[GB] Complaints on Placement of Advertising Breaks in Imported US Series Upheld

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The British regulator, Ofcom, has upheld complaints in a significant decision relating to advertising breaks in the series `Lost' broadcast by Channel 4.

A number of viewers and one television company had complained about the amount of advertising and the placement of commercial breaks in the imported US series. The net length of each episode, without breaks, was around 41 minutes; it was however placed in a 65 minute slot. It contained three advertising breaks, usually of 3 minutes 50 seconds each with a longer end break of 5-7 minutes. In addition, sponsor credits and programme trailers were broadcast, and each episode started with a reprise of key events for up to 5 minutes, thereby creating the impression of an excess of commercial material. However, the maximum amount of advertising allowed in each hour, 12 minutes, had not been exceeded.

Three internal breaks was also an acceptable number. However, section 5.4 of Ofcom's Rules on the Amount and Distribution of Advertising requires that a period of at least 20 minutes should normally elapse between successive internal breaks in programmes (from the start of one break to the start of the next). This rule had not been complied with on a number of occasions; in one episode separations were only of 10 minutes 54 seconds and of 12 minutes 53 seconds. The need to schedule breaks only at natural interruptions of programme continuity permits departure from the rule occasionally where this better serves the interests of the viewer, but Ofcom decided that this does not permit routine departures from the rule across an entire series. The country of origin of a series and the peculiarities of a drama do not provide a valid reason for such a failure to comply with a key requirement of the scheduling rules.

Ofcom, Broadcast Bulletin 48, 21 November 2005, p. 1

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv/obb/prog_cb/pcb47/

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