

The Weekly

SHEBEENS LASH IMPENDING ALCOHOL ADVERTISING BAN

September 7, 2012

The leaked draft law seeks to totally prohibit the promotion and advertising of alcohol products in the media

Copies of a proposed anti-alcohol advertising law have accidentally found their way into the public domain, stirring up a hornet's nest that has seen advertising agencies and liquor sellers in the Free State up in arms over a possible loss of revenue.

The leaked draft Control of Marketing of Alcoholic Beverages Bill has also sparked debates on its effectiveness as a deterrent to alcohol abuse.

The draft law, developed by the Department of Health seeks to totally prohibit the promotion and advertising of alcohol products.

The bill provides for limitation of alcohol advertising to permit notices that will be narrowed to "describing the price, brand name, type, strength, origin and composition of the product," all of which will be displayed inside licensed and registered premises. The notices will also be accompanied by a health warning and must not be visible from the outside. It will also prohibit the display of names and logos of alcoholic beverages on delivery vehicles, the linking of sports sponsorship to alcoholic brand names and the promotion of alcoholic beverages through donations and discounts at events.

It is this prospect of an imminent ban that has opened a Pandora's box, with debates ranging from the law's efficacy to traders' possible loss of income, even though the department has appealed to the public not to overreact to the bill as it is not a conclusive document yet.

According to an independent analyst, Chris Moerdyk, the move could potentially cost advertising companies revenue to the tune of R1.8-billion a year and about R800-million to sports sponsorship and development grants.

This possible move has prompted those in the industry to explore alternative avenues to advertise and promote their alcohol products.

Yoav Tchelet, of dotJWT, the digital division of advertising agency JWT said prohibition of liquor advertising will be undermined by the internet and social media. He said this will only drive brands to sidestep the law and adopt stealthy means to market and advertise products.

And already there is evidence of some alcohol brands resorting to Facebook and Twitter to advertise their products, hence making it difficult for government to regulate.

Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi has stuck to his stance to continue to wage war against alcohol advertising because many youngsters in South Africa were dying from alcohol abuse. Motsoaledi said he was not against alcohol consumption but rather its abuse, and conceded that it will take years for the alcohol advertising ban. "Like all draft laws, the Control of Marketing of Alcoholic Beverages Bill will go through various stages of scrutiny including Cabinet, before it is released for public consultations."

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Meanwhile, liquor traders in the Free State are worried that the advertising ban, should it be enforced, will negatively affect their businesses and their capacity to compete.

Most said their clientele is based on advertising as it alerts people of specials and cheaper or promotional material they have in store and giving them an advantage over other sellers.

Dennis Mokone, the manager of Street Corner Braai, a popular entertainment spot in Bloemfontein that sells alcohol said: "In the township shebeens, taverns and other joints alcohol contributes the biggest chunk of our income. We need advertising to hold a strong brand, and promote our products in this competitive industry."

He said advertising helps maximize revenue from, among others, promotions and sponsorship that liquor outlets receive from manufacturers. However, Mokone is already contemplating life after the proposed alcohol advertising black-out. "We will just have to get used to it and find other ways to market and promote our wares. Branding signages sponsored by alcohol brands will also be affected and other promotional material if that is the case."

"We will be creative how we advertise and yet find a way to be within the confines of the law... We will rely heavily on methods such as word of mouth. Some events that are sponsored by alcohol drinks will be affected but we will have to find a way around it."

Meanwhile, consumers have said they will not be deterred from purchasing or consuming alcohol products in the event of any ban.

"As consumers it will not affect us, we are still going to purchase it. The message will come across and the outlets will still be there," said Tumi Nkopane. He said the only difference is they will miss out on advertisement for promotions but word of mouth and other means will always find a way to plug the gap.

"Today's market, especially clubs, rely heavily on marketing and advertising so it will somehow negatively affect the businesses."

Alcohol abuse is a serious social concern in South Africa and is often blamed for mishaps such as Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, drunken driving as well as physical and emotional abuse. The Free State Gambling and Liquor Authority said the bill was still work in progress. It reiterated that no piece of legislation will be enacted without prior public hearings, and added that the anti-alcohol advertising bill will be subjected to the same treatment.

[Source: www.theweekly.co.za]