



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 9 to 10

**About the Author:** MediaSmarts

*Production of this lesson has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada.*

# Alcohol on the Web



This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools:

<http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.

## Overview

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In this lesson, students explore issues surrounding the marketing of alcoholic beverages on the Internet. The lesson begins with a class discussion about personal experiences on alcohol industry websites, followed by a summary of the research findings of the U.S. Center for Media Education (CME) and Center on Alcohol Advertising to Youth on alcohol advertising on the Web. In addition, students become familiar with existing Canadian guidelines on the broadcasting of advertisements for alcoholic beverages and discuss the challenges of applying these guidelines to Web content. In groups, students deconstruct and evaluate current beer, liquor and wine websites using a checklist of youth-friendly marketing techniques. Group findings are presented to the class.

**Note to Teacher:** *In this lesson students will be visiting alcohol websites which, in theory, are not intended for minors. Because of this, you may wish to have parental permission before sending the kids into sites that are nominally age-restricted.*

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will demonstrate an awareness of:

- the Internet as a sophisticated marketing tool
- the techniques used by online marketers to attract kids and teens
- the issues surrounding alcohol websites and youth
- their own responses and those of their peers to youth-oriented Web content

recognition of:

- “youth-friendly” features on adult-oriented websites

an appreciation of:

- the challenges relating to regulation of Internet content
- elements of design on commercial websites



## Preparation and Materials

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- Photocopy the student handouts *Alcohol Advertising on the Web*, *CRTC Code for Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages on Radio and TV*, and *Alcohol on the Web Checklist*
- Photocopy the alcohol website overheads: *Radio MaliBoom Boom*, *Ciroc Vodka* and *Bud Light Lime Canada Facebook Page*
- Photocopy the *Group Evaluation Assessment Rubric*

## Procedure

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### Class Discussion

Today we're going to look at issues surrounding alcohol advertising to youth on the Internet.

Before we begin, the first question that needs to be answered is why alcohol producers would want to target young people in the first place. Any suggestions? *(The alcohol industry needs new drinkers because the drinking population is aging, consumption is dropping and brand competition is getting fiercer. If alcohol companies don't attract young drinkers, they will continue the downhill track they've been on for the past 20 years. By recruiting young people, the industry is developing a lifetime's worth of brand loyalty.)*

Let's move on to alcohol advertising on the Web.

- Have you or your friends ever visited an alcohol website, watched an alcohol-related video (for instance, a beer ad on YouTube), "liked" an alcohol brand's Facebook page or used an alcohol-related app or game?
- If so, for what products?
- Did you have to get past an age disclaimer? Was this a problem?
- Where did you get the idea to visit the site? *(from a URL in an ad, from a friend, personal interest/curiosity, and so on.)*
- Generally, did you enjoy it? Is it something you would use or visit again?
- What activities or features did it offer?
- What features did you like most?
- Would you say this site was similar to or different from other websites (videos, apps, games, etc.) for teens? What are the similarities? What are the differences?

Distribute the handout *Alcohol Advertising on the Web* and give students time to read it.

Ask students:

1. For alcohol producers, what makes the Internet such an attractive medium for reaching young people? *(It's a cool, youth-oriented environment, kids are usually online without parental supervision, it's difficult to legislate, it's interactive and provides opportunities to engage youth through online activities, it permits the collection of data from individuals through games, contests and memberships.)*



2. What is relational marketing? (*Relational marketing is the building of community around a brand or product.*)
3. Why is the concept of “virtual community” important to marketers? (*Surveys show that most young people see the Internet as a communication and socialization tool. As a result, companies offer young people “virtual communities” or forums where they can interact and talk with like-minded people. Marketers value these “virtual communities” for a number of reasons:*
  - *They attract a specific target audience.*
  - *They bring visitors back again and again.*
  - *They provide a place to promote and sell products, collect demographic and product use information, and interact one-on-one with consumers.*
  - *They build consumer loyalty.*
4. In its survey, the Center for Media Education (CME) found more “youth-friendly” websites for beer and liquor than for wine. Why might this be so? (This reflects existing drinking patterns of consumption by young people. Beer is the number one alcoholic beverage consumed by teens, followed by liquor (especially “alcopop” – malt liquor beverages). Wine is not the beverage of choice for most teens and generally targets an older market.)

We’re going to examine a few alcohol company websites and social network pages. Can you identify the features that might make them attractive to kids and teens?

(Project the *Radio MaliBoom Boom* screen capture.)

Discussion Points:

The most notable feature of this site is its use of interactive elements that rely on a webcam like the “Mix a Drink,” “Do the MaliBoom Boom” dance and “Spin like a DJ” games. The Facebook “Like” button at bottom left allows users to promote the game to their friends, giving the company free advertising.

(Project the *Ciroc Vodka* screen capture.)

Discussion Points:

Alcohol companies use YouTube to launch “viral marketing” campaigns. Buyers post and share ads like this one – often ads that either were rejected for TV or were never intended to be broadcasted. Here, *Ciroc Vodka* uses two performers popular with young people – Diddy and comedian and actor Aziz Ansari – to make their product seem hip, cool and funny. Because of the way that YouTube shows “related content”, this might easily be shown to someone who had watched an unrelated video featuring either Ansari or Diddy.

(Project the *Bud Light Lime Canada Facebook Page* screen capture.)

Discussion Points:

One way alcohol companies reach teenagers is through social media sites like Facebook. Unlike alcohol company websites, which have at least token attempts to prevent underage kids from accessing them, most Facebook pages can



be accessed by anyone with a Facebook account. Because they're interactive, Facebook pages give alcohol companies an opportunity to build relationships with consumers. Alcohol companies also encourage consumers to start their own "fan" pages, such as the "Bring Bud Light Lime to Canada" page which was started when that brand was introduced in the US.

One of the biggest problems relating to kids accessing alcohol websites is the fact that these sites aren't regulated in the same way that more traditional forms of alcohol advertising are. Although there are laws in Canada and the U.S. that apply to electronic marketing to kids, these laws apply to kids' websites. Because websites for alcohol sites are considered to be adult environments, these laws don't apply.

- How do alcohol websites let users know that they are intended for adults? (*Through the use of age disclaimers, where visitors must confirm that they are of legal drinking age before entering.*)
- Do you think these age disclaimers prevent or discourage teens from visiting these sites? Why or why not?

Distribute the *CRTC Code for Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages on Radio and TV* handout and review with students. These are the guidelines that apply to the broadcast of alcohol ads in Canada. Think of the websites we've just looked at. Did any violate these guidelines? (*Review overheads if necessary.*)

### Group Activity

Divide the class into four groups.

For this assignment, each group will deconstruct websites for beer, wine and liquor. Groups may either choose from the list provided or select an alcoholic beverage that is commonly advertised in teen-oriented magazines such as *Spin*, *Vibe*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Rolling Stone*. Students will also be asked to compare one corporate website to a site for one of its beverages.

Suggested websites:

#### Group One

- Budweiser Beer: [www.budweiser.com](http://www.budweiser.com)
- Anheuser-Busch Corporate website: [www.anheuser-busch.com](http://www.anheuser-busch.com)
- Absolut Vodka: [www.absolut.com](http://www.absolut.com)
- Arbor Mist: [www.arbormist.com](http://www.arbormist.com)

#### Group Two

- Molson Canadian Beer: [www.molsoncanadian.ca](http://www.molsoncanadian.ca)
- Rickard's: <http://www.rickards.ca/en/index.aspx>
- Cuervo Tequila: [www.cuervo.com](http://www.cuervo.com)
- Kittling Ridge Wines: [www.kittlingridge.com](http://www.kittlingridge.com)



**Group Three**

- Coors Beer: [www.coors.com](http://www.coors.com)
- Molson Coors Corporate website: [www.molsoncoors.com](http://www.molsoncoors.com)
- Captain Morgan Rum: [www.captainmorgan.com](http://www.captainmorgan.com)
- Robert Mondavi Winery: [www.robertmondaviwinery.com](http://www.robertmondaviwinery.com)

**Group Four**

- Heineken: <http://www.heineken.com/ca/AgeGateway.aspx>
  - MillerCoors Corporate website: [www.millercoors.com](http://www.millercoors.com)
  - Skyy Vodka: [www.skyy.com](http://www.skyy.com)
  - Fetzer Estates: [www.fetzer.com](http://www.fetzer.com)
- 1) Using the *Alcohol on the Web Checklist*, students will deconstruct various alcohol websites and determine the intended target audience for each site.
  - 2) In addition to completing the checklist, students will also record specific details about any youth-oriented features they come across.
  - 3) As a group, students will decide on the overall messaging about drinking that's promoted on each site.
  - 4) Students will also note whether any of the websites would contravene existing CRTC guidelines.
  - 5) As part of this assignment, students will compare a corporate website with the website for one of its products. *(In addition to comparing target audience, purpose and features, is there any contradiction between messaging on the corporate site and messages about alcohol on the product site?)*

Once groups have completed their evaluations, they will present their findings in class. *(Students may wish to use free software such as SnagIt to create overheads of specific Web pages.)*

As part of their presentation, students will consider the CME recommendations from *Alcohol Advertising on the Web* and provide their own recommendations or guidelines for alcohol websites.

Once presentations are finished, ask students to consider the following:

- Compared with earlier sites for alcohol, would you say that, generally, today's alcohol sites are more or less likely to appeal to teens?
- What role does cross-marketing (*that is, promoting websites through magazine ads, commercials or contests*) play in attracting underage consumers to alcohol websites?
- Do you believe alcohol advertising through the Internet is a more or a less effective way to build brand loyalty and recognition than through traditional commercials on TV and in magazines?

**Evaluation**

Teachers or students can use the *Group Evaluation Assessment Rubric* to evaluate group presentations.



## Alcohol Advertising on the Web



Alcohol companies have taken enthusiastically to online platforms as a way of reaching potential buyers. In the United Kingdom, spending on online ads overtook spending on TV ads in September 2009.(1) The Web makes it easy for alcohol marketers to blur the lines between marketing and entertainment: one study found that half of kids who saw alcohol websites didn't recognize that they were advertising.(2)

And, with its large youth demographic, the Web is a natural medium for reaching and influencing young drinkers. Most websites for alcohol brands ask you to give your age before accessing the content, but accept whatever birth date the user enters. Alcohol brand accounts on social networks such as Twitter or video sites like YouTube are even easier to access. (Facebook does restrict alcohol-related content, based on the birth date the user entered when he or she first registered. Unfortunately, many Facebook users lie about their age to register before they turn 13.)

A study of websites operated by the four main alcohol brands in the United Kingdom found that they contained messaging that violated alcohol advertising codes by:

- appealing to youth, social success, masculinity and femininity
- suggesting that alcohol might be essential and that the success of a social occasion depends upon alcohol
- suggesting that alcohol can improve your mood
- linking alcoholic drinks to sexual success
- associating alcohol with success in sports (3)



Researchers have found that there are several different types of online alcohol sites that are geared towards different audiences. Generally, sites for microbreweries and wine companies target older customers, but many commercial sites for beer and liquor companies seem specifically designed to appeal to college and high school students. One report concluded: "These sites exude a joyful abandon about drinking: that it is good, clean, sexy and rebellious fun that doesn't hurt anybody."

A 1997 report by the Center for Media Education in the United States identified several strategies used by alcohol sites to attract young people, and most of these are still used today:

- Ineffective age disclaimers that do nothing to prevent underage visitors from accessing the site
- Glorification of youth culture, featuring hip, attitude-laden language, humour, music, popular performers, movie reviews and other events that would appeal to youth (many alcohol companies have their own YouTube channels and online radio stations)



- Recipes, especially for “bridge” drinks – sweet alcoholic drinks that are designed to encourage new drinkers to try hard alcohol (although alcohol websites have toned down their interactive elements, one feature that’s still commonly found is a “virtual drink mixer”)
- Information about rock concerts, company-sponsored sporting events, and links to other “cool sites”
- Funky virtual communities designed around the product brand
- Branded gimmicks such as the keychain “key” mailed to those who signed up for the Heineken virtual community (4)

Since that report was released, alcohol companies have come up with new ways of using digital media for advertising:

- Presence on social networks, both by creating official pages (Southern Comfort now puts most of its marketing budget into Facebook) and encouraging user-created fan pages
- Apps and widgets that help promote the product, such as a Bacardi party invitation app
- Viral marketing campaigns such as contests that encourage buyers to post videos promoting the product
- Loyalty programs run through email and company websites
- Smartphone apps that let users play games and simulate drinking
- Ad campaigns that use multiple online platforms

All of these factors allow alcohol marketers to bypass the rules and regulations of traditional media to reach young people. As Ann Dowsett Johnston, author of *Drink: The Intimate Relationship Between Women and Alcohol*, puts it, “If you’re an underage drinker, it isn’t so much the ad you’re seeing on television, but ‘pull’ marketing, where you’re Googling a vodka company and Facebook friending it.” (6)

Today, alcohol brands continue to use digital media to build brand loyalty and promote drinking as a fun, harmless and desirable activity. Currently, there is no legislation in either Canada or the United States that prohibits alcohol sites from using techniques that might appeal to underage drinkers.

- (1) “*Routes to Magic: The Alcoholic Beverage Industry’s Use of New Media in Alcohol Marketing*. University of Stirling, March 2010.
- (2) *Alcohol Advertising: the Effectiveness of Current Regulatory Codes in Addressing Community Concerns*. Australian National Preventive Health Agency, December 2012.
- (3) “*Routes to Magic: The Alcoholic Beverage Industry’s Use of New Media in Alcohol Marketing*. University of Stirling, March, 2010.
- (4) *Absolut Web*, Center for Media Education, 1997.
- (5) *Alcohol Advertising in New Media*, European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing, 2009.
- (6) Elizabeth Gonzalez, “Are Alcohol Ads Targeting Kids?” *The Consumer Eagle*, March 29, 2014. <<http://www.consumereagle.com/2014/03/29/are-alcohol-ads-targeting-kids/>>



## CRTC Code for Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages on Radio and TV

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The CRTC's Code for Broadcast Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages contains 17 guidelines that outline what commercial messages for alcoholic beverages may and may not do. According to the code, ads for alcohol should not:

- attempt to influence non-drinkers of any age to drink or to purchase alcoholic beverages
- be directed at persons under the legal drinking age, associate any such product with youth or youth symbols, or portray persons under the legal drinking age or persons who could reasonably be mistaken for such persons in a context where any such product is being shown or promoted
- portray the product in the context of, or in relation to, an activity attractive primarily to people under the legal drinking age
- contain an endorsement of the product, personally or by implication, either directly or indirectly, by any person, character or group who is, or is likely to be, a role model for minors because of a past or present position of public trust, special achievement in any field of endeavour, association with charities and/or advocacy activities benefitting children, reputation or exposure in the mass media
- attempt to establish the product as a status symbol, a necessity for the enjoyment of life or an escape from life's problems, or attempt to establish that consumption of the product should take precedence over other activities
- imply directly or indirectly that social acceptance, social status, personal success or business or athletic achievement may be acquired, enhanced or reinforced through consumption of the product
- imply directly or indirectly that the presence or consumption of alcohol is, in any way, essential to the enjoyment of an activity or an event
- portray any such product, or its consumption, in an immoderate way
- exaggerate the importance or effect of any aspect of the product or its packaging
- show or use language that suggests, in any way, product misuse or product dependency, compulsive behaviour, urgency of need or urgency of use
- use imperative language to urge people to purchase or consume the product
- introduce the product in such a way or at such a time that it may be associated with the operation of any vehicle or conveyance requiring skill
- introduce the product in such a way or at such a time as may associate the product with any activity requiring a significant degree of skill, care or mental alertness or involving an obvious element of danger
- contain inducements to prefer an alcoholic beverage because of its higher alcohol content
- refer to the feeling and effect caused by alcohol consumption or show or convey the impression, by behaviour or comportment, that the people depicted in the message are under the influence of alcohol
- portray persons with any such product in situations in which the consumption of alcohol is prohibited, or
- contain scenes in which any such product is consumed or that give the impression, visually or in sound, that it is being or has been consumed



## Alcohol on the Web Checklist

Web Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Product: \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth-Oriented Techniques

Search the website you have selected for the following techniques. If further information or explanation is required, make notes on an additional page:

Technique	Yes	No	“Teen Appeal” of activity or technique
Streaming music or video			1 2 3 4 5
Branded merchandise			1 2 3 4 5
Games/contests/activities			1 2 3 4 5
Age disclaimer			1 2 3 4 5
“Bridge” drinks			1 2 3 4 5
Slang/youth-oriented language			1 2 3 4 5
Cross-marketing with TV or other online ads			1 2 3 4 5
Apps or widgets			1 2 3 4 5
Information on music/film/art			1 2 3 4 5
Sports information			1 2 3 4 5
Community building			1 2 3 4 5
Email activities			1 2 3 4 5
Loyalty programs			1 2 3 4 5
Social network links			1 2 3 4 5
Brand spokescharacters			1 2 3 4 5
Messages about responsible drinking			Would these messages resonate with teens?
Use of “sex”			1 2 3 4 5
Other:			

Overall rating for youth appeal: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary target audience: \_\_\_\_\_



## Alcohol Websites: Radio Maliboom Boom

MALIBU radio maliboom boom VIDEO SHOOT

Mix a drink!

Do the MaliBoom Boom dance!

Spin like a DJ

Don't have a camera?  
[Check out this video!](#)

Like 3,445 people like this. Be the first of your friends. Terms and Conditions | POWERED BY xodcast

Downloadable content is intended for adults of legal drinking age and older.  
Do not forward to individuals under the legal drinking age. Get Your Island On Responsibly. Always Drink in Moderation.  
Malibu® Caribbean Rum With Coconut Liqueur. 21% - 24% Alc/Vol. ©2010 Pernod Ricard USA, Purchase, NY.

## Alcohol Websites: Ciroc Vodka

YouTube <sup>CA</sup>

Upload
Google AdSense

**CÎROC VODKA: Smooth Off- Diddy & Aziz Ansari**

**DankFiles** 1 video 505,287

Subscribe 48

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**Uploaded on 3 Jun 2010**  
 Check out my music blog! <http://tipsylights.com> The makers of CÎROC Ultra Premium vodka debut their 'Perfectly Smooth' ad campaign featuring Sean "Diddy" Combs and a surprise, up-and-coming... [Show more](#)

**Top Comments**

**KrakenStudios** 8 months ago  
 Awesome ad, but I still think Aziz should have won that Smooth-Off.  
 Reply · 227

**Aziz Ansari Adopts A Kid**  
 by collegehumor  
 951,491 FEATURED

2:34

**Aziz Ansari College Essay**  
 by Jeff Horne  
 237,841 views

7:00

**Aziz Ansari Teaches Zach Galifianakis About Swag**  
 by Sky Flame  
 1,332,440 views

2:22

**Ciroc**  
 by thibortandtv

11 videos

**Aziz Ansari Standup on Kimmel**  
 by Spilraw58  
 489,519 views

8:08

**Date Night With Aziz Ansari And Kristen Bell 2010 MTV Movie Award promo**  
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 742,103 views

1:01

**Aziz Ansari Talks About R. Kelly**  
 by ires313yes  
 416,190 views

4:44

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 62 videos

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**Parks and Recreation - Aziz Ansari - This Is How You Eat It**  
 by cosmokram3r  
 761,624 views

0:23

**10 Questions for Aziz Ansari**  
 by TimeMagazine  
 532,451 views

5:42

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## Alcohol Websites: Bud Light Lime Canada Facebook Page

The screenshot shows the Facebook page for Bud Light Lime Canada. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the Facebook logo and a search bar. The main header area features a large cover photo of two roasted chickens, each with a Bud Light Lime can tucked into its cavity. Below the cover photo is the profile picture, which is the Bud Light Lime logo. The page name "Bud Light Lime Canada" is displayed, along with "156,156 likes · 137 talking about this". There are buttons for "Like" and "Message". Below this, there's a "Company" section with a description: "Bud Light Lime — the refreshing taste of Bud Light mixed with a delicious splash of lime. Are you in?". There are also tabs for "About", "Suggest an Edit", "Photos", "Likes", "Videos", and "New Bud Light Lime...". A "Highlights" dropdown menu is visible. The main content area shows a post from Bud Light Lime Canada, dated April 18, 2016, near Toronto, Ontario. The post text says: "We know it's been quiet around here, so we want to point you to where the action is. 'Like' Bud Light Canada to stay informed (and entertained) on all launches, contests and giveaways for Bud Light Lime & the rest of the Bud Light family." Below the post, it says "Like · Comment · Share" and "149 people like this." There's a comment from Richard Gallo: "How about Bud Limarts in Canada????". To the right, there's a "Recent Posts by Others on Bud Light Lime Canada" section with posts from Barb Burkett, Tim Broxup, Jimmy Charbonneau, and Ryan Faith. At the bottom right, there's a search bar and a list of friends.

## Group Evaluation Assessment Rubric

Group members: \_\_\_\_\_

Websites: \_\_\_\_\_

Content	
Application of checklist to each website	1 2 3 4 5
In-depth analysis of specific techniques	1 2 3 4 5
Comparison of corporate website with product website	1 2 3 4 5
Application of CRTC guidelines	1 2 3 4 5
Recommended guidelines for alcohol websites	1 2 3 4 5
Presentation	
All group members equally involved	1 2 3 4 5
Points clearly presented	1 2 3 4 5
Interesting and engaging	1 2 3 4 5
Use of visual aids	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Total score:</b>	

