

Ung Rejs: Danish Youth Travel Agency and ethical promotions

Ung Rejs, founded in 1992, is one of the five youth travel agencies in Denmark offering travel to Southern Europe for Danish people between 16 and 26 years of age. Many Danish are familiar with Ung Rejs advertisements and e-marketing promotional strategies. [Click here to look at its [Facebook site](#).][1] These advertisements by Ung Rejs have been thought to 'cross the line' of acceptable marketing behaviour. Many organisations such as alcohol and youth councils think Ung Rejs's marketing strategies go beyond what is acceptable to the general public. Notwithstanding this however, the youth market remains successfully engaged by the Ung Rejs 'out there' strategy. The company's slogan, 'We know how to party', is just one of many ways in which its promotional campaigns hint at the potential of what its trips have to offer with the major focus being upon party activities and alcohol.

What is Ung Rejs?

Ung Rejs was founded when a 17-year old Danish youth wanted a holiday where he could go with friends, party and meet other people while at the same time relax on the beach. After just four short years the business boomed from 175 customers to 4 000 customers. Ung Rejs's product strategy was to choose holiday destinations in places much warmer than Denmark. Its second focus was on a low penetration pricing strategy, thus making it possible for almost everyone within the target market to be a part of the party. [Take a look at the [Ung Rejs webpage](#).][2]

Ung Rejs is now Denmark's largest travel agency for young people and offers around 6 000 tours to Lloret de Mar in Spain [Click to have a look at [Lloret de Mar in Spain](#)][3] or the Golden Sands Resort in Bulgaria. [4] All guides employed by Ung Rejs are required to either have a certificate from Scandinavia's biggest guide-school, Service & Co, or have been headhunted from other bureaus, where they have gained the necessary practical experience. As part of its marketing strategy Ung Rejs has developed a unique promotional and advertising campaign. The promotional strategy features highlights of its tours, while humour and pictures are also introduced to develop a concept of a fun-filled adventure in the minds of its winter-bound Danish consumers. Such images have been critically evaluated by many politicians and lobby groups. A recent article in the Danish press suggests that

many politicians think that Ung Rejs's latest series of advertisements has 'crossed the line' once more [Whilst the article is in Danish, you might be keen to see [what upset the Danish politicians.](#)][5] This is not the first time that Ung Rejs had come to the notice of authorities. Ung Rejs developed a very controversial e-marketing strategy including the uploading of several controversial videos and pictures to its website. [Click here to see [one of the milder video clips.](#)][6] These photographs and videos showed young holiday-makers in very few clothes kissing, dancing inappropriately and doing shots or tequila body shots.

More recently, Ung Rejs has drawn the attention of the authorities with its TV advertisements. One advertisement is about a naked young guy who wakes up, with a pair of flippers on and chained to a bed in a wrecked hotel room. The advertisement goes on to show someone knocking on the door of his hotel room. He then discovers a goat and some chickens in the room as well as a phone number on his arm. The voice in the advertisement then says: 'You never forget your Ung Rejs vacation but you probably will not remember it all either.' [Click to see [what sort of fun some people have with Ung Rejs.](#)][7]

Whilst there is not a single drop of alcohol or drugs to be seen in the advertisement, it is clear that it has been a very wild night with a huge intake of alcohol. As a result of this part of Ung Rejs's marketing strategy, the Alcohol Policy Council has reported Ung Rejs to the Consumer Ombudsman in order to have its latest advertisements removed from both television and print media, as it is claimed that they can be interpreted as promoting the use of alcohol to young people.

This is not the first commercial Ung Rejs has created that has been the focus of political debate. In 2001, Ung Rejs's marketing strategy focused upon 'Remember to drink enough fluids'. At the heart of this marketing campaign were pictures that showed 'someone pouring alcohol into a guy's mouth'. [Have a look at the [commercial image.](#)][8] This was seen by authorities to be clearly 'over the line'. The alcohol in the pictures, according to the Consumer Ombudsman Hagen Jørgensen, 'Clearly lures the youth in Denmark to want to drink and party hard and misuse[s] the important[ce] of drinking water not fluids [such] as in alcohol'.[5]

Ung Rejs has had troubles, since the company's inception, with politicians and health authorities. Difficulties have been generated by politicians who are uncomfortable

with the Ung Rejs marketing strategies and the product promotional concepts, including those promoted through e-marketing or other media. The Danish Health Board claims that Ung Rejs's promotional strategies encourage young people to become uninhibited in their drinking habits. They suggest that the e-marketing and other promotional tools used by Ung Rejs put forward images that imply that behaving in such a way is cool and appealing to the targeted demographic. Authorities and politicians alike recommend that both the e-marketing website and other marketing media need to be changed. Bad publicity and criticism by authority figures can contribute to troubles for Ung Rejs's marketing strategy. The poor public relations image caused by public criticisms in the press could denigrate Ung Rejs's image in the eyes of the parents of its teenage consumers, thus indirectly impacting upon its capacity to reach the youth market.

Despite this, its web advertisements and other media have been an absolute success among the youth market. Controversially, and contrary to the authorities' desired outcomes, Ung Rejs has received so much 'bad press' that this has in fact 'backfired', encouraging the purchase of these tours by young consumers, who now want to go even more. Negative publicity can sometimes increase purchase likelihood and sales as Berger, Sorensen & Rasmussen (2010) [9] suggest. The negative publicity relating to Ung Rejs has had just the opposite effect of that desired, as teenagers like to do the opposite of what they are told. Negative press releases relating to how bad Ung Rejs's e-marketing and other promotional messages are for the youth market have encouraged teenagers to purchase more Ung Rejs holiday packages than even before. This is quite a normal reaction in terms of teenage consumer behaviour according to Nelson (1970) [17]. Publicity, either positive or negative, still increases product awareness and accessibility.[9, 10] Research indicates that since 2001, awareness of alcohol amongst the youth population has increased by 71%, and this has occurred because of the high exposure to alcohol through advertising similar to that produced to promote Ung Rejs holidays. Authorities are concerned that this may increase the chances of teenagers taking up drinking as well as encourage increased teen consumption.[11] The Danish Alcohol Policy Council is unhappy with Ung Rejs's holiday promotions, since the majority of its advertisements either have alcohol in them or suggest alcohol consumption. The CEO of Ung Rejs, John Tobiesen, in defence of its marketing strategy, suggests that it is ridiculous that his company's e-marketing and other promotional tools are criticised. As he suggests, 'everyone

knows that there will be alcohol consumed on these holidays'.[5] But the Secretary General of the Alcohol Policy Council believes that both the web-based advertisements and other forms of marketing from Ung Rejs clearly violate the Danish Marketing Act Article 8(2), which, among other things, clearly states that advertising must not even indirectly incite youth to use drugs or other intoxicants including alcohol, or encourage reckless behaviour. One solution to this problem could be Ung Rejs trying to focus its marketing strategies more on the social activities of the tours rather than on the use of alcohol. Young people are very well aware that drinking and having fun is a part of a youth trip: it does not have to be highly evident in the advertising.

Danish culture and alcohol

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has conducted an analysis of European teenage drinking habits. This report reveals that Danish youth start drinking earlier and consume more alcohol than other European countries.[12] It is questionable whether the advertising used by Ung Rejs has had an effect on this drinking culture, or if it arises from Danish culture. The Danish culture of drinking has boomed since 'party-going' has become 'in' with the 12–30 demographic.[13] Generation Y is described by Amour (2007) [15] as 'the Ego boomers'. They are seen as being highly independent and driven to create a new culture instead of sticking to traditional Danish values. To change their youthful behaviour toward drinking is not about changing the web advertisements but changing their culture.[14]

The question remains, should the Alcohol Policy Board continue to blame Ung Rejs for its website advertisements and other youth-focused marketing strategies because it thinks they encourage drinking? Or should the authorities be focusing upon how to prevent, by other means, this changing youth culture from treating unsocial drinking as attractive.

Alcohol is a huge health problem and many politicians and health professionals are concerned about the impact alcohol has on youth today. Ung Rejs is a travel agency that uses e-marketing and other promotional messages to encourage young Danish people to join its party tours to Southern Europe. Its e-marketing and television advertisements have been recognised as 'crossing the line' with Danish law. On the other hand, they are also famous with Danish youth and they are known to be

innovative and humorous methods of successfully engaging this target audience. Notwithstanding this, Ung Rejs advertisements would not be suitable to all international markets because of the cultural unacceptability of youth alcohol consumption and other legal restrictions. However, Ung Rejs has a unique teenage tour service which shows the potential of international offerings, making it possible for young people from all over Europe join the party.

Questions

1. *Can Ung Rejs's use of e-marketing be effective in offering trips to the international youth market outside of Denmark?*
2. *Should Ung Rejs change its e-marketing and other promotional concepts and strategies in the Danish market?*
3. *Should Ung Rejs change its tour rules when it comes to alcohol consumption?*
4. *Should the Alcohol Policy Council and the Consumer Ombudsman switch their focus away from the promotional issues of Ung Rejs and more toward Danish culture and its attitudes toward alcohol consumption?*
5. *Consumer-created content is becoming more prevalent. Discuss how Ung Rejs could utilise this trend and identify to what extent it is likely to impact on teenage audience engagement, especially when the e-medium is carrying the consumer-generated content.*

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