[GB] Regulator Permits Sponsorship of Commercial Television and Radio Channels

IRIS 2007-1:1/19

Tony Prosser
University of Bristol Law School

Although sponsorship of programmes has been allowed in the United Kingdom for fifteen years, sponsorship of channels has so far not been permitted. The Office of Communications (Ofcom) has announced that, after extensive consultation, it has decided to amend its Broadcasting Code to permit the sponsorship of commercial television channels and radio stations.

Important safeguards are retained to preserve editorial integrity and to protect children. Originally Ofcom had proposed that channels which contained programmes which could not be sponsored (news and current affairs) could not themselves be sponsored. After the consultation, this was amended so that any channel may be sponsored so long as the amount of programming that cannot be sponsored is limited. Thus channels that broadcast short hourly news bulletins can be sponsored. Similarly, certain product categories are banned from sponsoring certain kinds of programmes; thus alcohol brands may not sponsor children's programmes and gambling companies may not sponsor programmes aimed at those under 18. Once more the new rules will permit sponsorship of channels which contain only a limited amount of unsponsorable content (thus an alcohol company could not sponsor a children's channel) and there must be clear sponsorship messages that do not suggest that unsponsorable content is included in the sponsorship arrangement. Credits for the channel sponsor must not appear in or around programmes that cannot be sponsored and credits should not suggest that these programmes are included in the sponsorship.

Other safeguards are that viewers must be made aware of the sponsorship arrangement and the sponsor's credits must be separated from all other editorial and advertising content. The sponsor's presence on the channel should not be unduly prominent, and broadcasters will not be permitted to name a channel after the sponsor. However, a company with a brand known in another field (for example a football club) will, as at present, be able to be granted a broadcasting licence in its own right, with editorial responsibility for all programme output. Ofcom is to publish further guidance for broadcasters.

Ofcom Press Release of 25/10/06, "Sponsorship of Commercial Television and Radio Channels"

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media/news/2006/10/nr_20061025

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026