

You've got mail: drinks are on sale! A study to assess volume and content of direct marketing received from online alcohol retailers in Australia

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Introduction and Aims: Customers of online alcohol retailers are exposed to marketing displayed on alcohol retailers' websites and may also receive marketing material directly via email and text message once contact details are provided at the time of an online sale. To date, this direct marketing activity from online alcohol retailers has not been studied. This study aims to document the quantity and content of marketing material received by customers of online alcohol retailers.

Methods: A cross-sectional study of direct marketing from the most popular 100 online alcohol retailers in Australia. Marketing material received via email and text message was collected for three-months and coded inductively.

Results: We received 1496 emails and 18 text messages over the three-month study period. The number of emails received from each retailer ranged from 0 to 143. The primary purpose of most emails (67.4%) was to advertise a special or offer a discount. Almost all emails (98.6%) complied with spam legislation to include an unsubscribe link, but almost half (46.5%) of the emails from retailers in jurisdictions where the inclusion of a liquor license number is mandatory, failed to include one. The most common marketing theme was to link specific times or events to drinking (18.8%). Almost half (48.5%) of emails advertised free or discounted delivery for purchasing over a specified threshold.

Discussions and Conclusions: Most online alcohol retailers are engaging in direct marketing to their customers via email. More research is needed to understand how these emails may influence purchasing and consumption.

Implications for Policy: Many Australian online alcohol retailers are using promotion and discounting strategies that may incentivise purchasing greater quantities of alcohol. Regulators should consider introducing restrictions on alcohol discounting and short-term price promotions, as has been done recently in Ireland.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare. SC is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship. CW is supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council Early Career Fellowship (1140292). XF is supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council Career Development Fellowship (1148792).