

Mad Men days are over

 By [Sam Swaine](#)

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Advertising and marketing companies have a nefarious reputation for liquid lubrication; over the years it's simply become industry standard with the attached dogma of 'work hard, play hard'. Agencies and drinking have become symbiotic bedfellows over the years, but judging by European and American trends, the party is coming to a close and the industry is shaking off the *Mad Men* stigma.



Mad Men's Roger Sterling (John Slattery) and Don Draper (Jon Hamm). © AMC.

Since the birth of advertising, alcohol has been part of the marketing ecosystem when winning and dining clients, celebrating the landing of a new account or forging close staff relationships. With this in mind, last week WPP New York sent a curtain call memo to staff outlining its drinking policy that stated the agency is "ensuring the safe consumption of alcohol by employees and other guests at work related events", furthermore "No drinks trolleys should be provided nor alcohol consumed at desks or in work areas."

Loophole of dark marketing

According to the statement, agencies are obligated to order safe travel home for employees who have been drinking and restrict service of alcohol to those of legal drinking age according to the memo, which was sent out by group finance director, Paul Richardson and director of internal audit, Paul Stanley.

Restriction on alcohol advertising and promotion has accelerated worldwide and the light switch has been turned off on traditional booze campaigns leading to the loophole of dark marketing; agencies have had to respond to the regulations and change tack. Marketing as a holistic industry has had to self-correct and play to subtle product placement, negotiate sponsorship deals or compelling 'safe driving' campaigns amongst other tactics. But we don't necessarily practice what we preach.

Alcohol is neither the devil's poison nor does prohibition make for a dull and dreary company culture, but it's clear given the glaring rise of addiction, poor work performance and the multiple health risks over-drinking can inflame, company drinking cultures need to be revisited.

Manhattans, Martinis and Malibus

According to a UK-based population study published in 2015, even one glass of wine a day increases the risk of breast cancer by four per cent, while heavy drinking (three or more drinks a day) increase these chances by 40-50 per cent. Isn't it time agencies put their staffer's health first?

Although imbibing generally takes place after working hours, execs in the past have stated that a drink or two takes the sting out of a 12-hour day and has also been attributed to igniting a 'creative spark'.

The *Mad Men* days when Manhattans, Martinis and Malibus were considered the norm after work, attending client lunches or even just lunch are slowly dwindling as agencies and other industries alike are taking a hard nose approach to their drinking policies. This is a bold stance initiated by one of the world's largest advertising conglomerations, the question remains, will WPP's new alcohol agenda set an industry standard for agency drinking cultures worldwide?

ABOUT SAM SWAINE

Sam Swaine is a freelance consultant with over 20-year's experience in marketing and PR. She also specialises in social media and digital marketing trends. Sam is a journalist for business, marketing and consumer publications.

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