



Social media condemned for alcohol marketing

Melissa Davey

HEALTH

AUSTRALIA'S peak medical body has censured the social media giant Facebook for allowing alcohol companies to target children.

The Australian Medical Association released its report yesterday into the alcohol industry's growing profile in social media circles.

Within hours of the release of the report, Facebook representatives sought a meeting with the association to discuss their criticisms.

Social media sites offered numerous advertising opportunities for alcohol marketers, the report found. Boxed ads for alcohol were appearing alongside user profiles and conversations, while companies were setting up their own Facebook pages that people of any age could "like". Facebook pages could be used to invite users to events, parties and competitions sponsored by alcohol companies, targeting children in an indirect way.

"Social networking sites such as

Facebook and Myspace are honing a more aggressive and insidious form of marketing that tracks online conversations and profiles, and tailors specific marketing accordingly," the report said.

"Digital technologies are creating unprecedented intimacies between children and marketers."

The summit, held at Parliament House, also called on the government to launch a federal inquiry into alcohol marketing that could force the industry to hand over highly-prized advertising strategies and market research.

The report was released at National Alliance for Action on Alcohol, and its chair, Mike Daube, said the head of policy and communications for Facebook Australia and New Zealand, Mia Garlick, had recognised summit attendees were highly concerned about the impact of social media.

"We will be meeting with Facebook to talk about the promotion of alcohol through that medium," Professor Daube said. "I think what we can expect is for them to come up with ... better controls to protect young people."

He said it was government regulators and policy makers that needed to more heavily regulate the alcohol industry and called for irresponsible alcohol advertisers to be "named and shamed" and for independent controls to be imposed on alcohol advertisers.

"Those attending the summit were absolutely unanimous that the current self-regulating system used by alcohol companies is busted," Professor Daube said. "They have failed us and it is clear the community is now also seriously concerned about how pervasive alcohol marketing is."

The president of the Australian Medical Association, Steve Hambleton, said marketing through social video channels, interactive games and mobile phones had important implications for public policy.

He told the summit 90 per cent of Australian children were exposed to alcohol by the age of 14. "It is time for a proper inquiry ... which exposes the failure of the current regime and proposes realistic and enforceable government sanctions," he said.

'The current self-regulating system used by alcohol companies is busted.' **Mike Daube, National Alliance for Action on Alcohol**