

*"Working for quality
and diversity in
British broadcasting"*



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Founded in 1983 by Jocelyn Hay CBE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Voice of the Listener & Viewer Opposes Product Placement on TV

In its response to the Government's new consultation, Voice of the Listener & Viewer strongly opposes lifting the ban on product placement in television programmes made by or for UK broadcasters. In VLV's view it is vital to the health of British broadcasting to maintain the clear separation between advertising and content which has been the hallmark of British-made television programmes since the advent of ITV in 1955.

Product placement would contaminate our programmes. As former Culture Secretary Andy Burnham said as recently as June last year (2009): *"there are some lines we should not cross – one of which is that you can buy the space between the programmes on commercial channels, but not the space within them."*

Far from adding to the 'authenticity' of programmes, as some in the television industry have argued, product placement destroys trust; and the more 'subtle' that placement is the more likely the viewer is to be deceived. Product placement is essentially surreptitious advertising, and ought not to be permitted in UK-made programmes.

VLV is deeply concerned at the present poor financial state of our commercial public service broadcasters, which has already damaged programme standards. We fully understand why these companies are looking for new sources of revenue. But product placement is not the way forward. As well as being wrong in principle it is highly unlikely to make up the shortfall in advertising revenue. Ofcom has estimated that revenues from product placement are unlikely to be more than £25-30 million in five years time. But even these low figures ignore what would probably be the result of allowing product placement – a corresponding reduction in income from programme sponsorship and spot advertising.

VLV recognises that product placement already exists, most obviously in American feature films and television series broadcast here, but we see no reason why Britain should abandon its present ban on product placement in UK production. To do so would be to destroy our high reputation for honest programme making which gives our television programmes their high reputation and (we would argue) a competitive advantage in the world market.

VLV strongly believes that to allow the introduction of product placement in UK-made programmes would damage the reputation of the British television abroad, and erode the trust that viewers place in the television programmes they watch. It would also undermine Ofcom's primary regulatory responsibility to protect the interests of the viewer as citizen and consumer.

To sacrifice an important principle on which British commercial television was founded for the sake of uncertain financial gain is wrong. VLV urges the Government to reconsider, and abandon this ill-advised proposal.

Note for Editors:

Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) is an independent, non-profit-making association, free from political, commercial and sectarian affiliations, working for quality and diversity in British broadcasting and new media. VLV represents the interests of listeners and viewers as citizens and consumers across the full range of broadcasting issues. VLV is concerned with the structures, regulation, funding and institutions that underpin the British broadcasting system.

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