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Best Practice Guide for the Responsible Use of Generative AI in Advertising

(SME Version)



**ADVERTISING
ASSOCIATION**

Executive Summary

AI is reshaping the advertising industry, and advertising practitioners are already using Generative AI (GenAI) to transform every facet of the process – from creative ideation to production. While offering significant benefits, GenAI can potentially introduce risks in areas such as deception, bias, and privacy erosion. Growing use of AI generated content could impact the industry's long-term standing with consumers, with notable implications for trust in advertising.

That is why the Advertising Association's members: advertisers, agencies, and media, under the auspices of the joint Government-Industry Online Advertising Taskforce, have come together to develop this voluntary Best Practice Guide, building on and operationalising the IPA and ISBA principles for ethical AI use in advertising. We believe that a coherent, industry-led approach, which advocates consistent, high-standard practices, is the most effective means to pre-empt potential harms before they may occur. For those newer to AI technologies, we hope this guide sets out the key principles and considerations to build your confidence in appropriate use of AI tools.

The Guide is designed to enhance public trust and confidence in AI and ensure that responsible AI has a central role in growth and innovation, particularly in the advertising and marketing industry. This version of the Guide, specifically aimed at SMEs tackles these challenges facing advertising practitioners by providing more concise and tailored advice and recommendations which complements UK laws, like UK GDPR and the Equality Act 2010, as well as the UK's self-regulatory framework, such as CAP/BCAP Codes and ASA standards, to foster ethical innovation while upholding integrity.

This version of the Guide, aimed specifically at SMEs, contains changes has been adapted from the full Guide, focusing on the principles of most relevance for SMEs and making it easier and more proportionate for them to implement. These changes include:

- Removing the detailed guidance on governance
- Reducing the number of principles from eight to six
- Improving conciseness for each principle
- Removing the cumulative framework for implementing best practice

The Guide's principal aims are to deliver:

- Practical, high-level guidance for deploying GenAI responsibly in advertising
- A document for shared standards

By following the Guide, practitioners can harness GenAI's creative and operational potential whilst upholding the ethical standards that maintain consumer trust and support sustainable industry growth.

The Guide's recommendations are anchored in six principles which cover the following areas:

- Transparency
- Responsible Data Use
- Bias and Fairness: Mitigate discrimination via diverse data and monitoring.
- Human Oversight and Accountability: Review outputs proportionally to risk.
- Brand Safety and Reputation

- Environmental Stewardship

By following the Guide, practitioners can harness GenAI's creative and operational potential whilst upholding the ethical standards consumers expect and deserve.

Introduction

This voluntary Best Practice Guide ('Guide') supports UK advertising industry practitioners in using generative artificial intelligence ('GenAI') responsibly. It provides guidance on transparency, consumer protection, and maintaining advertising integrity whilst enabling innovation and growth.

GenAI is increasingly central to advertising—from ideation to content creation and personalisation. These systems include large language models, image generators, voice synthesis, video creation tools, and hybrid systems. They can create text, images, audio, video, or other media based on prompts, training data, or user inputs. Given this complexity, this Guide helps practitioners navigate these changes by distilling technical issues into accessible language. It does not create new rules or replace existing legal frameworks. Instead, it offers a common reference point for businesses making ethical decisions about AI deployment, complementing existing regulation with actionable best practices.

1. Objectives and Scope

1.1 Purpose

This Guide aims to:

- Establish high-level, voluntary best practice guidelines for GenAI use in online advertising
- Provide practical guidance for identifying and managing GenAI-related risks
- Support effective consumer protection and prevent misleading or harmful AI-generated content.
- Create shared standards and common language across the advertising ecosystem
- Promote public trust in the advertising industry
- Enable responsible innovation and competitive advantage
- Complement existing legal, regulatory, and self-regulatory frameworks

1.2 Scope and Applicability

This Guide is designed to be relevant to the following SME organisations

- Advertisers and brands
- Advertising agencies
- Media owners
- Technology providers and platforms serving the advertising industry

Whilst developed for the UK market, the principles are sufficiently flexible to accommodate international interpretations and applications.

To ensure consistency with existing obligations, the Guide operates within established legal and regulatory frameworks whilst providing practical interpretation of their application to GenAI contexts. These frameworks include:

UK Legislation:

- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR
- Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act (2024)
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act (1988)

- Equality Act 2010

Self-Regulatory Standards:

- CAP/BCAP Codes and ASA standards (UK)
- EASA, ICAS, and ICC standards (international)

Practical Guidance:

- ICO AI and Data Protection Risk Toolkit
- ASA/CAP guidance on GenAI & advertising regulation
- ASA/CAP guidance on disclosure of AI in advertising

By working alongside these frameworks, the Guide provides a common reference point for businesses navigating the evolving AI landscape.

3. Core Principles

Principle 1: Ensuring Transparency

Disclosure of AI-generated or AI-altered advertising content should be determined using a risk-based approach that prioritises prevention of consumer harm.

Transparency enables consumers to make informed choices and builds trust in individual brands and the advertising ecosystem. When consumers understand how content is created and why they are seeing particular advertisements, they can evaluate claims critically and exercise meaningful choice.

The decision to disclose GenAI use should be proportionate to the potential for consumer harm or misinterpretation. Content that is clearly deceptive or misleading should never be used, whether GenAI use is disclosed or not. Content that could potentially, but not always, confuse consumers about facts, product capabilities, endorsements, or the reality of depicted events requires clear disclosure. Content that is obviously fictional, fantastical, or impossible does not typically require AI-specific labelling, though standard advertising disclosure rules would still apply. For further guidance and context, consider the report from ICAS¹: Beyond Simple Labelling².

Principle 2: Ensuring Responsible Use of Data

Personal data used for GenAI applications—including model training, algorithmic targeting, and personalisation—should comply with data protection law and respect individuals’ privacy rights.

GenAI systems often rely on large volumes of personal data to function effectively. Responsible use ensures that individuals’ privacy rights are respected and consumer trust is maintained, and regulatory penalties are prevented. Consumers are also increasingly aware of—and concerned about—how their data is used. Responsible practices—such as transparency, consent, and clear opt-out mechanisms—help maintain public trust in digital advertising and prevent backlash against brands or platforms. Additionally, respect for intellectual property rights is an important part of responsible practice in this area.

Principle 3: Preventing Bias and Ensuring Fairness

GenAI systems should be designed, deployed, used, and monitored to prevent discrimination and ensure fair treatment of all individuals and groups.

AI systems can unintentionally create replicate or amplify new or existing societal biases related to race, gender, age, disability, socioeconomic status, or other protected characteristics. In advertising, this manifests as unfair targeting, systematic exclusion of certain groups, or reinforcement of harmful stereotypes. Beyond being unethical, discriminatory AI practices may breach the Equality Act 2010 and undermine consumer trust.

Preventing bias requires proactive measures throughout the AI lifecycle—from initial design through ongoing deployment. Fair AI systems benefit everyone, align with legal obligations, and build long-term brand credibility.

¹ <https://icas.global/>

² <https://icas.global/wp-content/uploads/Beyond-Simple-Labelling.pdf>

Principle 4 – Ensuring Human Oversight and Accountability

AI-generated advertising content should be subject to appropriate human oversight before publication, with the level of oversight proportionate to potential consumer harm. Human oversight also includes monitoring GenAI systems to detect performance degradation, bias drift, compliance failures, or other issues requiring intervention.

Whilst AI systems can produce efficient and scalable content, they can also generate misleading, inappropriate, or harmful material that damages brand reputation or deceives consumers. Human oversight ensures AI outputs align with brand values, legal standards, and ethical requirements including CAP/BCAP Codes and ASA rulings.

Effective oversight maintains the balance between AI's efficiency benefits and the need for accountability, particularly as consumers and regulators increasingly scrutinise AI-generated advertising.

Principle 5 – Driving Brand Safety and Suitability

Organisations should assess and mitigate brand safety and suitability risks from AI-generated content and AI-driven ad placement, ensuring GenAI systems align with brand values and safety standards.

GenAI systems can rapidly create and distribute content at scale, increasing both efficiency and risk. AI-generated content may inadvertently misalign with brand values, include offensive material, or appear in brand-unsafe contexts alongside harmful content. The speed and volume of AI operations mean reputation damage can occur quickly and at scale.

Proactive brand safety measures—including robust content screening, placement controls, and real-time monitoring (where practical)—are essential to prevent GenAI use from undermining brand credibility.

Principle 6 – Promoting Environmental Stewardship

When selecting GenAI tools and approaches, organisations should consider environmental implications alongside business objectives, favouring energy-efficient options where practical.

AI systems, particularly large-scale model training and high-volume inference, consume significant energy. Whilst individual advertising applications may have modest environmental footprints, collective industry usage creates meaningful impact. Organisations can support sustainability by making informed choices about AI deployment, recognising that environmental responsibility increasingly influences brand reputation and aligns with UK Net Zero targets. Consider signing up to AdGreen (www.weareadgreen.org), which tracks AI usage during production and enables users to measure the emissions impact of their AI tools.

4. Conclusion

This Best Practice Guide provides the UK advertising industry with a practical framework for deploying GenAI responsibly in online advertising.

The six core principles – transparency, responsible data use, preventing bias and ensuring fairness, human oversight, brand safety, and environmental consideration – address the key ethical challenges that AI presents whilst enabling innovation. Together, they help advertisers, agencies, media owners, and technology providers navigate AI’s opportunities and risks.

Responsible GenAI use requires more than good intentions. It demands robust governance, proportionate risk assessment, and ongoing vigilance. Organisations that embed these principles into their operations will be better positioned to maintain consumer trust, ensure regulatory compliance, and build sustainable competitive advantage.

GenAI will continue to evolve and this Guide will evolve with it. Organisations adopting these principles are encouraged to share their experiences, contribute to industry forums, and collaborate on updates as technology, regulation, and best practices develop.

By committing to responsible AI practices, the advertising industry can harness GenAI’s creative and operational potential whilst upholding the ethical standards consumers expect and deserve.

For more detail, consider reading the full version of the Best Practice Guide, which contains additional principles on societal wellbeing and continuous monitoring, recommendations for AI governance, and a cumulative framework for implementing best practice.

ANNEX (A) Definitions

GenAI is a broad and evolving term that can mean different things to different stakeholders—advertisers, agencies, tech providers, regulators, and consumers. Clear definitions ensure everyone speaks the same language when discussing risks, responsibilities, and opportunities, and help organisations understand when they are using AI in ways that may trigger legal, ethical, or operational responsibilities. These definitions are tailored to online advertising and aligned to the Guide’s objectives.

AI-Generated Content: Any advertising material where GenAI has been used to create, substantially alter, or enhance content in ways that materially affect its meaning, appearance, or impact.

Bias (in AI systems): Systematic errors or skewed outcomes in AI systems that unfairly favour or discriminate against certain groups, individuals, or characteristics. Bias can arise from unrepresentative training data, flawed algorithms, or the replication of existing societal prejudices, and may result in discriminatory targeting, exclusion, or stereotyping in advertising.

Deepfake: AI-generated synthetic media that convincingly depicts real individuals saying or doing things they did not actually say or do, created by manipulating or fabricating audio, video, or images using AI techniques. In advertising, deepfakes pose particular risks when used without consent or adequate disclosure.

High-Risk Applications: AI applications that pose significant potential for consumer harm, including: unauthorised or undisclosed use of real people’s likenesses, advertising in regulated sectors (financial services, healthcare, gambling), content targeting vulnerable populations, or unsubstantiated claims about product or service efficacy.

Human Oversight: The process by which qualified personnel review, validate, or intervene in AI-generated outputs or decisions to ensure accuracy, compliance with ethical standards and regulations, and alignment with brand values. The level and frequency of human oversight should be proportionate to the risk level of the AI application.

Personalisation (AI-driven): The use of AI to tailor advertising content, messaging, or delivery to individual users based on their characteristics, behaviour, or predicted preferences, going beyond traditional demographic segmentation to create unique or highly specific advertising experiences.

Synthetic Media: A subset of AI-generated content. Audio, visual, or audiovisual content that has been artificially generated or manipulated using AI to create realistic but fabricated representations of people, events, or scenarios.




Training Data: The datasets used to develop and teach AI systems, which may include text, images, videos, or other content. In advertising contexts, training data influences what AI systems can generate, how they make decisions, and what biases they may contain.

Vulnerable Populations: Groups requiring enhanced protection in advertising contexts due to factors that may increase susceptibility to harm or exploitation. This includes children (under 18), elderly consumers, individuals with cognitive impairments, and those experiencing financial distress, or other groups requiring enhanced protection.

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