

How brand blocking regulations in South Africa could lead to further job losses

By  Ron Cregan

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A legislative trend of applying branding and marketing restrictions on alcohol, junk food and sugar is gaining traction across the world and posing a threat to some of the worlds' most famous brands.



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These proposed regulations are primarily aimed at food and drink products policymakers deem unhealthy, and South Africa laws seem to be on the same trajectory.

Full branding ban

Whether it's the Liquor Amendment Bill, tabled by the EFF, which seeks to place a blanket ban on alcohol advertising and introduce new warning labels, or Lynn Moeng, the chief director of Nutrition in the Department of Health, looking to place warning labels on junk food, or professor Karen Hofman, a health advisor to the South African government, who said sugary drinks need to be seen in the same light as tobacco, lawmakers are looking to use legislation to change consumers behaviour.

The goal is to subject alcohol, high-calorie foods and sugary products to tobacco-style restrictions: a full branding ban, with such products, only served in plain packaging with alarmist labels.

Where will Castle Lager be without its iconic castle, or Kanonkop Wines without its cannon or Crunchalots breakfast cereal without its cute furry characters? These are iconic brands that could find themselves under strict censorship.

It may sound far-fetched but policymakers in Chile have already erased Tony the Tiger from packets of Frosties there, and the moustachioed Pringles man must be covered with a dark circular sticker. I'm not suggesting that obesity or excessive alcohol consumption isn't a global problem but legislating towards a healthier citizenry by discouraging the use of legal, every day staples can have unintended consequences, whether it's hitting people in their pockets, triggering job losses or fuelling a black market in illicit trade.

Legislators need to be more creative

This is why I founded Endangered Species to draw attention to the issue of labelling and marketing restrictions on packaging and to get professional designers, creative agencies and graphic artists to participate in the conversation.

Instead of scaring people into changing their behaviour or punishing their pockets, legislators need to be more creative when it comes to protecting our health.

Instead of health warnings and brand censorship, I believe we could use smartphone technology to unlock information and create health codes - a scannable QR code which consumers can use to access live nutritional and health information from around the world.

Creating positive and educational messages that will help change consumer behaviour and avoid misunderstanding is well within the design community's capabilities, legislators just need to be more creative in their approach to promoting good health.

ABOUT RON CREGAN

Ron Cregan is the founder at Endangered Species, a membership organisation working across multiple categories under threat from overzealous regulators and policymakers in design and packaging.

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