

AMERICA BY THE NUMBERS

How to Protest Offensive Ads

How can you protest when you find an ad offensive? Here are some strategies.

1. COMPLAIN TO THE COMPANY THAT MAKES THE PRODUCT.

In the days before the Internet, people used regular mail to let companies know what they thought about their products and advertisements. This still works. You can find a company’s address by Googling its name and corporate headquarters. Many people recommend writing to a company’s president or CEO. Will he or she actually see the letter? Maybe not. But an assistant will make sure that the proper department gets the letter and responds to complaints.

2. COMPLAIN PUBLICLY.

When something strikes you as really, really wrong, it’s helpful to get support from other people who think the same way you do. In 2012, Burger King dumped an ad featuring Mary J. Blige singing about chicken, allegedly due to music licensing issues. Yet, many people—potential customers—had complained about the ad’s “buffoonery” and stereotyping. Some speculate that these criticisms, not licensing issues, prompted Burger King to pull the ad.

Online tools exist that can help make your case public. Some people use Twitter. Others use change.org, which provides a template for an online petition, including suggestions for how to use it.

For example, in April 2012, an eighth-grader named Julia Bluhm used a change.org petition to launch a protest against *Seventeen* magazine. She believed that articles and ads in the magazine contributed to young women’s unrealistic perceptions of beauty and ideal body weight. She joined forces with a group called SPARK, which helped assemble more than 80,000 signatures on her petition. In early May 2012, Julia met with Ann Shoket, *Seventeen*’s editor-in-chief, to discuss the issues.

You can see Julia’s petition here: change.org/p/seventeen-magazine-give-girls-images-of-real-girls.

3. COMPLAIN POLITELY.

Be polite and professional in your communications. Say who you are, why you found a particular ad offensive, and what you’d like the company to do. Treat your reader with respect so that your request is taken seriously. Advertisers want to sell stuff, so they care about potential customers’ opinions. Make your voice heard!