

## DSICA Column – National Liquor News – April 2007

### “Drink Moderately”

By Gordon Broderick

‘Corporate Social Responsibility’ or ‘CSR’ has been a buzz-word for more than a decade now. CSR basically means that an organisation should take into account broader social, economic and environmental consequences of their activities, whereas the traditional view is that an organisation only has a duty to its shareholders, so long as it operates within the bounds of the law. For the record, DSICA supports corporate social responsibility and we wish to highlight that CSR in the alcohol industry can be traced back decades.

For example, the following advertisement was released by Seagram Whiskey in 1934:

“On one point all thoughtful men have always agreed. On one point all connoisseurs in the art of enjoyable living have always agreed. The lasting enjoyment of the pleasures of life depends on *moderation* ... the pleasure of gracious living is possible only to the man who drinks good aged whiskey and drinks moderately.

“Whiskey cannot take the place of milk, bread or meat ... on our part we feel so strongly that we say – the House of Seagram does not want a dollar that should be spent of the necessities of life ...

“Therefore, the lesson of generations of experience is not inapplicable to the problems of today. The principle of moderation is not at variance with what common sense suggests as the right course for us today. Drink moderately ... drink better whiskey.”<sup>1</sup>

The subtext of course is ‘buy Seagram’s whisky’ - but the message of consuming alcohol responsibly is undeniably there. In addition, in 1937 Seagram began a series of advertisement against drink driving with the slogan ‘Drinking and driving do not mix’. This message is echoed today – almost verbatim – in official anti-drink driving campaigns.

Back in the 1930s explicit messages from alcohol companies promoting responsible drinking were not the norm. However, today all this has changed.

As part of CSR, practically all large alcohol companies now emphasise moderation and responsible drinking as part of their product experience. For example, all DSICA members have ‘responsible drinking’ policies and promote these in Australia and/or overseas.

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<sup>1</sup> Advertisement reproduced in: Lord, T., 1979, *The World Guide to Spirits*, Rigby, p. 199

Perhaps the most significant industry action in terms promoting moderation is the alcohol industry's establishment and funding of *DrinkWise Australia*. *DrinkWise Australia* is an independent organisation focused on promoting change towards a more responsible drinking culture in Australia. As part of this its aims to maximise any benefits and minimise the harm from alcohol consumption.

DrinkWise Australia's approach involves pursuing an effective means of addressing irresponsible drinking while maximising the positive health and social impacts of responsible drinking. This approach will be underpinned by the application of evidence-based policies necessary to influence both adverse patterns of drinking and the harm caused by chronic excessive alcohol intake.

Returning to the responsible drinking message. Unfortunately there are some sections of academia that disparage the alcohol industry's efforts to promote the responsible drinking message. For example, a recent article appeared in the *Journal of Consumer Marketing* calling into question the effectiveness of 'responsible' drinking campaigns. The article argues that responsible drinking campaigns are tied to an outdated model of alcohol abuse prevention that is no longer in 'vogue' ... and that ... the responsible decision-making model blames the user for alcohol abuse.<sup>2</sup>

DSICA flatly reject this argument. It appears that the alcohol industry is damned if they do and damned if they don't. Readers can imagine the outcry from health advocates if the alcohol industry stopped its moderation message. DSICA also rejects that the moderation message blames the user – they do however seek to remind drinkers that there are consequences for alcohol misuse.

DSICA does not hold out the responsible drinking messages by themselves are a panacea for alcohol misuse. We do, however, consider that the industry has a vital role to play and that such messages are important in the overall scheme of harm reduction. So it is without hesitation that I remind readers and their customers that "The lasting enjoyment of the pleasures of life depends on *moderation* ..."

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<sup>2</sup> Wolburg, J.M, 'How responsible are 'responsible' drinking campaigns for preventing alcohol abuse?', *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 22, Number 4, 2005, pp. 176-177