

5 August 2005

To: The Forum Editor

Ad claims: What you see is often not what you get

I refer to the letter “Nip false hair-ad claims in the bud” (ST Forum, August 4) by ST reader Seow Shook Phan.

It is heartening to see a savvy consumer who scrutinised the said ads with a questioning eye. Unfortunately, there are many others who take the claims in advertisements at face value. With many hair and beauty ads taking visual prominence in the print media nowadays, it is not surprising that consumers are easily swayed by promises of guaranteed results and quick-fix solutions, and by celebrity endorsements and claims of medical evidence.

It is for this reason that the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS), an Advisory Council to the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE), decided to clamp down on hair ads and beauty ads last year. In view of the rising number of complaints, ASAS introduced three clauses to the Singapore Code of Advertising Practice, which regulates commercial advertising in Singapore, to tighten up regulations pertaining to these industries. These clauses pertain to the use of testimonials, the inclusion of mandatory disclaimers, and their font size.

The advertising control system in Singapore is one of self-regulation. Since its inception, ASAS has helped to administer the Code in its efforts to ensure that local advertising practices remain fair, honest, responsible and truthful. The Code is a fundamental part of this system of control, which ASAS administers, with the co-operation of members from the organisations in ASAS representing advertisers, advertising agencies and media, government agencies and other supporting organisations.

By the Code, ASAS is empowered to ask an advertiser or advertising agency to amend or withdraw any advertisement which, in its opinion, is contrary to the Code. It may also ask an advertiser or advertising agency to withhold such advertisements until they have been modified.

Self-regulation works in the interest of both advertisers and consumers because it ensures that through fair play, there is a balance of trust and responsibility between them. In the situation that an investigation into a misleading ad uncovers an unfair business practice, ASAS may refer the matter to CASE for action to be taken under the Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act.

We encourage vigilant consumers such as Ms Seow to bring to ASAS’ attention ads that omit the relevant disclaimers as stipulated in the Code, as well as ads with content that is not decent, honest, legal or truthful. ASAS can be reached at Tel: 64611888, or email: asas@case.org.sg. In the meantime, consumers seeking redress may approach CASE for advice and assistance. CASE can be contacted at Tel: 64631811, or email: complaints@case.org.sg.

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