[GB] Regulator Proposes to Simplify Rules on Distribution of Advertising

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Ofcom, the UK communications regulator, has proposed changes in the rules relating to the distribution of television advertising. These reflect the provisions in the new Audiovisual Media Services Directive (see IRIS 2008-1: 5).

Currently, the rules applied to most TV channels reflect those in the Television Without Frontiers Directive and limit advertising to no more than an average of nine minutes per hour plus three minutes for teleshopping, with no more than 12 minutes advertising in each hour. There must be a break of 20 minutes between advertising slots, which must be taken during natural breaks in programmes. Stricter rules are applied to the five public service channels (ITV1, GMTV, Channel 4, Five and S4C), where the limit is an hourly average of seven minutes with a maximum of 12 minutes in each hour; at peak hours the average must be no more than eight minutes of advertising per hour; there may be only one break in a half-hour programme.

Ofcom now proposes that the rule requiring a 20 minute break between advertising slots should be scrapped; however some limits on the frequency of advertising breaks should be retained. For the moment, the current rules for public service channels will be retained and limits will be put in place for other channels, which will maintain the same frequency as under the 20-minute rule. The rules on natural breaks will be simplified and restrictions on advertising in particular types of programmes will be removed; for example, films may be interrupted every 30 minutes rather than the current 45 minutes, and restrictions on advertising breaks in current affairs and religious programmes will be lifted.

Ofcom is also consulting on how much advertising is allowed on television, and whether stricter rules should continue to apply to public service channels, although it has not yet made firm proposals in these areas.

On the distribution of advertising, the new rules will come into effect by 1 January 2009 at the latest and, on the amount of advertising, by the beginning of 2010.

Ofcom, 'Review of Television Advertising and Teleshopping Regulation', 19 March 2008

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/rada/

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