[GB] New Rules on Product Placement

IRIS 2011-3:1/21

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Ofcom, the UK communications regulator, has issued new rules on product placement following the Government's decision to permit it subject to restrictions (see IRIS 2010-8/33). The new rules are contained in the revised Broadcast Code and came into effect on 28 February 2011.

Product placement is allowed in films (including dramas and documentaries), TV series (including soaps), entertainment shows and sports programmes. The new rules clarify that single dramas fall within the genre of 'films made for television' where product placement may take place. But it will be prohibited in all children's and news programmes and in UK-produced current affairs, consumer affairs and religious programmes. A product, service or trade cannot be product placed if it is prohibited from being advertised on television or falls within a category where product placement is prohibited. These include tobacco, alcohol, gambling, foods or drinks that are high in fat, salt or sugar, medicines and baby milk.

The rules state that product placement must not impair broadcasters' editorial independence and must always be editorially justified, seeking to prevent programmes being created or distorted as vehicles for product placement. Ofcom is issuing a universal visual logo which must be used to signal the presence of product placement; this must appear for three seconds at the beginning and end of programmes and after advertising breaks. Ofcom will also formally request broadcasters to undertake an audience awareness campaign about the logo. The product placement rules will be applied to paid-for references to products, services and trademarks that are included in a television programme for a non-commercial purpose. They will also be applied to the placement of products by sponsors in the programmes they are sponsoring and internal credits may be broadcast by sponsors in programmes they are sponsoring, unless they fall within the categories where product placement is prohibited.

Other amendments to the Broadcast Code include introducing a consumer protection principle, prohibiting surreptitious advertising and requiring the cost of premium services to be made clear.

Ofcom: "Broadcasting Code Review: Commercial References in Television Programmes", 20 December 2010

http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/bcrtv2010/statement/

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