

Home Retail Group – Guidelines for the assessment of socially unacceptable products

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Background

HOME RETAIL GROUP's product buyers and quality assurance managers are supplied with a set of guidelines to use when selecting and appraising new products. The guidelines (listed below) highlight issues such as ethnic/religious offence, antisocial behaviours, the use of fur, materials sourced from the wild, products appropriate for children etc. enabling HOME RETAIL GROUP to consider in advance whether and how it wishes to stock items that may be controversial. We are aware of the need to understand and respond to the sensitivities from selling potentially socially unacceptable products.

Guidelines

The product

- Is the product a weapon – e.g. guns, airguns, ball-bearing ('bb') guns, replica weapon, knife, hunting knife, military knife?
- Does the product include real animal fur?
- Does the product contain any 'unusual' leathers (e.g. crocodile, ostrich etc) as opposed to cow or goat hide?
- Does the product contain animal or plant related materials that may have been sourced illegally or from an endangered species (e.g., ivory, bone)?
- Has the product been sourced from the wild (e.g., beach cobbles, flower bulbs, seeds, peat etc)? The product must have been obtained in a sustainable way and that no long term environmental damage has been caused by its abstraction.

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- Is there a potential controversy or particular media sensitivity surrounding the source or type of product (e.g., has the product been genetically modified or engineered in some way?)

Hidden messages or content

- Does the product have 'design' text in a script or language not understood?
- Does the product have 'design' text that is or could be interpreted as offensive or unsuitable for children?
- Does the product have unsuitable recorded dialogue (e.g. children's toys)?
- Could there be an issue over the content of electronic media (e.g. video games, computer software) for explicit violence or sexual content etc?
- Does the accompanying product documentation (e.g., instructions) obviously mislead or encourage the product to be used in a dangerous or inappropriate way?
- Does the product contain substances that are potentially hazardous to human health or the environment (such as pesticides, VOCs, acids or solvents)? Are product usage instructions and labelling clear enough to prevent misuse?

Promoting irresponsible behaviour

- Could the product lead to irresponsible use of IT (consider computer hacking, police radios, surveillance etc)?
- Are there any particular issues with children's toys (inappropriate weaponry, toys which could cause harm with repeated use, toys which do not support good infant development etc)?
- Is there potential for the irresponsible use of health products (e.g. dietary supplements) or alcohol?
- Are there questions over the product's effectiveness or ability to meet the stated claims (particularly consider for health and fitness products, household products, electronic products)?

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Causing offence

- Is there potential for offence in the way the product or its packaging represents groups of people (e.g. ethnic groups, male/female images, disability etc)?
- Does the product or its packaging contain any religious reference or content (e.g. in designs, quoted phrases, images etc) that could offend customers?
- Could the product be seen as sexualising children under 16 (e.g. clothes, dolls, beauty/glamour products)?
- Is the product adult branded and to be featured with items specifically designed for children?
- Taking account of the cultural and social attitudes of customers, is the product likely to be considered distasteful eg the sale of marital aids, pornographic content of games, videos, magazines?

What happens if a product is considered to fall in any of the above categories?

Discussion are held between the buying and quality assurance teams and a decision on selecting the product or withdrawing a product from sale is made at Director level.