

2013 - The year the UK government opens its eyes to the impact of advertising?

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Last week I was at the Advertising Association's LEAD conference where it revealed the results of a three year study with Deloitte. As someone in the thick of the industry, I wasn't particularly surprised to see the huge impact that advertising has on the economy. However I did find it reassuring that we now have some data to back up what we've known for some time. It's now time for the government to acknowledge just how important the advertising industry is to driving economic growth.

For those who haven't seen the report, which you can find [here](#), the main finding was that annual advertising expenditure of £16 billion in the UK results in a £100bn contribution to the British economy. It also touches on some perhaps unexpected benefits of advertising, such as the growth in broadband from ad funding. The report estimates that 36% of the households that have access to broadband would not have done so without advertising. That's a pretty significant number.

Despite the massive economic and social impact, advertising is often sidelined as an untrustworthy entity, instead of receiving support that will allow the industry to grow. Too much attention is paid to the argument that advertising drives negative lifestyle behaviours, with advertising remaining the whipping boy for everything that's wrong with the world - a view that's very short sighted.

Despite David Cameron regularly meeting with captains of industry and committing to growing other sectors, advertising is not awarded the same attention. That's despite the fact that for every £1 spent on advertising, £6 is generated for the economy, compared to between £2 and £4 in most other industries. The government seems keen on helping to grow the film and music industries, but these are also fuelled by advertising.

As an industry, advertising needs two things. The first is more attention and support from the government - we've been ignored for too long. The second is help to actively move regulatory bodies away from implementing such strict regulation, especially when it comes to digital and above the line promotions. The digital arena has huge growth potential but this is being stunted by regulation and unfounded fears over privacy.

It's understandable that people don't want their personal details shared far and wide. But advertisers don't see individual personal information, just general data which is used to help us give people the most relevant and engaging content possible. This is something so often misunderstood by policy makers. No brand wants to put out bad adverts - with the prominence of social media channels the backlash and impact on the brand's reputation would be too great. So much regulation ignores the public's savvy and common sense to interpret messages in the right way. As an industry we are closely aligned with various bodies and need to be trusted to do the right thing, not only for brands but consumers.

The AA report shows that advertising deserves to have its voice heard. Let's hope it acts as a wake-up call for the government to protect and promote our industry so we can help to drive the economic growth that the UK so desperately needs

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