



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNICATIONS AGENCIES

Preamble

The adherence to high ethical principles is a requirement for any business sector today. As the representative body for the advertising and commercial communications sector in Europe, it is EACA's task to ensure that member companies have clear guidance on the ethical standards that we set for ourselves and that our stakeholders fully understand our commitments to the highest standards of performance.

1. *Ethics in a consultancy sector*

We accept that the ethical responsibilities of a consultancy sector like our own must be balanced consistently between the possibly conflicting interests of our clients, their customers and society in general.

This document therefore attempts to define the ethical priorities we accept and attempt to live by.

2. *Laws, Codes and Ethics*

The sector in which we operate is comprehensively covered by laws that prevent deception and protect consumers. These are supplemented by a range of national and sectoral codes of practice which together make up the self-regulation system, a system that is easily updated and able to react to new situations and technological developments faster than legislation.

The self-regulation system in Europe is based on the premise that all advertising must be

- Legal, decent, honest, truthful

Both laws and codes are imposed on practitioners within our sector. Ethical standards, however, come from the people who practice and support the industry's legal and self-regulatory structures.

Ethical codes additionally provide what laws and codes of practice cannot. They govern how we work with our clients, competitors, colleagues and society in general.

3. *Creating the Code*

The Code was drafted in association with the Institute of Communication Ethics in February 2004, after a twelve-month period of consultation and research amongst the key stakeholder groups including:

- Our clients, our colleagues, agency managements, our suppliers, students, investors



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
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Code of Ethics

4. *Observance and Maintenance of the Code*

Membership of EACA is conditional upon the acceptance, by associations, companies and individuals, of this Code, which works as a minimum standard for professional conduct and performance. It is intended to give guidance for those who may be responsible for resolving questions and disputes that may have an ethical basis.

The Code is overseen and updated as necessary by an Ethics Committee of the Board of EACA.

5. *Applying the Code*

We believe that all personnel within the advertising sector should have access to advice on ethical issues. In the first instance, this should be available at company level, at group level within agency networks and through National Associations of commercial communications agencies.

In each case there should be an appointed person, most likely from within human resources, corporate affairs or legal departments who should be trained to advise on ethical issues pertaining to the Code.

6. *Resolving ethical conflicts of interest*

We accept that there will be situations in which the immediate interests of certain stakeholder groups might conflict with one other. We expect members to bear in mind when resolving such conflicts the interests of society, our consumers and our clients as a priority, while acknowledging the values of other stakeholder groups.

7. *Promoting the Code*

The Executive Board, member agencies and National Associations in membership of EACA undertake to promote the Code to all commercial communications practitioners and to maintain awareness of the Code on a periodic basis.

It is EACA's aim to promote the teaching of ethics within all relevant higher education courses in advertising and communications.

8. *The Core Values of our Ethical Code*

Our Code is founded on five core values, which we believe govern every aspect of our personal performance:

- 1) Integrity
- 2) Respect
- 3) Fairness
- 4) Trustworthiness
- 5) Professional excellence



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The Code and our stakeholder groups

1. *Society and Citizens*

We recognise our obligation to create advertising, which is consistent with the social, economic and environmental principles of sustainable development.

We further recognise that this obligation applies equally across the different societies that receive advertising that might not have been developed directly for them.

2. *Consumers*

We recognise that consumers are entitled to rely on our profession to operate not only within the law and within the letter and spirit of global, national and sectoral codes of practice, but also within accepted ethical norms.

We accept that our understanding of the “average consumer” might not always be the standard, acknowledging that there are groups who are vulnerable, for example, and that we should adopt a sensitive approach to judging how advertising will be understood and acted upon by society in general.

3. *The Media*

We recognise the role of the media in providing independent and balanced information to consumers. We accept that in placing advertising in editorial or other media we should not intentionally seek to influence the independence or balance of editorial content. An exception will be so-called “advertorials” which are clearly presented to consumers as joint statements from the advertiser and media owner.

4. *Our Clients*

i Consultancy standards

We recognise the right of our clients to receive impartial advice and service to the best of our professional ability.

In the many different societies in which we operate, we recognise the ethical requirement to avoid incentives or inducements that might undermine the integrity of the agency / client relationship.

ii Confidentiality

We commit ourselves to maintaining the confidentiality of our clients’ proprietary information, whether covered by non-disclosure agreements or not.

We accept that this requirement extends to information obtained as part of unsuccessful pitch or tender competitions or through practitioners moving between agencies.



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COMMUNICATIONS AGENCIES

Code of Ethics

iii Transparency

We acknowledge a requirement to make our terms of business as transparent as possible and to operate entirely within the spirit of financial agreements entered into.

iv Conflict of Interest

We adhere to the definitions of conflicts of interest contained in the EACA document "EACA Guidelines on Account Conflicts". Where potential conflicts exist we accept the requirement to bring them to the attention of all parties.

Where measures are agreed to avoid such conflicts, we accept the responsibility to operate faithfully within these constraints.

5. *Our Employees and Colleagues*

We recognise that people are our principal asset and understand the necessity to provide working conditions, training and remuneration consistent with their value to our business.

We recognise an obligation to ensure that our employees receive the full protection of local and international employment and workplace legislation, including equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination in terms of gender, age, race, religion, or sexual orientation.

As employees we recognise the obligation to serve the best interests of our employers, consistent with the principles set out in this Code.

6. *Our Competitors*

We agree to compete with other agencies fairly and honourably and to treat our competitors and their work with professional respect.

7. *Our Suppliers*

We agree to deal fairly with our suppliers of all kinds, especially in respect of payment terms, intellectual and other property rights.

8. *Our Investors*

We recognise that our investors are entitled to receive accurate information within generally accepted accounting principles and that they should be given every assistance to understand and evaluate the circumstances that lead to investment decisions.

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