

South African advertisers are determined to stay secretive

By  Gail Schimmel

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Last year, I became ever so slightly obsessed with *The Great British Bake Off*. Yes, I know – I’m showing my age.



Source: www.unsplash.com

Revelation

The teenagers in my home showed me how to stream it straight from Channel 4 on my computer, and I happily watched the latest season. But because installing an ad blocker was beyond me – and I wasn’t going to ask the teenagers again, I have some dignity – I also saw a lot of UK advertising.

And it was a revelation.

At the time that I was watching, the ARB was dealing with several complaints about hidden terms and conditions. The impression I was getting from both the complaints and the reaction of the advertisers to the ARB decisions was that South African advertisers are determined to tell the consumer as little about the offer as possible.



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And then I watched GBBO (that’s what us fans call it) and saw all this English advertising. Ads were in big bold letters it said things like “Very limited stock”, “Offer valid for 30 days only” and “Tested on five incredibly gullible people”.

Okay, maybe not the “incredibly gullible” part. But they gave the important information upfront, empowering the consumer to make a properly informed decision.

The Code of Advertising Practice says:

“ Advertisements should not contain any statement or visual presentation which, directly or by implication, omission, ambiguity, inaccuracy, exaggerated claim or otherwise, is likely to mislead the consumer. ”

Omission

The thing that our industry seems to struggle with is the part about “omission”. When you leave out important information you are misleading consumers as much as when you actively give misinformation.

I’m not sure, but our advertisers instinctively feel that if they tell all the details, they will lose sales. The reality is that advertising is bigger than that one lost sale: if consumers feel more and more misled by advertising, then they will stop trusting the advertising space. They’ll stop believing anything that any advertiser says.

That is, in fact, the very reason that as an industry we have chosen to self-regulate – we want consumers to trust our claims. But we all need to commit to creating a trusted space – through supporting the ARB and creating advertising that takes the consumer into your confidence. Tell them the truth – in the small picture you might lose a few sales, but in the big picture, the consumer will learn that you are a brand they can trust.

And if the offer or the product is so bad that telling the truth about it is going to lose more than a few sales – well then, frankly, maybe you need to think about that.

ABOUT GAIL SCHIMMEL

Gail Schimmel is the CEO of the Advertising Regulatory Board. She has a BA (Hon) LLB LLM, and is an admitted attorney. In the past, she has worked as a lecturer, attorney and consultant. She’s also a bestselling novelist and co-hosts a podcast featuring writers.

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