

Liquor Control Victoria

Responsible Alcohol Advertising and Promotion Guidelines

VICTORIA
State
Government

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About these guidelines

Licensees have clear obligations under the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 (the Act) to serve alcohol responsibly and ensure they promote or advertise their venue or products responsibly. This is because the way alcohol is promoted and sold influences the way customers consume alcohol and how they behave.

Certain types of alcohol advertisements and promotions can encourage excessive and irresponsible alcohol consumption, which may contribute to harms such as anti-social behaviour, alcohol-related violence and disorder, and adverse health effects. Other types of advertisements and promotions may not be in the public interest or are out-of-step with community standards.

Given the harm that may be caused by inappropriate alcohol advertising or promotional practices, the Victorian Liquor Commission (the Commission) has powers under the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* (the Act) to ban advertisements or promotions it considers likely to encourage or promote irresponsible alcohol consumption, or that are otherwise not in the public interest.

These guidelines:

- explain how the Commission's banning powers are applied
- set out seven principles licensees should adhere to when advertising or promoting alcohol or their venue
- provide examples and case studies to show the types of advertisements or promotions likely to attract a banning notice by the Commission.

While it is not possible to provide examples of all the kinds of advertisements or promotions that may be banned under the Act, the principles and examples in these guidelines provide a broad picture of what is or is not considered acceptable alcohol advertising or promotion.

Application to online and social media sites

Licensees are responsible for advertisements published on social media sites (such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and Twitter). This includes comments made by third parties about alcohol advertisements or promotions on their social media or web pages, as well as advertisements or promotions conducted by third parties engaged by the licensee (such as social media influencers or brand ambassadors). Licensees must ensure that any third parties they engage in promoting or advertising their products or venue comply with the principles outlined in these guidelines.

Application to on-premises consumption and packaged alcohol supply

Advertisements and promotions can significantly influence the behaviour of people purchasing and consuming alcohol. This applies to venues that provide on-premises consumption (such as bars, clubs and restaurants) and venues that sell packaged alcohol for consumption away from the premises (such as bottle shops and businesses delivering alcohol). The principles and examples of unacceptable practices set out in these guidelines apply to all types of licensees.

Licensees operating packaged-liquor outlets or online businesses supplying packaged alcohol are encouraged to carefully consider point-of-sale marketing displayed at their premises or website to ensure advertisements and promotions do not encourage irresponsible alcohol consumption or are otherwise not in the public interest.

What does the law say?

Under section 115A of the Act, the Commission may give a notice to a licensee banning them from advertising or promoting:

- the supply of alcohol; or

- the conduct of their licensed premises.

The Commission may do this if the advertisement or promotion will likely encourage irresponsible alcohol consumption or is otherwise not in the public interest. The Act provides that advertisements or promotions that are not in the public interest include those that are:

- likely to appeal to minors
- likely to encourage or condone violence or anti-social behaviour
- directly or indirectly sexual, degrading or sexist
- prescribed under regulations as advertisements or promotions that are not in the public interest.

Advertisements or promotions can come in various forms, including:

- signs, banners, flyers and posters
- newspaper or internet advertisements
- websites
- social media channels, such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok or Twitter
- SMS.

How will the law be applied?

Step one

When the Commission is alerted to a particular advertisement or promotion (for example, by receiving a complaint or a referral or while investigating or auditing), it will apply the principles in these guidelines to assess whether the advertisement or promotion is likely to lead to irresponsible alcohol consumption or is otherwise not in the public interest.

Step two

The Commission may contact the licensee seeking a copy of the advertisement or promotion, and the licensee may wish to withdraw or modify the advertising or promotion at that stage. In certain circumstances, the Commission may immediately issue a banning notice (for example, when the ad or promotion severely contradicts the principles in these guidelines).

Step three

The Commission will assess any response received from the licensee. Should the response not result in the situation being rectified (such as amendment or advertisement modification) or an acceptable explanation, the Commission may issue a formal section 115A banning notice. Licensees may apply to the Commission to have the decision reviewed.

Step four

Failure by the licensee to comply with a banning notice may result in fines of up to 120 penalty units (\$23,077 as of 1 July 2023).

Unacceptable practices

Principle	Rationale	Examples of unacceptable practice	Case studies
Principles regarding irresponsible consumption of alcohol			
<p>1. The advertising or promotion of alcohol must not encourage the rapid or excessive consumption of alcohol, nor should it use emotive descriptions, language or imagery likely to encourage irresponsible drinking.</p>	<p>This principle aims to prevent promotions that encourage people to drink in excess or faster than they normally would. It covers promotions such as games, competitions or “dares” that encourage excessive alcohol consumption or offer alcohol as a prize.</p> <p>Emotive language or descriptions such as “drink till you drop.” may encourage rapid or excessive alcohol consumption.</p> <p>In the context of packaged alcohol, advertisements or promotions that place emphasis on the alcohol content of a product also have the potential to lead to excessive or irresponsible alcohol consumption.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sculling or speed-drinking games, boat races, “toss the boss”, and other challenges or “dares” to induce people to drink rapidly or sample a particular alcoholic drink because of its higher alcohol content. • Promoting binge-events such as “Mad Drinking Monday”, or end-of-school-year celebrations, such as “Schoolies Week” or “after parties”. • Using language, slogans, images, labelling, or titling a promotion so it encourages rapid or excessive alcohol consumption (for example, “beat the clock”, “drink like a fish”, “beer prices hammered”, “we drink till we drop”, “drink till you get smashed”). • Advertisements or promotions encouraging the consumption of a product by emphasising its strength (unless emphasis is placed on the product’s low-alcohol content relative to the typical strength of similar beverages) or the intoxicating effect of alcohol (such as promotions highlighting the number of standard drinks in a product compared to the price of the product). • Portray the refusal of alcohol or choice of abstinence in a negative light. 	<p>Previous advertisements or promotions banned by the Commission under this principle include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an advertisement published by a licensee that used the phrase “get trashed every week and get snapped”, as well as imagery of people showing signs of intoxication or general anti-social behaviour • a promotion that encouraged customers to “get hammered” and to pretend to be sober if anyone asked • an advertisement on a licensee’s social media channel that asked customers what flavour of a packaged-alcohol product made them “lose all their dignity” and asked them to raise their hand if they had been “personally victimised by that product”.

Principle	Rationale	Examples of unacceptable practice	Case studies
<p>2. The advertising or promotion of alcohol must not involve extreme discounts that would encourage excessive consumption, encourage the stockpiling of drinks, or involve free or unlimited alcohol being provided without reasonable controls in place.</p>	<p>Extreme discounts on alcohol, such as 50% off the retail price, may lead to rapid or excessive alcohol consumption by customers, particularly when the discount is for a limited time within a trading period (which may also encourage stockpiling of drinks by customers) and there are no controls in place to limit the amount consumed by customers.</p> <p>For certain types of functions, alcohol, food and entertainment is included in the entry price (for example, race day functions, fundraising events, balls or special events). In some cases, the combination of the type of event and the unlimited supply of alcohol as part of a ticket or entry price can lead to excessive drinking over a period of time, especially if the promotion primarily focuses on the availability of free alcohol and appropriate measures have not been put in place to limit the amount of alcohol consumed.</p> <p>Promoting these functions as “all-you-can-drink” or “bottomless” events can encourage a culture of irresponsible alcohol consumption, especially where no controls are in place to minimise this type of behaviour.</p> <p>Similarly, extreme discounts on packaged alcohol, particularly packaged-alcohol products that are already inexpensive, may lead to irresponsible alcohol consumption, where reasonable controls are not in place to limit the amount of packaged alcohol customers can purchase.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting “all you can drink” within a limited timeframe or providing drink cards that must be redeemed within a short period of time. • Any competition where unlimited free alcohol is the prize, or part of the prize, and consumption is expected to take place on the licensed premises. This includes free giveaways as part of a draw or something similar, which involves unlimited free alcohol (such as winning free bottomless brunches). • Advertisements highlighting the availability of free alcohol without promoting other services offered by the venue. • Promotions linked to unpredictable events (such as “free drinks after every goal scored”). • Promotions involving extreme discounts (such as \$1 shots of spirits). • Promoting packaged cask wine at 50% off the recommended retail price, without any limits on the number of casks that may be purchased by a customer. • Multiple promotions in one trading period (such as “open bar for the first 10 minutes of each hour” or multiple recurring “happy hours”). • Promotions that encourage or reward the purchase or drinking of large quantities of alcohol in a single session or transaction (such as “buy six drinks in one round and get the seventh for free”). • Discounted or free drink offers conducted in rapid succession (such as “two-for-one spirits for the first 15 minutes of every hour”). 	<p>Previous advertisements or promotions banned by the Commission under this principle include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a promotion of “TWO FOR ONE ALL DRINKS ALL DAY” on Mother’s Day • a promotion of “unlimited free beer and champagne” for two consecutive hours.

Principle	Rationale	Examples of unacceptable practice	Case studies
<p>3. The advertising or promotion of alcohol must not feature non-standard serving techniques, non-standard sized drinks or the availability of alcohol in receptacles that encourage rapid drinking.</p>	<p>There are well-recognised standard drinking receptacles used for drinking particular types of alcohol. While variations exist in different Australian jurisdictions, in Victoria, standard-size glasses are generally used for serving wine, beer and spirits, which are discussed in the approved Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) training course.</p> <p>In some cases, new and innovative ways of serving alcohol may encourage irresponsible drinking (for example, drinking receptacles such as test tubes encourage individuals to consume alcohol quickly by sculling or downing the drink in one).</p> <p>A new serving method may also mean people are less aware of how much alcohol they are consuming.</p> <p>When advertising or promoting the sale of alcohol, licensees are encouraged to use standard drinking receptacles to minimise the risk of rapid or excessive drinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving alcohol in a yard glass for sculling • Pouring alcohol straight into customers' mouths (such as pouring alcohol directly from a bottle or shooting alcohol from a water pistol). • Supplying multiple shot of alcohol for one person's consumption. • Serving spirits in a non-standard spirit's glass (such as a schooner glass). • Serving alcohol in test tubes or receptacles that are not free-standing and will thus likely be consumed rapidly. • Supplying large quantities of mixed spirits or other alcohol in jugs or other receptacles that are not intended to be shared (such as supplying champagne bottles with straws, or serving spirits, champagne or wine bottles without appropriate drinking glasses, or providing cocktails in buckets). Where the alcohol is intended to be shared, standard drinking receptacles should be provided with its purchase. 	<p>Previous advertisements or promotions banned by the Commission under this principle include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a promotion of "TWO FOR ONE ALL DRINKS ALL DAY" on Mother's Day • a promotion of "unlimited free beer and champagne" for two consecutive hours.

Principle	Rationale	Examples of unacceptable practice	Case studies
Public interest principles			
<p>4. The advertising or promotion of alcohol must not contain any directly or indirectly sexual, degrading, sexist, offensive or discriminatory content, such as sexual, degrading, sexist or offensive images, symbols, figures or innuendo which imply sexual or social success.</p>	<p>Linking alcohol promotion explicitly or implicitly with messages about achieving sexual or social success may contribute to a culture around alcohol use that places pressure on people to either drink more or to rely on alcohol as a “social lubricant” and a way of achieving social acceptance.</p> <p>Using sexual imagery in alcohol promotions or advertisements can foster message about sexual availability being linked with alcohol consumption.</p> <p>Advertisements or promotions that are insulting, offensive, or discriminatory are also not in the public interest.</p> <p>When considering whether an advertisement is offensive or not, the Commission will consider what an ordinary reasonable person within the general community would consider offensive. The use of humour is not an excuse for offensive advertisements or promotions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotions providing incentives for customers to dress provocatively or remove their clothing (such as wet T-shirt competitions, “free drinks for women wearing bikinis”, “take off an item of clothing for a free drink” or “\$50 drink card for women who hang their undies behind the bar”). • Using images that objectify women’s and men’s bodies, portraying men or women as sex objects or using sexual innuendo or sexual images, such as images depicting nudity. • Connecting alcohol consumption with achieving social or sexual success (such as “drink x brand and be the envy of all your friends”). • Discriminatory promotions based on gender or race, etc., (such as free drinks for women only) • Using language or images that are likely to insult or offend a reasonable person, or language or images that are discriminatory, vilifying or demeaning. This includes language or images that mock, ridicule or deride certain personal characteristics, such as disability. • Advertisements or promotions that use stereotypes to highlight racial differences. 	<p>Previous advertisements or promotions banned by the Commission under this principle include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a promotion encouraging customers to expose themselves in exchange for free alcohol during a drinking competition • a video advertisement on a licensee’s website depicting dialogue which uses the term “slut” with reference to animated female patrons who are handed containers of vomit after asking for any drink specials • an advertisement depicting female genitalia giving birth to a licensee’s business logo.

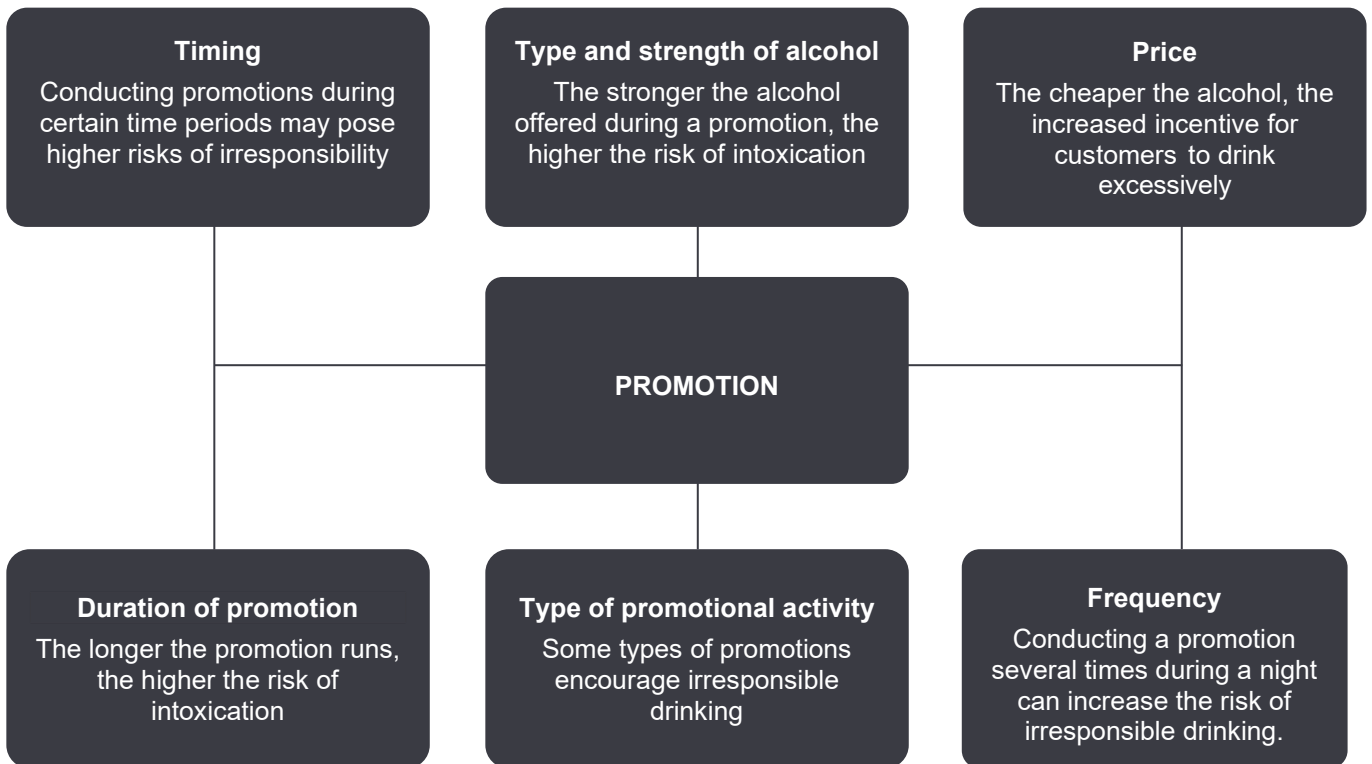
Principle	Rationale	Examples of unacceptable practice	Case studies
<p>5. The advertising or promotion of alcohol must not encourage or suggest any association with risk taking, or with violent, aggressive, dangerous or anti-social behaviour.</p>	<p>The link between alcohol misuse and violence and anti-social behaviour is well established.</p> <p>Reducing the impact of alcohol-fuelled violence and anti-social behaviour on public safety is an important community goal, and there is clearly a public interest in breaking the link between alcohol and aggressive behaviour.</p> <p>For the purpose of this guideline, anti-social behaviour covers a range of conduct including acting in a manner that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to other people, such as intimidating, bullying, aggressive or threatening behaviour. It also includes socially unacceptable behaviour (such as vandalism, rowdy or noisy behaviour, creating a public nuisance) or offensive behaviour (such as urinating in public).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using images or messages associating alcohol consumption with risky or dangerous activities (such as sky diving, motor racing, drink driving or speed boating). • Using stereotypes that link the advertising or promotion of alcohol with celebrating aggressive or risk-taking behaviour. • Associating alcohol with activities that encourage or condone aggressive behaviour towards others (such as competitions or challenges that pit customers against each other, for example, arm wrestling). 	<p>A previous advertisement or promotion banned by the Commission under this principle include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a meme posted by a licensee on social media featuring an image of a man driving a car, accompanied with the text “Clean and sober, just means that I’m showered and heading to the alcohol store”.
<p>6. The advertising or promotion of alcohol must not suggest any association with, acceptance of, or allusion to, illicit drugs, nor encourage breaking of the law.</p>	<p>In addition to being illegal, taking illicit drugs can have serious health consequences and poses risks, particularly when combined with alcohol. There is a strong public interest in upholding the law.</p> <p>Licensees should ensure they are not advertising or promoting alcohol in a way that could be seen to be encouraging or condoning breaking the law.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using images, text or language that allude to taking drugs. • Using props, settings or scenarios that link the promotion of alcohol to illicit drugs. • Linking alcohol consumption to drink driving. • Linking alcohol consumption to breaking the law, depicting people intending to break or actually breaking the law. • Showing contempt for the law. 	<p>A previous advertisement or promotion banned by the Commission under this principle include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a video promotion posted on a social media site that included comments by the licensee encouraging customers to “snort” salt from the chest of customers before drinking a tequila shot.

Principle	Rationale	Examples of unacceptable practice	Case studies
<p>7. The advertising or promotion of alcohol must not encourage underage drinking or otherwise be likely to appeal to minors (persons under 18 years of age).</p>	<p>It is illegal under the Act to sell or supply alcohol to minors. Young adults are at high risk of alcohol-related injury, including road trauma, violence and sexual coercion.</p> <p>There is a clear public interest in preventing the harms associated with drinking by minors. Licensees should exercise particular care to minimise children's exposure to alcohol advertisements and promotions.</p> <p>In addition to this principle, the Act also prohibits placing static alcohol advertisements within 150 metres of the perimeter of a school. Further information on this prohibition is available on Liquor Control Victoria's website at vic.gov.au/responsible-alcohol-advertising-and-promotions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using imagery, designs, motifs, language, interactive games, animations, or media likely to appeal to minors. • Using role models, celebrities or other testimonials that primarily appeal to minors. • Using names or packaging that could be confused with confectionary, non-alcoholic drink, or otherwise appeal to minors. • Using settings primarily used by minors (such as schools or playgrounds), including depicting models in settings primarily used by minors, even where the model used in the advertisement or promotion is over 18 years of age. • Depicting models in school uniforms or other clothing typically worn by minors, or models who are or look under 18 years of age. • Using props or characters commonly associated with minors or their interests or activities (such as cartoon characters or TV characters targeted at minors). • Showing alcohol consumption and minors in the same frame. • Advertising or promoting alcohol in connection with non-related products or services typically purchased or used by minors. • Brand identification, including logos, on clothing, toys or other merchandise for use primarily by minors. • Advertising non-alcoholic drinks that have the look and feel of an alcoholic drink to minors (such as non-alcoholic beer or wine). 	<p>Previous advertisements or promotions banned by the Commission under this principle include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the promotion of a product with packaging similar to a well-known chocolate beverage brand consumed by minors • a post by a licensee on a social media site featuring an image of a toddler, accompanied with the text "When the vodka kicks in and your confidence skyrockets".

Assessing risks when promoting alcohol consumption

Promotions at venues where customers consume on the premises

Several elements in a promotion can result in the irresponsible consumption of alcohol. When considering new alcohol promotions for their venues, licensees should carefully work through each element to assess the risks posed by the promotion. These elements interact and, in many cases, the risk that is raised by one element can be reduced or offset by adjusting another element of the promotion.



Unacceptable promotions

This is an example of a promotion that includes all the wrong elements:

- reduced-price alcohol is offered
- the promotion is offered multiple times over the course of the trading period
- the duration of the promotion is three hours
- the strength of the alcohol increases over the course of the promotion
- the promotion is conducted at a time when there is an increased risk of intoxication, particularly as the strength of the available drinks increases.

Licensees seeking to reduce the risk associated with alcohol promotions should consider the following factors:

1. **Type and strength of alcohol:** the higher the alcohol percentage by volume used in the promotion, the higher the risk that customers will become intoxicated. Consider running promotions offering lower-strength alcohol products.
2. **Price:** the cheaper the alcohol, the greater the incentive for customers to purchase and consume excessive amounts. Care should be taken with promotions involving free alcohol, especially for high-strength alcohol products. Consider limiting alcohol discounts during a promotion, ensuring any price reduction is not excessive.
3. **Duration:** the longer a promotion runs, the higher the risk of irresponsible alcohol consumption. By placing reasonable limits on the duration of their promotion, licensees can still provide opportunities to increase sales with reduced risk of irresponsible alcohol consumption (for example, a “happy hour” should not be “five hours of happiness”).
4. **Frequency:** a promotion conducted several times during a trading period can heighten the risk of irresponsible alcohol consumption (for example, “half-priced drinks for the first 10 minutes of each hour”). Consider limiting the number of promotions held during a single trading period.
5. **Timing or timeframe:** conducting promotions at certain times may pose a higher risk of irresponsible alcohol consumption. Promotions conducted before 10pm raise fewer risks as customers are less likely to have consumed excessive amounts of alcohol already and are more likely to have eaten a meal that reduces the effect of alcohol. After this time, the risk of customers becoming intoxicated increases. Licensees are encouraged not to conduct promotions at high-risk times.
6. **Type of activity:** the nature of the promotion itself may contribute to a culture of excessive or irresponsible drinking. For example, competitions, games, “dares” or challenges can incentivise customers to drink more. Licensees should carefully consider the type of promotion they are conducting.

Responsible promotions relating to on-premises consumption

Licensees can make many good decisions about promotions in their venue to reduce the risk of irresponsible alcohol consumption.

These include:

- restricting the duration, timing and frequency of “happy hours” and free or discounted drinks promotions
- ensuring controlled distribution of “drink cards” and allowing their redemption beyond a single trading period (for example, redeeming a “drink card” over a one-month period)
- adopting a serving policy that restricts the number of drinks customers can obtain during a promotional period
- offering non-alcohol prizes or rewards for competitions (for example, meal vouchers or free entry or movie tickets)
- conducting promotions involving low and non-alcoholic drinks
- pricing drinks to encourage customers to drink in moderation (for example, low and non-alcoholic drinks may be priced lower than full-strength drinks)

- incorporating responsible drinking messages into advertisements and promotions
- ensuring promotions and advertisements clearly state they are intended for people aged 18 years and over
- referring any third-party promoters engaged in promoting a venue to these guidelines and maintaining firm control and oversight of activities undertaken on the licensee's behalf.

Conducting responsible promotions should be supported by responsible alcohol-serving strategies to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for customers.

These strategies may include:

- helping customers make informed decisions about their alcohol consumption by standardising servings or raising awareness of the number of standard measures in the serving being consumed
- offering free tap water regularly and ensuring food is available
- establishing and implementing policies and procedures to ensure all staff understand and observe responsible serving practices
- designating staff (RSA marshals) to monitor and coordinate the responsible serving of alcohol in high-risk premises to help reduce the risk of alcohol-related harm
- ensuring adequate security is on hand at peak trading times and providing briefings to security and service staff, emphasising the need to identify potential issues before they become problems
- having written house policies regarding a venue's strict adherence to RSA principles and communicating these to customers, including making customers aware of responsible drinking laws and that inappropriate behaviour and intoxication will not be tolerated
- ensuring minors and intoxicated people are not served alcohol
- displaying all required signage prominently
- operating venues within any prescribed patron capacity
- promoting safe transport options.

Responsible promotions relating to packaged-alcohol supply

Licensees can make a range of good decisions about promoting packaged alcohol to reduce the risk of irresponsible consumption. These include:

- placing limits on the quantity of discounted packaged alcohol that a customer can purchase at any given time
- conducting promotions involving low alcohol or alcohol that normally retails at higher prices
- ensuring any discounts on packaged alcohol are reasonable and not extreme
- not emphasising the strength of the alcohol or its intoxicating effect
- incorporating responsible drinking messages into any advertisements or promotions.

Responsible promotion should also be supported by responsible service of alcohol strategies, particularly at packaged liquor outlets. These strategies include:

- establishing and implementing policies and procedures to ensure all staff understand and observe responsible serving practices
- considering observing customers and refusing service to customers who frequent your store to purchase packaged alcohol several times a day
- maintaining a register of RSA-related incidents
- ensuring minors and intoxicated people are not supplied with alcohol, including refusing service where secondary supply to minors is suspected.

Other resources and national guidelines

Licensees are encouraged to consider other resources available in relation to responsible alcohol advertisements and promotions, such as the ABAC Responsible Alcohol Marketing Code (ABAC Code), which outlines key standards for responsible content and placement of alcohol marketing in Australia. Licensees may apply to have their marketing communications independently assessed by ABAC pre-vetters against the Code's standards. Further information on the ABAC Code and the pre-vetting procedure is available at abac.org.au

National rules also apply to alcohol advertisements on television. Information on these rules may be accessed on the Australian Communications and Media Authority website at acma.gov.au

Complaints

Complaints about inappropriate alcohol advertising and promotions should be made via LCV's website: vic.gov.au/complaints-liquor-industry

Liquor Control Victoria PO Box 1019, Richmond 3121
P: 1300 182 457 E: contact@liquor.vic.gov.au
liquor.vic.gov.au