policy which utilizes collective measures aimed at limiting alcohol consumption and alcohol related injuries, will not work, but rather that it will “punish” the vast majority who use alcohol in a responsible manner, without any problems. The product itself is not the problem – the problem is the (very few) individuals abusing it.

Research and statistics, however, draw quite a different picture:

- Harmful alcohol use causes about 2.5 million deaths every year. 320,000 young people between 15 and 29 die as a result of alcohol-related causes – this represents 9 percent of all deaths in this age group (WHO).
- Most of the violence in Norway actually happens when the perpetrators are drunk, and every year around 400 people die as a direct result of alcohol use. Deaths, accidents and violence due to alcohol use represent the dark side of drinking (The Norwegian Directorate of Health).
- Drunkenness and violence are closely linked together. 70–80 percent of discovered incidents of violence occurred in connection with either the perpetrator or the victim or both have been drinking. Alcohol alone does not lead to violence, but the situation in which you drink alcohol does (The Norwegian Directorate of Health).
- Each year, between 5000 and 5500 Norwegian drivers are arrested on suspicion of drunk driving. Often other intoxicating substances, possibly in combination with alcohol, are used (The Norwegian Institute of Public Health, 2008).

Facsimile 7: Advertisement for Guinness
«The alcohol industry marginalizes abstinence and glorifies alcohol use»

Only to a limited extent does the alcohol industry relate to the fact that most societies in the world do have a relatively large teetotaller percentage of the population. Globally, 45 percent of all men and 66 percent of all women, totally 55 percent of the population in the world are teetotallers (WHO, 2007). In Norway, approximately 10 percent of the population refrain from drinking alcohol. The alcohol industry presents an image of alcohol use as «the norm», while abstinence is «not the norm».

By doing so, the alcohol industry tries to create a connection between the use of alcohol and social acceptance and good health and a healthy lifestyle.

Among other things, a well-known measure utilized by the alcohol industry in its marketing in developing countries is influencing non-drinking people to accept western alcohol habits.

The picture below is an example of alcohol marketing from Uganda, Africa from 2011. The message in the advertisement is this: The ones who drink alcohol will achieve western welfare and wealth, and those who want to belong to this successful group, should drink – «the western way».
«The alcohol industry denies that use of alcohol is harmful and addictive»

As a chemical substance, alcohol (ethanol) will cause great health hazards and it is highly addictive for humans. These two negative characteristics are not at all communicated in the alcohol industry’s advertising, except in countries where the industry is obliged to print health warnings (as on tobacco products sold in Norway) in their advertisements.

In spite of the fact that alcohol is a toxic substance, that it is carcinogenic and hence associated with a broad range of diseases and detriments, the alcohol industry continues to present alcohol as a healthy product with positive effects on health. A good example is how the alcohol industry constantly tries to emphasize that a daily glass of wine contributes to a healthy heart (cardio protective), based on research studies funded by the industry itself. Research showing that alcohol contributes positively to the health of the heart is frequently given ample space in newspapers.

However, such research is strongly disputed. Analysis, even on a demographic level, questions the cardio protective effect of alcohol. If such cardio protective effects really exist, one should expect to find lower cardiovascular related death rates in areas with a higher total consumption of alcohol. Such a correlation should first and foremost be expected in countries with low alcohol consumption and in age groups with moderate consumption of alcohol. The results from a comparative, European study nevertheless shows no tendency in that direction (Hemström, 2001).

The alcohol industry also attempts to give the impression that their products are healthy by focusing on healthy and natural ingredients and that the production techniques have been developed through a long history and tradition. One example of this is found in connection with Norwegian beer. Most of these products are marketed as being brewed according to «Renhentsloven av 1516» (The Purity Law of 1516).

A paradox in this example is the fact that while the German purity law, Reinheitsgebot, was introduced in 1516 the Norwegian purity law was not introduced until 1857, although it was based on the German law (Wikipedia).

«It is a paradox that drugs are regarded as the larger problem, considering the fact that problems associated with alcohol affect so many more people and also induce more strain on many areas of society.»

Elisabet E. Storvoll, researcher at Sirus

The inside is what matters most.

Faesimile 8: Advertisement for Jägermeister
«The alcohol industry claims that it is working to resolve alcohol related problems»

«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.»

The quote is from the so-called Dublin principles (ICAP, 1997), adopted in 1997 by the International Centre for Alcohol Policy, a lobbying organization for the international alcohol industry. The message from the alcohol industry is clear: Alcohol related issues can only be resolved if the alcohol industry teams up with governments, health institutions and nongovernmental organizations. The alcohol industry assumes responsibility for everything that may go wrong in connection with their products, and the industry will gladly contribute towards counteracting any negative effects.

Totally more than 30 larger international NGO’s are funded by the alcohol industry. Among the more profiled organizations is the European Forum for Responsible Drinking (EFRD), the International Centre for Alcohol Policies (ICAP), The Century Council and The Portman Group, Great Britain. The largest global alcoholic beverage manufacturers, including Diageo, Pernod Ricard, Anheuser-Busch InBev, Heineken and SABMiller, stand behind all of these organizations.

On their websites, these organizations explain that their goal is to promote sensible drinking habits, prevent abuse and contribute to creating a balanced understanding of alcohol related issues. Among leading alcohol researchers it is commonly understood that these organizations generally promote the regulation measures that have the least influence on alcohol sales (Rae, 1991) (Sheldon, 1996) (McCreanor, Casswell, & Hill, 2000) (Babor T. F., 2004) (Room, 2004). These organizations are very active both within political discussions and research on alcohol habits and alcohol damages, and a Google search on the word alcohol will most probably show several hits from their work.

«Research strongly underpins that alcohol taxes, restrictions as to reducing sales and serving times and restricting the number of sales and serving outlets are effective measures. Enforcement of minimum age for buying alcohol drinks is also efficient. The expected effect of these measures on public health is quite considerable, especially when both the informal market and the illegal alcohol production can be controlled. Several measures against drunk driving are also efficient, especially when the likelihood for being arrested increases.»

Ingeborg Rossow, researcher, SIRUS

The statement from the alcohol industry is at best self-contradictory. The alcohol industry and its owners and shareholders are driven by profit, and their most important goals are increased sales, leading to increased consumption. This goal is of course in strong contradiction to the government’s objective of reducing alcohol consumption.
«The alcohol industry denies that alcohol marketing contributes to increased alcohol consumption»

The alcohol industry denies any correlation between marketing and consumption, especially the claim that alcohol marketing entails increased sales and thereby contributes to an increase in the harmful effects on society. The industry itself claims that the purpose of their marketing is limited to helping the consumers find the right product and brand. It is also their claim that they adhere to a self-imposed set of rules that counteracts deplorable marketing, and that this set of rules has led to very good results all over the world.

At the same time, a lot of research is showing that alcohol advertising has a strong appeal to young people and that advertising stimulates increased drinking among youngsters (Anderson, de Bruijn, Angus, Gordon, & Hastings, 2009).

It is also clearly evident that the alcohol industry invests heavily in sponsorships and the kind of brand building that has a strong appeal to young people. This is hardly a coincidence.

Facsimile 10b: Advertisement for Heineken

«The beauty of this package is you get to advertise in countries where you would not normally advertise.»

Hans-Erik Tuijt,
Manager for sports sponsorships at Heineken

Facsimile 11a: Advertisement for Carlsberg
As mentioned earlier, the alcohol industry holds the opinion that the problem is not the products (the alcohol); but that irresponsible use of the products is causing the problems. Based on this, the industry claims that they are using large amounts of money teaching the consumers «responsible use».

On the alcohol industry’s websites this mix-up of «responsible information» and pure marketing and product information is quite evident. One example is Diageo’s website, DrinkIQ.com, apparently intended to promote responsible use of alcohol. To be sure, there are facts here about alcohol and alcohol use, plus tips and hints on how to use alcohol in a responsible manner, but only a click away there is information about all of Diageo’s products. In addition, Diageo operates a number of other websites, among them Diageo Digital Drinks Database (Diageo), where the message about responsible use of alcohol is reduced to the smallest possible font size, while drink recipes based on Diageo products are very prominently placed.

Another problem the limited extent to which awareness campaigns are effective: An especially big challenge is getting people to drink less, not in the least because alcohol consumption creates many immediate positive effects for people. For most people, the absolute risk for serious injuries or diseases caused by their own drinking is very low, and it will be difficult getting people to control their consumption in order to further the lowering of this risk. The challenge lies in the fact that the health and socially related injuries of alcohol is mainly a collective matter. Therefore, for each and everyone it will, in most cases, be rational to continue drinking as before – regardless of what health authorities or other «campaign actors» might mean (Pape & Rossow).
The alcohol industry misrepresents PR and marketing as social awareness campaigns

The alcohol industry has established separate programs for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as an element in promoting its message and its agenda. While 13 of 24 global alcoholic beverage manufacturers had established such programs in 2005 (Babor, et al., 2010), practically speaking all companies do have such programs today. The problem remains; the borders between what is actual social responsibility, and what is PR and marketing, are undefined. As most PR activities aim towards increasing and strengthening the company’s or the brands’ visibility and standing, one must also consider the CSR programs as a kind of indirect form of marketing.

By means of the program Water of Life, Diageo has the ambition to provide clean drinking water for 1 million people in Africa each year until 2015. However, several people are critical as to the results of this program, among them Rory Carrol, recognized British newspaper The Guardian’s Africa correspondent (Carrol, 2003).

Nevertheless, the fact that the alcohol industry goes after drinking water projects is not incidental. In their production, the alcoholic beverage manufacturers use enormous amounts of water, and they have been fined more than once for discharging waste into drinking water. To illustrate the scope of this, UN claims that Diageo owned Kenya Breweries use six percent of the potential volume of drinking water in the capital city, Nairobi, for their production (United Nations Foundation, 2010).

Two other interesting examples where the alcohol industry has used water projects in their marketing is in the aid work following the tsunami in Sri Lanka in 2004 and hurricane Katrina the year after. On Sri Lanka, Carlsberg launched a new local beer by giving out drinking water using the brand’s bottles, and after Katrina, Anheuser-Busch distributed drinking water using the brewery’s logos (Marin Institute).

Drawing definite conclusions regarding the effect of the alcohol industry’s CSR programs is difficult, but several studies conclude that the purpose behind at least part of these activities is to support marketing and lobbying projects which counteracts the interests of public health and the official goal to have effective control over alcohol marketing (Tesler & Malone, 2008).

Facsimile 13: Front page of Diageo’s social report, 2010
«The alcohol industry undermines national and international alcohol policies»

In May 2010, WHO adopted a global strategy for reducing alcohol related injuries. However, the road leading to the decision was long, and bore evidence of intense struggles for power between the alcohol industry’s economical interests, and the global consideration for public health.

By way of documents from The United States Senate, it appears that The Global Alcohol Producers Group (GAPG) paid an American PR agency $240,000 dollars for assistance in influencing the WHO process in 2007 (Lobbying Spending Database). In the statutory American lobby register, is a. o. Daniel Spiegel, former American delegate to WHO listed as lobbyist for GAPG. Of course, we can merely speculate whether or not this was only one of many lobbying campaigns, paid by the alcohol industry.

ICAP’s website, mentioned earlier, also documents open lobbying. ICAP produced six different reports, which were sent to WHO on behalf of the alcohol industry. These articles were expanded and published in the book "Working Together to Reduce Harmful Drinking" (Grant & Leverton, 2009). ICAP has probably spent quite considerable resources promoting the book, as they have had press launches both in London, Johannesburg and New Delhi. The main message of the book is that the alcohol industry must cooperate with authorities and NGO’s to reduce alcohol injuries, due opposite to the view expressed by WHO. In an internal note, ICAP writes that the book will be widely distributed to WHO board members, member countries and other decision-makers. The relief agency FORUT believes that the goal was probably to soften WHO board members, so that the alcohol industry would get their place inside the alcohol strategy.

The alcohol industry was very active, even prior to the EU commission’s 2006 adoption of the EU alcohol strategy. Independent NGO Eurocare, which was a promoter of this strategy, made the following statement about the EU strategy and the alcohol industry's role in it: «Although the Strategy is very weak, Eurocare welcomes the strategy [...] Eurocare also regrets [...] that the strategy reflects the undue influence of the alcohol industry, which has been responsible for one of the most intensive lobbying campaigns ever known in regard to public health policy» (European Public Health Alliance).

The two above-mentioned processes reveal that the alcohol industry does not leave out large-scale lobbying against organs like WHO and the EU commission. At the same time, developing countries represent the largest proportion of the alcohol industry’s growth. Therefore, those markets are the ones getting the highest priority from the industry. Democracy has a weak position in many of these countries, with challenges in areas like corruption and the lack of transparency, while at the same time being dependent on investments from foreign companies.

Øystein Bakke and Dag Endal, from relief agency FORUT, have in a study published in the acknowledged journal Addiction documented how the alcohol industry has tried taking charge of alcohol policies in four African countries, among them Lesotho, Malawi, Uganda and Botswana. Their study is evidence that the alcohol industry takes advantage of countries with weak democracies in order to create an increased base for profit and economic growth (Bakke & Endal, 2010).
This is The Blue Cross

The International Blue Cross (IFBC) is one of the world’s leading non-governmental organisations, caring for people harmed by or at risk from alcohol or illicit drug use.

Blue Cross’ project work in prevention, treatment and counselling and aftercare focuses primarily on young and vulnerable people, and on those in extreme poverty. Through carefully researched and targeted interventions the organization advocates for evidence-based alcohol policies at the national and international level. In doing so, the Blue Cross seeks to draw positive and dignified attention to the issues faced by dependent people and their families.

For over a hundred years, committed and passionate Blue Cross health care professionals and volunteers continue to provide high quality prevention and treatment services to people and communities in countries around the world.

The head office of the IFBC is in Bern, Switzerland. Over 40 national Blue Cross organizations make up the membership.

Read more: www.ifbc.info
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