

Facebook drink ads 'to target children'

Diageo accused of 'normalising' alcohol use in teens

ONE of the country's biggest drinks companies has been accused of 'targeting children' through a multi-million euro deal that will see vodka adverts appear on Facebook.

Diageo will use the website - which is accessed by tens of thousands of youngsters every day - to promote its most popular brands including Smirnoff Ice, Baileys and

By **Sandra Murphy**

Guinness. The firm insists the adverts will only be displayed on areas of the site which cannot be seen by anyone under 18.

However, Diageo was last night accused of reaching out to underage children on the social networking site.

Alcohol Action Ireland pointed out that the social network site has no way of preventing

teenagers or children seeing the adverts if they simply lie about their age.

Director Fiona Ryan said the charity had called for regulation to stop alcohol companies reaching underage users.

She said a recent survey showed that 30 per cent of under-18s had received unsolicited advertising from drinks firms.

And she revealed she had demanded a meeting with Facebook to discuss strict marketing guidelines for social network sites but has not received a response.

'Age control settings on drinks websites are mere window dressing,' she added. 'There is no proof needed and anyone can fake an older age just by changing the two last digits.'

'It is not like walking down a street and seeing an advertisement on a billboard. This is a young person's own page and considered their own private space.'

'The bottom line is this sort of brand marketing is normalising alcohol usage. We were concerned about children being exposed to alcohol firms online by constant spamming.'

'We asked for a discussion on the matter but we received no response - that was about four weeks ago.'

Last night, Fine Gael's Jerry Buttimer said he would raise the matter in the Dáil today.

The Cork South Central TD revealed he planned to ask Roisin Shorthall to change the online policy regarding underage youth at the Oireachtas Health

€7.4m

is the amount Diageo will spend on Facebook adverts

and Children Committee. He said: 'I have genuine and serious concerns about Diageo advertising and this cannot go unchecked.'

'This is irresponsible and wrong, and needs to be tackled.'

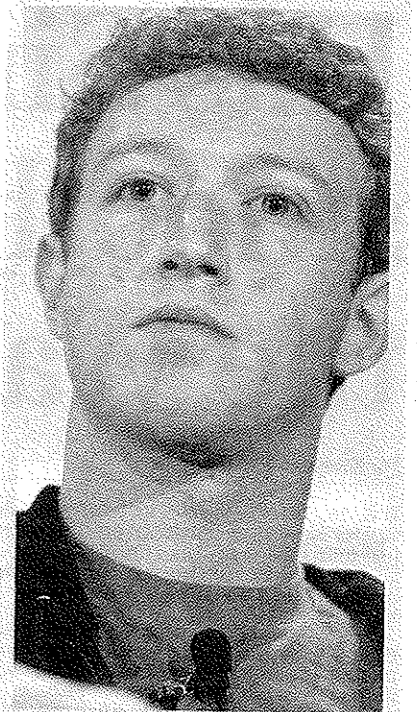
Leading doctors, including those in the British Medical Association, had 'serious concerns' about the deal between Facebook and Diageo, he said, and so Ireland could not afford to stand by and do nothing.

'I will raise it immediately as chairman of the Oireachtas Health and Children Committee, and put it on the agenda, he added. 'It is irresponsible to use Facebook as a vehicle to sell alcohol to young people.'

Diageo will spend around €7.4million on the Facebook adverts over the next year. The firm already advertises on the U.S. version of the website and claims sales have gone up by a fifth as a result.

Professor Linda Bauld, an expert in alcohol misuse at Stirling University, Scotland, said: 'Companies like Diageo are wanting to recruit drinkers of a young age and using Facebook is a key way of getting to children.'

'It's Facebook's responsibility to think very carefully about who is able to ad-



Successful. Mark Zuckerberg

FOUNDER'S €7BN FORTUNE

FACEBOOK founder Mark Zuckerberg's fortune has risen by nearly a third in the past year alone to €7.6billion, Forbes magazine has revealed.

The increase from €5billion last year came as the number of those using the social-networking website reached more than 750million.

In 2009, Mr Zuckerberg's fortune had been 'just' €1.4billion.

Now he ranks 14th on the Forbes list of the 400 richest Americans.

At the top of the list once again is Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who is worth €43billion, followed by investor Warren Buffet with €28.5billion.

Mr Buffet was, however, the biggest faller this year and lost €4.3billion due to volatility in world markets.

Also in the top ten was financier George Soros, who came in at No 7 with a net worth of €16billion, and three members of the Walton family, which founded Wal-Mart.

The combined wealth of America's richest is €1096billion.

vertise on their site.' Dr Nick Sheron, who specialises in alcohol and liver disease at the Southampton University said 'there are no adequate controls'.

'All you have to do is put in a false date of birth. I think Diageo are aware that the age profile of Facebook is predominantly younger generations.'

Diageo said that the deal with Facebook is subject to its own internal marketing code 'which mandates that we must comply with all applicable laws, regulations and industry codes'.

A Facebook spokesman said: 'We have tools to ensure that people only see age-appropriate content on our site.'

'Unlike other methods of display advertising such as television, billboards or newspapers adverts, Facebook offers advertisers the ability to target adverts by precise age and restricts all alcohol advertising to all over 18s only.'

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