

# Responsible drinking, the foundation of CSR in the alcoholic beverage industry

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## **A program to prevent alcohol abuse is getting stakeholders involved and should be the core of Corporate Social Responsibility in this sector.**

"We want our customers to enjoy our products. And they will not be able to do so if they consume them in excess." This is how Diageo, one of the leading companies in the spirits sector, explains its interest in taking part in campaigns to prevent alcohol abuse and encourage responsible drinking. This might seem contradictory because it means a drop in sales over the short term.

The sustainability of the alcoholic beverage sector is based on promoting responsible drinking, which is the foundation of the industry's Corporate Social Responsibility. Besides one-time activities, the idea is to assume responsibility for the business's impact on society and seek long-term solutions that will keep the sector afloat. The "[White Book on Consumption of Alcohol in Spain](#)" is framed in this context. It was published by IESE and Diageo with the goal of triggering social debate among the various institutions and groups that are involved and trying to find joint solutions.

## **The product is the key**

Just as a mining company must be concerned about the environment, a producer or distributor of alcoholic drinks must take into account the characteristics of its products and their effects on consumers, both the good ones and the harmful ones. For this reason, as IESE professors [Antonio Argandoña](#) and [Joan Fontrodona](#) and researcher Pilar García Lombardía

explain in the prologue of this White Book, responsible drinking must be a critical component of the Corporate Social Responsibility of all companies in this industry. We are talking about social and moral responsibility, not just a legal one, that goes beyond simply launching another public awareness campaign when incidence of traffic accidents goes up.

However, companies that produce or distribute alcoholic drinks are not alone in this endeavor. Rather, they share the stage and responsibility with other actors: the authorities (traffic, education, public order), schools, nightlife establishments, families, the news media and others.

In Spain, three alcohol-related areas have been identified as entailing the most risk, and for this reason they dominate prevention drives: minors, young people and the combination of drinking and driving. Although minors cannot legally drink, it is relatively easy for them to obtain alcohol and this is a source of growing concern. It is exacerbated by the fact that it is at this age when kids set the drinking patterns they will follow later, in their adolescence. In the case of adolescents, the basis of their consumption lies in sociological factors, such as group drinking. Finally, drinking and driving can be considered an element that affects all age groups. The triple mix of youth, alcohol and driving is particularly alarming, as the inexperience of young motorists is compounded by the false sense of confidence that comes with drinking alcohol.

## Efficient prevention campaigns

Companies in this sector, government bodies and other institutions (such as the General Directorate of Traffic) have implemented prevention campaigns aimed at these high-risk groups, but the results so far have been insufficient. The authors of the White Book argue that in order for alcohol prevention and responsible drinking programs to yield positive results they must feature the following:

- **Involvement by all stakeholders.** No group on its own can undertake the task of bringing about a change in people's attitudes toward alcohol consumption. A good example of this are highway safety campaigns, the success of which stems, among other things, from the collaboration of various related interest groups. Abuse or dangerous consumption of alcohol is a highly complex phenomenon in terms of incidence, the groups affected, cultural variables, etc., and different perspectives, interests, expectations and knowledge must come together to combat the problem. Among the relevant interest groups, the authors cite the ministries of Education, Health and Social Policy, the

General Traffic Directorate, leisure-time outlets, bars and restaurants, advertising agencies, production companies, teachers and schools and youth associations.

- **A clear message.** It is important to block out messages that are different from those which make up the core of any program to prevent alcohol abuse. So a message that is clear and forceful has no reason to feature political or other overtones. This was without a doubt one of the keys to the success of the various highway safety campaigns, which should serve as an example for programs in other areas.
- **A solid theoretical and conceptual foundation.** It is necessary to revise the models of behavioral theory that underlie the different campaigns and action plans. Working with specialists in behavioral sciences can provide an adequate framework for finding the keys to the changes that are sought in attitudes and, therefore, in decision-making.
- **Have an overall strategy, but act at the local level.** International experts and hands-on experience show that acting locally is the most effective way to get stakeholders involved and make an alcohol abuse prevention program work. Under a framework with general guidelines, acting locally lets you adjust your actions to suit each particular case. For instance, campaigns aimed at young people work better if they are carried out when and where young people tend to drink (for example, at nightlife spots) and if the message comes from a young person. So, getting up close is a critical factor.
- **Innovation and creativity.** Seek new messages, lure the attention of the audience the program is geared toward, and try not to trigger rejection. Furthermore, it is necessary to break the cycle of social permissiveness ("people have always drunk a lot, it is not that big a deal, young people have the right to have fun") and fatalism ("this cannot change, it is just the way things are").

A strategic focus. As in the design of any action plan, three basic steps should be followed: define the goals to be achieved, the strategy, and the action plan; implement the plan, and finally, do a follow-up and evaluation of the results that have been achieved. This will be fundamental for making the necessary adjustments to the program.

Putting the stakeholders theory into practice Argandoña, Fontrodona and García-Lombardía feel that the complexity of preventing alcohol abuse offers a major opportunity to put into practice the stakeholders theory first advanced by Edward Freeman.

Therefore, through this study they have created an IESE-led platform for dialogue among groups with a stake in encouraging responsible drinking. Over the next few months, this

platform will seek solutions to the problem.

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