



The drinks industry is working hard to present a positive image of alcohol, in the face of growing evidence of the harm it causes. This glancesheet looks at the messages the drinks industry wants you to hear.

- **Alcohol is part of a full and active social life**

The alcohol industry has been particularly keen in recent years to associate itself with popular music, sport and youth culture. Making their drinks feel like an essential part of a good time is the aim. As part of their sponsorship of Liverpool FC, for example, Carlsberg described their beer as “part of the game”. The impression the industry seek to create is that you can’t have fun without its products. As the Diageo website states: “Every day, everywhere customers and consumers can rely on Diageo to help them celebrate life”.

- **The drinker is to blame, not the drink**

Drinks industry-funded responsible drinking campaigns have been around for some time, from the Anheuser-Busch (whose brands include Budweiser and Stella Artois) TV adverts ‘Know when to say when’, aired in the 1980s, to Drinkaware’s more recent ‘Why let good times go bad?’ campaign. Such messages subtly imply the advantages of drinking and that at least some alcohol is needed by you for a good time. They also lay all responsibility at the door of the drinker: alcohol problems are caused by irresponsible individuals who simply don’t know when they’ve had enough.

“Pushing all responsibility onto individuals is an inadequate response to tackling a serious problem and an abrogation of responsibility from an industry that still sells cider cheaper than bottled water.”

Dr. Alison Giles

- **It’s only a minority**

The alcohol industry acknowledges the harm associated with excessive drinking, but views this as a consequence of the actions of a small minority of people. This is despite evidence that large numbers of us are overdoing it: in a recent survey, 45% of people in Wales said they had drunk more than recommended guidelines during the previous week. The industry typically opposes measures targeting the wider population, such as the introduction of a minimum price per unit, despite evidence that it would be especially effective in influencing heavy drinkers and in reducing rates of alcohol-related harm across the board.

“Our objective is to allow the silent majority the continued freedom to enjoy alcohol without being penalised because a mindless minority does not understand how to drink sensibly.”

Jeremy Beadles, Chief Executive of the Wine and Spirit Trade Association

- **Education, education, education**

According to Portman Group, which represents the alcohol industry, “It is only through education, coupled with targeted interventions against misusers, that we can ultimately change the drinking culture...” Unfortunately, research shows that individuals seldom change behaviour if nothing around them changes. The key drivers to a reduction in alcohol-related harms are reducing the availability and affordability of alcohol, and reducing young people’s exposure to alcohol marketing.

“There are relatively few [education initiatives] that point to long-term impact on drinking behaviour or alcohol-related problems.”

Prof. Thomas Babor et al.



- **Alcohol is just like any other drink**

Although the dangers of alcohol are well known, producers and retailers are keen for it to be seen, and sold, as an 'ordinary commodity'. In supermarkets, alcohol can be typically found throughout the store. A recent survey found alcohol at store entrances, by the tills, on free-standing displays, and next to everyday groceries such as bread and tea, reinforcing the notion that alcohol is a normal and desirable part of our lives, rather than a drug that needs to be used with care.

- **Alcohol advertising is just about brand-switching**

According to the drinks industry, alcohol advertisements do not encourage people to start drinking or to drink more, merely to switch brands. This is much the same argument put forward previously by the tobacco industry, and ultimately debunked. In reality, as well as competing with each other, drinks companies have a common interest in promoting alcohol in general and in recruiting new drinkers to the market. Young people, who represent the next generation of drinkers, are particularly vulnerable to alcohol advertising, especially those already showing signs of alcohol misuse.

- **The drinks industry is part of the solution to alcohol-related problems**

The message from the industry is that alcohol-related harms can only be reduced through a collaborative approach involving them. However, the measures most likely to be effective in driving down rates of consumption, such as a minimum price per unit and major restrictions on advertising, are not supported by the industry. There is an obvious conflict of interest: if everyone drank within recommended guidelines, industry profits would fall by 40%. Since the drinks industry depends on maintaining and increasing alcohol sales, it is not best placed to advise on the safe use of alcohol.

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- **The truth is out there – exploding some drinking myths**
- **Different industry, same messages? How Big Alcohol recycles Big Tobacco's arguments**

This glancesheet was prepared by Alcohol Concern Cymru.
For more facts about alcohol go to www.drinkwisewales.org.uk