

Alcoholic-Beverage Industry Needs Young Drinkers

Many argue that alcoholic-beverage producers target young people – including underage persons – with their advertising. Industry needs to recruit the next generation of heavy drinkers to maintain and expand profits. Evidence shows that young adults who begin to drink at an early age have higher chances of becoming dependent on alcohol. Since the alcoholic-beverage industry relies heavily for sales from those heavy drinkers, it has little incentive to prevent the early onset of underage alcohol consumption.

Heavy drinkers support the industry:

- The top 20% of alcohol consumers account for about 87-89% of all of the alcohol consumed in the U.S.¹
- Beer consumption accounts for 81% of the alcohol consumed in hazardous amounts (defined as five or more drinks per day) in the U.S.²

Youthful market:

- Young adults aged 18-29 account for 45% of total alcohol consumption.³
- In 2001, 50.3% of students in grades 9-12 consumed beer, 48.1% drank liquor, and 48.8% drank wine coolers.⁴
- Youth between the ages of 12 and 20 consume almost 20% of the total number of drinks consumed per month.⁵
- 18-25 year-olds binge drink at the highest rates (38.7%), peaking at age 21 (48.2%). Heavy drinking also peaks at age 21 (17.8%).⁶
- 6.8 million youths aged 12 to 20 (19.0%) are binge drinkers.⁷
- Binge and heavy alcohol use decreases with age. In fact, more 18-25 year olds (48.2%) binge drink than 65+ year olds drink (33%) at all. 19.1% of 45-49 year olds qualify as binge drinkers.⁸

Establishing the demand for alcoholic beverages:

- “Marketers of low-alcohol refreshers, the so-called ‘malternatives’ such as Smirnoff Ice, delivered 60% more [magazine] advertising to youth than to adults.”⁹
- 30% of malternative drinkers are new drinkers.¹⁰
- “With younger drinkers, their palates haven’t quite matured yet to drinks like bourbon. ‘Malternatives’ are a sweeter drink, they’re easier to drink and it takes less time to mature to the taste.” (Trish Rohrer, Brand Development manager for Boston Beer Company in “Malternative Universe,” *Restaurants USA*, May 2002)
- Teens are three times more likely than adults to have seen or heard about alcopops.¹¹
- Teens (41%) are nearly twice as likely as adults (24%) to have tried alcopops.¹²

“Sales of traditional alcoholic beverages are in decline, so companies are looking for other categories to sell. Brewers have been looking for stuff that will appeal to groups that don’t drink beer, as a means to develop a broader demographic pool.” (Peter Reid, editor of *Modern Brewery Age*, in *Minneapolis-St. Paul City Business*, 9 May 1997)

Examples of products with a youthful twist:

- Fruit-flavored gelatin shots (Zippershots)
- Ready-to-drink cocktails, brews and “coolers,” such as alcopops (a.k.a. malternatives)

“The beauty of this [malternatives] category is that it brings in new drinkers, people who really don’t like the taste of beer.” (Marlene Coulis, Anheuser-Busch’s director of new products, in *Advertising Age*, 22 April 2002)

Consequences of early drinking:

- Young people who begin drinking before the age of 15 are **four times** as likely to become alcohol dependent than those who start drinking at the age of 21.¹³
- Early drinking is associated with more disciplinary and academic problems in high school, trouble with employment, and behavior problems in young adulthood compared to nondrinkers.¹⁴
- Alcohol is a factor in the four leading causes of death among persons ages 10 to 24: (1) motor-vehicle crashes, (2) unintentional injuries, (3) homicide, and (4) suicide.¹⁵

Industry campaigns don't work:

- In 2001, for every ad that discourages drinking before age 21, alcoholic-beverage companies placed 87 product promotion ads. For every ad about the legal drinking age, alcohol companies showed 179 product promotion ads.¹⁶
- Colleges with “social norm programs,” a “prevention” concept backed by alcoholic-beverage marketers to convey messages to students about “healthy” levels of drinking, did not experience any decrease in alcohol consumption by students. Monthly alcohol use increased at these schools.¹⁷

November 2003

References:

- ¹ Greenfield, T.K. & Rogers, J.D. (1999). Who drinks most of the alcohol in the U.S.? The policy implications. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. 60(1):78-89.
- ² Rogers, J.D. & Greenfield, T.K. (1999). Beer drinking accounts for most of the hazardous alcohol consumption reported in the United States. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. 60(6):732.
- ³ Greenfield, T.K. & Rogers, J.D. (1999). Who drinks most of the alcohol in the U.S.? The policy implications. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. 60(1):78-89.
- ⁴ PRIDE Surveys (2002). *2001-2002 National Summary, Grades 6 through 12*. PRIDE Questionnaire Report. July 12, 2002. Online: <http://www.pridesurveys.com/main/supportfiles/natsum01.pdf>.
- ⁵ Foster, S.E., Vaughan, R.D., Foster, W.H. & Califano, J.A. (2003). Alcohol consumption and expenditures for underage drinking and adult excessive drinking. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 289(8):989-995.
- ⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2002). Results from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Volume I. Summary of national findings.
- ⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2002). Results from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Volume I. Summary of national findings.
- ⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2002). Results from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Volume I. Summary of national findings.
- ⁹ Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (2002). *Overexposed: Youth a target of alcohol advertising in magazines*. Research Report. September 24, 2002. Online: <http://camy.org/research/files/overexposed0902.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Rovito, R. (2001) Miller to join ‘malternative’ craze. *The Business Journal of Milwaukee*. 10 December 2001. Online: <http://Milwaukee.buzjournals.com/Milwaukee/stories/2001/12/10/story1.html>.
- ¹¹ CSPI (2001). What teens and adults are saying about alcopops. Summary of Poll Findings. May 2001. Online: http://www.cspinet.org/booze/alcopops_summary.htm.
- ¹² CSPI (2001). What teens and adults are saying about alcopops. Summary of Poll Findings. May 2001. Online: http://www.cspinet.org/booze/alcopops_summary.htm.
- ¹³ Grant, B.F. & Dawson, D.A. (1997). Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse*. 9:103-110.
- ¹⁴ Ellickson, P.L., Tucker, J.S. & Klein, D.J. (2003). Ten-Year Prospective Study of Public Health Problems Associated With Early Drinking. *Pediatrics*. 111(5):949-955.
- ¹⁵ Kann, L., Kinchen, S.A., Williams, B.I., Ross, J.G., Lowry, R., Grunbaum, J. & Kolbe, L.J. (2000). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance -- United States, 1999. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. 49(SS05):1-96.
- ¹⁶ Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (2003). *Drops in the bucket: Alcohol industry ‘responsibility’ advertising on television in 2001*. Research Report. February 3, 2003. Online: <http://camy.org/research/files/drops0203.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ Wechsler, H., Nelson, T.F., Lee, J.E., Seibring, M., Lewis, C. & Keeling, R.P. (2003). Perception and reality: A national evaluation of social norms marketing interventions to reduce college students’ heavy alcohol use. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. 64:484-494.