

## **TELEVISION PROGRAMME SPONSORSHIP CODE**

### **PREAMBLE**

1 The Television Programme Sponsorship Code is concerned with those aspects of television programme services that entail advertiser involvement in programming and promotional (rather than advertising) time.

2 All sponsored programmes should be presented within the guidelines provided under this Code. It is the broadcasters' responsibility to ensure that sponsorship formats that fail to comply with the spirit and the letter of the Code are not broadcast. The Media Development Authority (MDA) may require sponsorship that does not comply with this Code to be withdrawn.

3 Sponsored programmes must satisfy the requirements in the Television Programme Codes and Advertising Code issued by MDA.

4 This code is applicable to all programmes on free-to-air television. On subscription television, the code is applicable to local programmes, locally packaged channels or any other programmes where sponsorship deals are made locally and/or the broadcaster have control over the sponsor's presence.

5 In view of the rapid development and evolution of technology in communications and broadcasting, the guidelines in this Code will be reviewed regularly to safeguard the interests of viewers and ensure their relevance to broadcasters.

### **CONSULTATION WITH MDA**

6 Broadcasters are invited to consult MDA in cases where they are unsure whether a proposed sponsorship presentation or relationship would be acceptable.

### **DEFINITION OF PROGRAMME SPONSORSHIP**

7 A programme is deemed sponsored if any part of its costs of production, acquisition or transmission is met through payment, or other valuable reward or consideration to the broadcaster, with the objective of promoting the sponsor's name, image, product, activities or services.

8 References to commercial names in programmes do not necessarily denote programme sponsorship. Such occurrences are acceptable if they are

inherent in programmes acquired by a broadcaster. For example, the various event sponsor logos on site in a sporting event are not considered part of programme sponsorship.

## **GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

9 Broadcasters should maintain their integrity and exercise their responsibility to the public to ensure that consumer's interest is protected. Hence, they must retain their editorial and programming independence and should not be influenced by the sponsor on either the content or acquisition of a programme.

10 On free-to-air television, broadcasters should bear in mind that channels are not over-commercialised such that viewers are inundated with sponsorship messages.

11 Sponsorship of a channel is not allowed.

12 Sponsorship of programmes may be allowed, but promotional references and presenters' endorsements of the sponsor or its products, that have the effect of advancing the sale or publicising the sponsor or its products within the programme, are not allowed.

13 Broadcasters should recognise that there is a distinction between programme sponsorship and advertising. Through the sponsorship of a programme, an organisation gains public exposure, prestige and favourable association. The image of the organisation may be enhanced, and this is what sponsorship amounts to. It does not equate with advertisements or infomercials (long-form advertisements), where there is a direct appeal to the public to purchase a specific product or use a particular service.

14 Programmes should not be made to look like infomercials.

15 Broadcasters should be vigilant in ensuring that there is no undue prominence given to a sponsor. As a general principle, references to a sponsor's name, product/service, product name, trade mark or slogan in any programme should be editorially justified and should not obtrude on programme interest. Sponsorship identifications in a programme should also not be distracting such that they affect viewing pleasure.

16 Broadcasters should bear in mind that programmes such as info-educational, current affairs, and children's programmes require a greater sensitivity to sponsorship, as opposed to entertainment or sports programmes. Broadcasters should hold these programme genres to stricter sponsorship standards. Genres such as info-educational programmes should always provide balanced, factual and objective coverage so that viewers can make informed choices.

17 Advertisements tagged as part of a sponsorship credit will be counted as part of the 14 minute per clock hour advertising limit. However, sponsor

credits before and after a programme will not be included in the 14 minute limit.

18 A sponsored programme or programme segment must be clearly identified before the beginning and after the end of the programme or programme segment. The credits should explain the sponsor's actual connection with the programme.

## **SPONSORSHIP CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROGRAMME GENRES**

### **Children's Programmes**

19 For the purposes of this Code, 'children' is defined here as persons aged 14 years and below.

20 Sponsorship of children's programmes should be treated with caution. Broadcasters should consider carefully the appropriateness of any sponsorship of children's programmes as children are unlikely to understand fully the relationship between sponsor and programme.

### **Current Affairs and Info-educational Programmes**

21 Current Affairs programmes are characterised by their analysis and explanation of current events and issues, including materials dealing with current public policies, political, economic or social controversy.

22 Info-educational programmes are programmes which serve informational and educational needs. These programmes serve to inform and educate the public about a range of issues including, but not limited to, health, finance and education.

23 Broadcasters should consider carefully the appropriateness of any sponsorship of these programmes, particularly programmes which are analytical, informative or investigative in nature. It is therefore the responsibility of the broadcaster to maintain the programme's editorial integrity.

## **SPONSORSHIP FORMAT**

### **Sponsorship Credits**

24 A sponsored programme or programme segment must be clearly identified before the beginning (i.e. front credit) and/or after the end (i.e. end credit) of the programme or programme segment.

- a. The credits should explain the sponsor's actual connection with the programme, for example: "sponsored by", "in association with" or "brought to you by".

- b. The sponsor's name, trade, brand, product, service name and/or trademark or logo (the essential identification for the sponsor) may be used.
- c. Credits may indicate the connection between the sponsor and a brand or the nature of the sponsor's business, e.g. "sponsored by Company X, makers of Product X".
- d. Slogans or copylines of the sponsors may appear in visual display and/or through voice-overs during the front/end credits, but not within the programme or programme segment. Sponsor's promotional messages are also allowed at the end of a sponsored programme or programme trailer.
- e. Bumper sponsorship credits (i.e. entering and/or leaving any commercial break) would be counted as part of the advertising allowance of 14 minutes per clock-hour.

### **Trailers of Sponsored Programmes**

25 The main purpose of a trailer is to alert viewers to a forthcoming programme or to provide general information about the broadcaster's programme service. The sponsor's presence should therefore remain secondary.

### **Programme Title Sponsorship**

26 A sponsor's name may be incorporated into the title of a programme, provided that it is an entertainment variety or sports programme. These programmes should adhere to the general principles of sponsorship and not be made to look like infomercials. While the sponsor's products and services can be featured in the programmes, they should not be given undue prominence and be sales pitches that promote and encourage the purchase of the products. Presenters or interviewees appearing in these programmes should also not endorse the sponsor's products or services.

27 A sponsor's name should not be integrated into the titles of other programme genres, especially news, current affairs, info-educational and children's programmes.

28 A sponsor's name may also be integrated into a programme title when the title is that of a sponsored event covered by the programme (eg the *Konica Cup Final*, *AXA FA Cup*) or when the programme is acquired (eg *Barclays EPL Highlights*). This applies to both sponsored programmes and segments.

29 A sponsor's name may be integrated into the generic title for programme time slots. Therefore, generic titles for time slots, such as "Company XXX's Blockbuster Sunday", may be used. However, this dispensation will not be applicable to time slots dedicated to children's programmes, news, current affairs, business and informational programmes.

30 The programme title should not share the same graphic representation or adapt the typeface of the sponsors' trade name/mark/logo. This is to preserve the identity of the broadcaster's programme from that of the sponsor's. A programme title is a part of a programme and producers of these shows should not be pressured into designing titles to meet sponsorship demands.

### **Sponsor's Logo**

31 The sponsor's logo should not appear within programme genres such as news, current affairs, info-educational or children's programmes. An exception would be if the sponsor's logo appears as part of the physical landscape of the featured event itself.

32 For entertainment programmes, sponsor's logo may appear within a programme, as part of the studio set or on sponsor's products. However, the logos' appearance on screen should be incidental and should not be given prominence in terms of close-up or from favourable camera angles, or for any significant length of time.

33 The sponsor's logo should not be superimposed onto any programmes such as News, Info-ed, Current Affairs, Children's programmes as well as programmes that receive funding from MDA. A sponsor's logo can be superimposed onto a programme in the following instances:

a. Superimposition on Screen.

Sponsor's logos can be superimposed on a corner of the screen during entertainment programmes, such as films, dramas or variety programmes. This can be allowed for a maximum of five seconds.

b. Provision of Information Services

This includes reports containing factual data such as weather reports, scoreboards, traffic updates etc. In this instance, the sponsor's logos can also be accompanied by a short slogan provided it does not block vital information.

c. Coverage of Sports Events

During transmission of "live" sporting events, and recorded or delayed telecast of sporting events where there are no regular commercial breaks. The superimposition of the sponsors' logo should be limited to five seconds' duration and should appear no more than once every quarter of an hour. This allowance is to address the lack of regular commercial breaks during the telecast of such events.

d. Provision of Timing

This will include technical timing for various sporting events such as athletics, swimming and football matches. An on-screen acknowledgement to the technical provider may appear on screen whenever the information is displayed.

e. Banners Superimposed during Programmes

This refers to SMS banners (superimposed banners carrying viewers' SMS messages) and programme banners (superimposed banners to promote the channel or its programmes).

34 In the above exceptions mentioned in Clause 33(a) to 33(e), the sponsor's logo as well as the vehicles that carry the logo (e.g. timer, sms banner), should not block any vital action or visual information on screen and not mar viewing pleasure. Sponsors logo and programme banners should not appear concurrently. Sponsor's logos should also not appear more than once every quarter of an hour.

35 Crawlers with congratulatory messages and a sponsor's logo can be allowed in the coverage of sports events where there is local participation to congratulate local athletes who have won competitions. The messages presented should not be unduly distracting and the logo used in such crawlers should be in accordance with guidelines mentioned in Clause 34.

**Virtual Logos/Billboards**

36 Electronic imaging systems allow broadcasters to alter, add, or superimpose logos or billboards onto the telecast of an event. For example, a sponsor's logo is superimposed on the football field before the start of a match.

37 The use of such virtual signage is only allowed in sports programmes. When used, the virtual signage should not obstruct or interfere with events happening on the screen.

38 The virtual signage can feature the sponsor's logo and slogans, but it should not contain any sales message. (Example of a slogan without sales message is "Toyota - Moving forward".)

39 Since such virtual signage works by altering the broadcast signal itself, the usage of such systems should not result in a discernible degradation of the picture quality.

**REFERENCE TO THE SPONSOR WITHIN A PROGRAMME**

40 A programme sponsor can be featured in a programme but the content and presentation should not be of a promotional nature and should be relevant to the programme's context, storyline and format.

41 If the sponsor's logo, products or other identification is used, they should be governed by the programme's needs. In the case of informational programmes, if the programme requires a reference to a particular product or service, it should, as far as possible, include a range of products and services in order not to give an unfair advantage to the sponsor, or to be seen as advertising for the sponsor.

## **Undue Prominence**

42 When featuring a sponsor in the programme, it is important to note that undue prominence should not be given to the sponsor within the programme such that the effect amounts to advertising. Any references to a product, service, company name or logo must be limited to what can be justified by the editorial requirements of the programme.

43 Undue prominence may result from the recurring presence or reference to a product, service, company name or logo in a programme, or from the manner in which a product, service, company name or logo is presented or appears in a programme. Instances where undue prominence may occur include *product placements* and *plugging*.

a. 'Product placement' is the placement of a product in a programme such that it is prominently seen, either through close-ups, choice angles, a shot held longer than usual, or repeated often.

b. 'Plugging' is a free mention of a product, service, company name either by the presenter or voice-over narration extolling the virtues of the product or service. It may also include close-ups, choice angles, repeated and/or prolonged shots of commercial products, services, logos, trade names, etc.

44 The general principle of undue prominence should also apply to product and/or set sponsors. These are sponsors who provide only props/sets in programmes. These items need to be relevant to the programme's storyline or context and used discreetly and tastefully.

## **Endorsements**

45 The compere/presenter (including artistes) should be objective and should not promote or endorse the sponsors and their products, especially in children's programmes and programmes that seek to inform/educate or give consumer advice.

## **Game and Award Shows**

46 More flexibility may be given to Game and Award shows in which sponsored prizes and products may form an inherent part of the programme. For instance, aural/visual references to the sponsor's provision of the prizes may be allowed.

## **UNACCEPTABLE SPONSORSHIP**

### **Unacceptable Products and Advertisers**

47 Broadcasters should not accept sponsorship from products, services and establishments that are not acceptable for advertising under the MDA TV Advertising Code, e.g. tobacco products, condoms and casinos.

## **Political and religious interests**

48 Sponsorship from political parties and religious groups should not be accepted.

## **UNSPONSORABLE PROGRAMMES OR PROGRAMME SEGMENTS**

49 The following programmes must not be sponsored:

- a. ***Parliamentary Programmes***
  - i. Parliamentary programmes would include Opening of Parliament, Highlights from Parliament, Select Committee Hearings, Commission of Inquiry, etc.
- b. ***Programmes related to the elections***
  - i. Election-related programmes include Campaign Reports and Polling Night Results.
- c. ***Ministerial Speeches, Press Conferences and Special Interviews***
  - i. Ministerial speeches, press conferences and special interview programmes include the Prime Minister's National Day Message and National Day Rally, etc.
- d. ***News Programmes including flashes, bulletins, headlines, top stories, specials, and breaking news***
  - i. The main news bulletin, including headlines, top stories, news flashes and breaking news, should not be sponsored.
  - ii. Specialist news reports may however be sponsored. Specialist news reports refer to factual data like traffic, weather, stock market indices, foreign exchange rates, and "softer" news items like culture, sports and travel. Such sponsored reports must be separated from the general news programme clearly, for example by programme end credits or a commercial break, so as not to give the perception that the whole news programme is sponsored.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPONSORSHIP CODE**

50 The Code takes effect from 4 June 2010 and replaces the Code that took effect from 22 January 2007. MDA may from time to time revise or update the Code to maintain currency.

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