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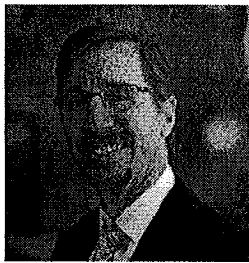
VOICES

# Q&A with David Jernigan on underage drinking prevention

by Dan on Dec 17, 2012 • 9:55 am

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Alcohol is responsible for more than 4,700 deaths per year among youths and is the most abused drug by young people in America. The numbers might be much worse without the work of Dr. David Jernigan, Director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth. Jernigan and the agency, founded 10 years ago by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, monitor the effect alcohol advertising has on young people by using new research — which can be viewed online — to initiate public health interventions. On Thursday, the center released data showing that time restrictions on alcohol advertising actually increase teen exposure, because companies move the advertising to late night.



Dr. David Jernigan is the director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth. The center monitors the marketing practices of the alcohol industry to reduce high rates of alcohol abuse among young people. Photo by CAMY

Public Health Newswire talked to Jernigan about the findings, the social media impact on alcohol advertising, how policy can deter underage drinking and prevention efforts within the last decade that have limited alcohol abuse among minors.

Your center just released a study showing that time restrictions on alcohol ads do not keep kids from seeing them, specifically on television. Do you think that it means time restrictions just aren't the answer?

We looked at a number of policy solutions intended to decrease alcohol advertising from reaching young people under 21. We looked at the possibility of time watersheds in 2002 and 2003 and concluded it wasn't going to work in the U.S. Now having the Netherlands experience, we used U.S. data modeling to measure what would happen if a ban on TV alcohol ads was placed at 9, 10, and 11 o'clock [p.m.]. We found that each ban would increase exposure because the ads get moved — alcohol companies push their ads onto late night programming, when the adolescent/teenage audience is more highly concentrated. We know in the U.S. that many young people have TVs in their bedrooms, and they watch "The Daily Show," "The Colbert Report," Jay Leno, Jimmy Fallon and all those late-night shows. They are being exposed to significant alcohol

advertising.

At a recent discussion, you showed slides from some of the major alcohol manufacturers that are popular with underage drinkers — Bud Light, Hennessy, Smirnoff malt beverages — and their social media efforts may show why they're so popular among youths. What kind of interventions are possible, since young people are usually more Web savvy than their parents?

There are several things to look at. First, tobacco companies are doing a much better job at age-verification than alcohol companies are. They're closely scrutinized by state attorneys general, so tobacco companies are verifying ages of people who come to social media sites. With alcohol, at most, it's an age affirmation; you put in a birthday and say, 'Yes, I'm over 21.' We know that one-third of minors on Facebook are using fake ages. The second one would be to have companies set up no-buy lists. On certain shows and channels advertising would be so close to the line of exposing more young people than adults, that a decision could be made, 'We just won't advertise there, there's too much potential for abuse.'

What can states do to address this issue?

There are two things states can do: They can put in their own statutes and put a ban on targeting minors. In one of our most recent reports, we looked at eight different areas where states have taken action. Some states have jurisdiction over social media within their state. These states could adopt stricter standards on practices — which

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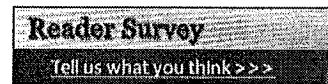
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none have done yet, but they can. Five states do have best practice bans on outdoor alcohol advertising, and several others have varying degrees of a ban. Numerous cities around the country have also banned outdoor alcohol advertising — In Baltimore, you won't see it in residential neighborhoods, and in Philadelphia, you won't see it around parks or schools. Another thing states can do is ban retail signage — Virginia has a practice where you can only put one sign on a retail outlet. Just by themselves, these small steps have cleaned up major sections of cities overnight.

**Your center is in its 10th year now. How successful do you feel your program has been?**

When we started, the industry said it wouldn't advertise anywhere kids comprised 50 percent of the audience, and that applied to less than 1 percent of TV programming. Since we've been around, that now applies to 28.4 percent, based on U.S. census information. We've seen a dramatic drop in alcohol ads in magazines and declines in radio. We've gone the wrong way on TV and digital, social media is another monster, but we're pleased that in the last 10 years, we've maintained ongoing awareness of these issues by working with the media, policymakers and others. The Federal Trade Commission is working on its third report on the alcohol industry since we've been on the scene. Beverages that combined caffeine with alcohol, like Four Loko, no longer have stimulants in them.

The classic description of marketing is like a squishy balloon, and we're trying to build a box around that balloon: all the little things add up.



**Tags:** alcohol, CDC, Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, teen drinking

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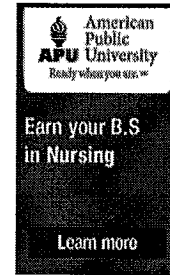


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