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Self-regulation of Ads in Singapore

We refer to the letter (Sales ads: Self-regulation doesn't work; 18 Aug) which mentioned that the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS) is not the right organisation to ensure that all advertisers conform to acceptable standards.

ASAS consists of multiple motivated stakeholders such as advertisers, advertising agencies, government agencies, media owners, and other supporting organisations and so no one group dominates. The advertising industry and ASAS co-exist and operate well in a self-regulatory environment, where the stakeholders are motivated to make self-regulation work. This self-regulatory regime has been effective since its inception in 1976. Advertisers are aware of and generally adhere to ASAS' Singapore Code of Advertising Practice (SCAP) whose premise is that all advertisements should be legal, decent, honest and truthful.

In the review process, advertisers may be asked to revise their advertisements, failing which to withdraw them altogether, to avoid providing inaccurate or misleading information. Advertisers who do not comply with SCAP risk media owners' withholding of advertising space or time, as well as the withdrawal of trading privileges from advertising agencies. There is the additional sanction of adverse publicity through the publication of details of the outcome of ASAS' investigation, in extreme cases. So far, most advertisers have acted responsibly.

Consumer protection is important. ASAS provides an avenue for consumers to give feedback and keep in check errant advertisers. ASAS, a Council of the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE), works closely with CASE to deal with cases that breach the Consumer Protection Fair Trading Act (CPFTA). ASAS will also be looking into outreach programmes targeted at advertisers and consumers so that they are familiar with SCAP as well as the standards acceptable to the community.

CASE would like to advise consumers to be critical when looking at advertisements and making the decision to purchase the product or service. Advertisements are by nature designed to highlight the positive aspects of the product and service, and consumers can always look for alternative viewpoints in independent product reviews or online forums. It is up to the consumer to do their own initial research and make a smart purchase decision.

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