

PRESS RELEASE
1 March 2005

Greater prominence of Code Of Advertising Practice in 2004

ASAS sees sharp increase in complaints last year; plans for the year ahead revolve around tightening implementation and adherence of the SCAP

The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS) is an Advisory Council to the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE). It was set up in 1973 to promote ethical advertising in Singapore and is the self-regulatory body of the advertising industry. The ASAS Council comprises representatives from advertisers, advertising agencies, government agencies, media owners and other supporting organisations. CASE provides secretarial support to ASAS.

Under the Code, advertisements must be honest, legal, decent and truthful. Should any advertisement breach the Code, the ASAS Council is empowered to take action on the advertisement. Actions include withholding advertisement space and/or time and adverse publicity.

The SCAP is set to gain greater prominence in 2005 if statistics gathered by the ASAS Secretariat in 2004 are anything to go by. ASAS received 641 enquiries and complaints on advertising matters, a sharp increase of 51% from 2003 figures. Of these, 403 pertain directly to advertisements while the rest deal with general enquiries on the scope of the SCAP.

In 2004, in view of the increasing number of claims pertaining to health, beauty and medical related advertising, ASAS added three new clauses to the SCAP. These deal primarily with bust enhancement products and services, hair and scalp products and services, and the use of customer testimonials in advertisements. Please see *ANNEX A – ASAS Press Release: Three new clauses add teeth to Code of Advertising Practice*.

In 2005, ASAS intends to monitor and if necessary tighten the implementation and adherence of these clauses. ASAS also anticipates that more consumers and companies, aware of the SCAP, will want to know how it affects them. To this end, greater efforts to educate the public will be made as part of the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE)'s consumer education efforts.

Highlights and observations of 2004

In 2004, the ASAS Secretariat handled a total of 191 cases, a 9% decrease from 2003. However, the numbers in 2003 are likely to be inflated as January to May 2003 figures were tabulated under a different calculation basis from 2004. In 2004, the statistic categories were revised to reflect more accurately the nature of complaints by including categories for enquiries relating to, for example, the SCAP, or general feedback.

Common concerns relate to misleading information on advertisements where advertisements sufficiently depict a different message of the product or service. A company should present the information as transparent as possible. ASAS also looks into untruthful presentation of content where claims made are without basis or unlikely to be true.

From the feedback and complaints received, the top three categories that received the highest number of concerns are as follows:

Feedback and complaints		Handled cases	
2004	2003	2004	2003
1. Slimming (35 complaints or 12%)	Food/Can beverages (23 complaints or 8%)	1. Beauty (26 complaints or 14%)	Food/Can beverage (13 complaints or 8%)
2. Beauty related (34 complaints or 12%)	Telecommunications (20 complaints or 7%)	2. Slimming (25 complaints or 13%)	Electrical/Electronic (13 complaints or 8%)
3. Telecommunication (24 complaints or 8%)	Slimming (18 complaints or 6%)	3. Food and Beverage (11 complaints or 6%)	Health related (10 complaints or 6%)

For a detailed breakdown of 2004 figures, please see attached charts *ANNEX B – Table Summary of Feedback, Complaints and Other Enquiries*; and *ANNEX C – Chart comparison of 2003 and 2004 statistics*.

Slimming and beauty-related complaints take prominence for both feedback/complaints and handled cases. In view of the increasing number of claims pertaining to health, beauty and medical related advertising, ASAS added three new clauses to the SCAP in October 2004.

The additional clauses have since come into effect on 1 January 2005. Both CASE and the ASAS Secretariat are monitoring the implementation of the clauses.

Greater consumer awareness and vigilance of companies for 2005

CASE and ASAS see the sharp increase in figures for 2004 as an encouraging sign that the public is becoming more aware of their consumer rights, especially pertaining to advertisements. Ultimately, we believe that greater awareness can help contribute to a healthy advertising climate, with fairer competition for retailers, and transparency of information for consumers. This will ideally result in a win-win situation for advertisers, media owners, and consumers.

Consumers can refer to the Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act (CPFTA), which came into force on 1 March 2004. Under the Act, unsubstantiated claims made by businesses may amount to a false claim, which is an unfair trade practice and thus constitutes a breach of the provisions in the Act. In 2005, CASE will continue its outreach programme in the form of consumer education forums, publication materials and news reports.

Consumers who feel they have been misled by false claims are strongly urged to take the matter up under this Act at the Small Claims Tribunal or report the matter to CASE via their hotline: 64631811 or via email: complaints@case.org.sg.

If they would like to bring up an advertising-related matter to ASAS, they can do so via email: asas@case.org.sg, or via their hotline: 64611888. The SCAP can be purchased from the CASE office at 170 Ghim Moh Road, Ulu Pandan Community Building, #05-01, Singapore 279621. More information on ASAS is available at the CASE website, www.case.org.sg.

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