

# How gullible are we?

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EDITORIAL

What prompts the question is the subject of advertising, or more precisely marketing. Every now and again I receive an irate email, often timed to have been sent in the small hours of the morning as many irate emails are, complaining about 'advertorials'. To make it perfectly clear, an advertorial is a paid-for item that is presented in the form of text, or an article rather than as a more conventional advert that uses large images, colourful display or eye-catching design. It may be said that the intention is to deceive the reader into thinking that the content is actually part of the standard editorial subject matter of the publication instead of an advert; equally it may be claimed that advertisers sometimes wish to impart far more detailed information than can be conveyed in a conventional advert. Either way, so as to maintain maximum clarity and diminish any misunderstanding whatsoever, in the *BDJ* we label such content 'advertorial' very clearly at the top of the page and to emphasise this transparency even further we insist that any such material does not use the same type-face or layout as the normal *BDJ* pages. But I still get the angry emails asking why these are included and, wait for it, the question, how gullible do I think he or she is? Well, since they have identified it for what it is, not gullible at all.

## ADVERTS OR HIGHER FEES?

Looking at the bigger picture, why do we include advertisements at all? The primary reason that leaps to mind is to help pay for the journal's production and distribution. However, strange as it may seem to some, from our frequent market research we learn that many readers actually find (some of) the adverts interesting and informative, keeping them up-to-date with new products and services, some of which they chose to investigate further and purchase. It is of course often the same as with those catalogues that fall out of weekend newspapers or come through the letterbox containing 90% completely useless gimmicks, and 10% which could be quite handy – though not necessarily the same 10% as for the next person. Thankfully we are all different.

For the purists, only an advert-free journal will do but, like the BBC, this requires funding by means other than commercial sponsors. Bluntly, since the *BDJ* brings in a financial return to the BDA it subsidises the membership subscription. My guess is that few readers would be prepared to pay a higher fee to have no advertising than would stay with the current, and longstanding arrangement.

However, I have also recently received correspondence about the Product News section of the journal. This is a standard feature in each issue and provides a shop window for goods and services, usually with a feature on particular aspects of practise and practice. In this instance the emailer questioned whether an item suggesting that it was possible to get a business-style qualification in a day using a DVD was appropriate content for the *BDJ* since it was clearly a ridiculous claim to make. The implication was also that we should effectively peer-review all the product news as the *BDJ* is a peer-reviewed journal. As before, we attempt to be as transparent as possible by printing at the top of the page (see page 419 in this issue) an advisory notice to the effect that the copy on the following pages is provided by the external supplier and, effectively – buyer beware.

I have to write that we do respect our readers to be adult and worldly-wise enough to make some of their own judgements. There is only so far that we can hold people's hands. Besides, how would it be possible to validate claims such as 'our most comfortable chair ever', 'the fastest setting material currently available' and so forth? In the event that we receive complaints that products or, more often, services are less than they are advertised to be then we take this up on behalf of the reader or readers and are also backed by the wider experience of BDA members contacting the advisory services, with whom we also liaise and share information.

I think the real reason behind this apparent outrage and anger is an understandable fear; a fear of being duped and of the supposed pressure of being sold something, and possibly a commodity that one doesn't want, rather than operating the free choice of buying something that one does want or need. We make every effort to ensure that the content we publish, where stated to be peer-reviewed is done so to the highest standards; that other content follows accepted publishing best practice and that all adverts are legal, decent, honest and truthful. Every display advert (and advertorial) is individually checked.

We do not think that readers are gullible and my guess is that you do not either. Also, we believe that our readers trust us, which is one of the reasons why the *BDJ* is so well read and regarded, and which is also one of the reasons why advertisers want to advertise.

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