

# Skyy hit the limit with racy ad: critics

## Council probes possible breach of standards

By JAMES B. ARNDORFER

SKYY SPIRITS, which has long promoted its namesake vodka with sexually charged advertising, may have pushed the envelope too far. Its latest ad is provoking ire inside and outside the industry.

The ad depicts a lingerie-clad woman with a martini glass, a half-empty bottle of Skyy and an instant camera splayed on a bed sprinkled with pictures of people in states of undress. It is being scrutinized by the industry's lead trade group, the Distilled Spirits Council of the U.S.

The concern of the group's Code Review Board is whether the ad violates the industry standards code, which states that ads shouldn't depict situations where alcohol is being consumed excessively and shouldn't include lewd images, gratuitous nudity, overt sexual activity or promiscuity.

"This ad takes the promise of 'buy the booze, get the girl' to new lows," a spokeswoman for the Marin Institute, an alcohol watchdog group, said.

The review was triggered by a complaint that "came from within the industry," said a spokesman. He wouldn't identify who pointed the finger. If the panel rules the ad crosses a line, it can ask Skyy, which is owned by Campari Group and is not a Discus member, to yank or change it.

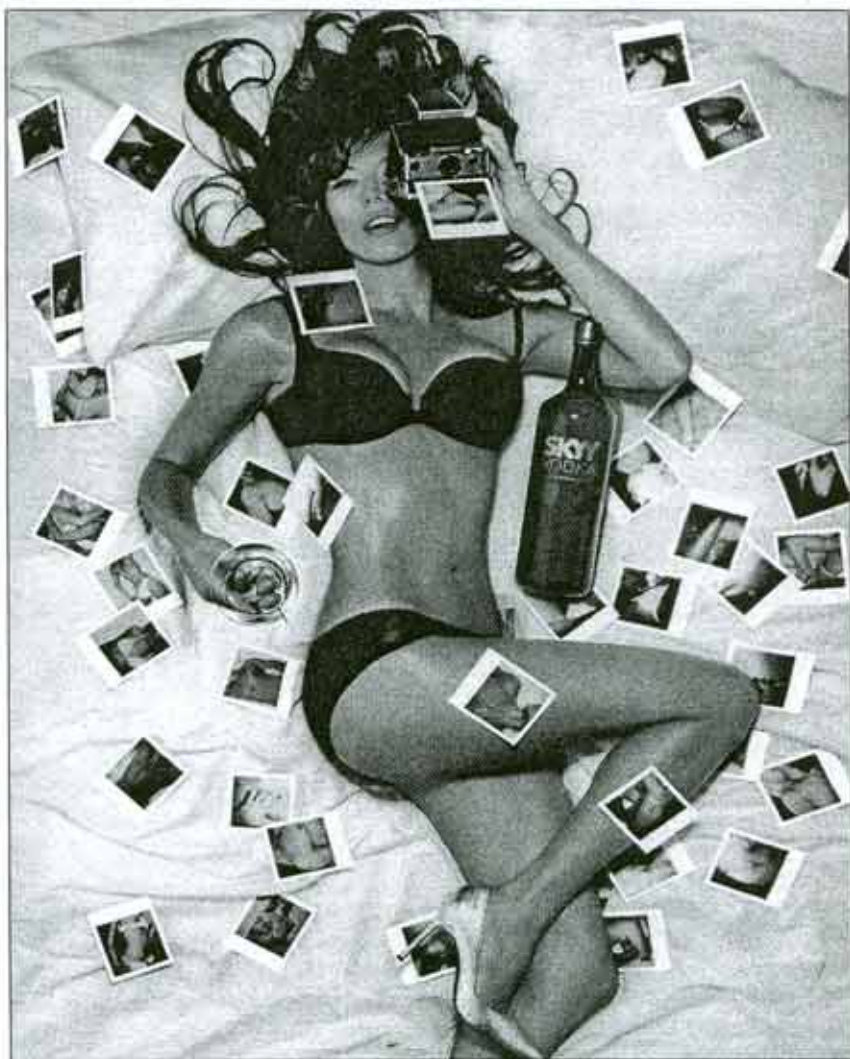
### TRICKY SPACE

The conflict highlights the tricky space spirits companies occupy. Nearly a decade after breaking its self-imposed ban on TV and radio advertising, the industry is growing again through attention-getting ads which can sometimes create controversy.

In California and Texas, Allied Domecq recently took down outdoor ads for Sauza tequila that showed a bottle with its label off and the headline, "Lost: Modesty." Allied moved after the Marin Institute complained to Discus that the ads suggested "drinking Sauza will lead to nudity." Allied took down the ads even though Discus decided they didn't violate the code.

The company "wanted to respond to community concerns," an Allied spokesman said. Publicis Groupe's Publicis, New York, handled.

Skyy's campaign—and innovative marketing strategies such as



IT'S ART: Skyy wouldn't comment on the ad, but said, 'Style is a matter of interpretation.'

Web films overseen by Chief Marketing Officer Keith Greggor—have paid off. Since 2000, sales have jumped 72% to 1.9 million cases, according to Impact Databank. Sales increased 11.2% in 2004.

Skyy executives wouldn't comment on the current ad, but in a prepared statement, a spokeswoman pleaded art. "Style is a matter of interpretation and like with all art we appreciate all points of view."

## "This ad takes the promise of buy the booze, get the girl to new lows"

Skyy's print campaign from Lambesis, Carlsbad, Calif., often places the bottle in stylized, dreamlike photos and frequently includes deep cleavage and suggestive situations. An ad in the latest issue of GQ features a woman wearing soaked lingerie floating on a mattress in a pool, a nipple clearly visible through the material.

Its work has caused controversy before. Years ago it ran an ad showing a sunbathing woman reclining on a diving board and looking up at a man's crotch. Skyy pulled it from some publications.

### BEER SELF-REGULATION

A spokeswoman for the Marin Institute denounced the ad now running in outlets including Dennis Publishing's *Maxim*, saying it violates Discus code. The photos surrounding the woman feature naked male torsos, two bra-clad women embracing, a woman covering her bare breasts and difficult-to-identify body parts.

The Skyy situation hits amid a controversy over self-regulation of advertising in the beer industry. The Federal Trade Commission, in a recent letter to the watchdog group Center for Science in the Public Interest, called for the Beer Institute to create an outside panel to weigh marketers' compliance with industry guidelines. (Currently, the association refers complaint to marketers to handle.) ■