

## Briefing on “Report on campaign evaluation for The Senet Group”, October 2017

### Background – the April 2016 report

This report shows evidence from the sixth wave of research from Bilendi (an independent research company) for the Senet Group. Since early 2015, Bilendi have run a survey twice a year (in March and September) looking at brand recognition for adverts from the Senet Group (e.g. “When The Fun Stops, Stop”). This report includes evidence from the September 2017 survey.

One of Bilendi’s previous reports for the Senet Group (from April 2016) was analysed by Landman Economics for the Campaign for Fairer Gambling (CFG). Following this analysis, CFG made a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority in August 2016 over the following aspects of the 2016 report (as referenced in an advertisement “When The Fun Stops, Stop” published in “The Week” magazine, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2016):

- 1) The report claims that “over a third of regular gamblers who have seen the message [“When the fun stops, stop”] from the Senet Group say it has led them to approach gambling more responsibly”.
- 2) The report claims that “over 2 million people have directly quoted the line [“When the fun stops, stop”] themselves – online or offline”.

CFG argued that claim (1) was misleading for the following reasons:

- a) The Survey was not adequately reflective in its sample respondents of either the gamblers whose behaviour is represented based on its results, or of the population as a whole owing to the nature of the sample participants (persons prepared to participate in a wide range of online and/or offline surveys for reward) and the manner in which they are recruited and in which the survey is conducted (an online survey taken for reward).
- b) The claim implies that the advertiser’s previous adverts containing the message “when the fun stops, stop” changed the behaviour of regular gamblers in that the message “has led them to approach gambling behaviour more responsibly”. In correspondence with CFG, Senet Group argued that the claim was justified on the basis of the responses received in the survey to the question “made me think about my gambling behaviour”. This was an unjustified interpretation of the survey responses: to equate “made me think about my own gambling behaviour” with “led [them] to approach gambling more responsibly” is not justifiable.

CFG argued that claim (2) was misleading for the following reasons:

- a) The survey was not adequately representative of gamblers or of the population as a whole (as with claim (1) above).
- b) The claim was worded unambiguously to state a statistical fact an average reader of the advert might believe was based on empirical data, whereas it is in fact based on a speculative figure extrapolated from a small and unrepresentative sample of respondents to the survey. This extrapolation was done in a simplistic manner which applies the percentage of survey respondents agreeing to a statement to the entire adult population of the UK.

The ASA upheld each of CFG's complaints regarding the advert and the inadequacy of the Senet Group's response to the points raised. The result was that the ASA informed Senet Group of the complaint and they have assured us that the ad will no longer appear in its current form. Senet Group also agreed to ensure that similar issues do not arise in their future similar marketing communication.

## The new (October 2017) report – more of the same

The new (October 2017) report demonstrates that, despite the criticism from the ASA and its undertaking not to misrepresent research findings in future, Senet Group is *still* commissioning research and accepting research findings based on the same flawed methodology as before. In particular:

- The analysis still scales up figures from the 'all adults' part of the survey to the total UK population. For example slide 9 reports that 19% of all adults say that the "When the fun stops, stop" campaign has 'led [them] to warn other people about their gambling, if only jokingly'. This is presented as 5.7 million adults (i.e. 19% of the total population) but the same limitations with the selection and representativeness of the sample apply as with the 2016 report – [it's a paid sample, not randomly chosen, etc.] It's not clear whether this statistic is an accurate representation of the data. Similar extrapolation to the whole population is found at several points in the report, e.g.:
  - Slide 10 where it is claimed that 5.7 million adults have warned others about their gambling, 'if only jokingly';
  - Slide 11 where it is claimed that the ad campaign has helped 5.4 million people approach gambling more responsibly;
  - Slide 12 where it is claimed that 3.3 million adults (6.3% of the adult population) agree that the campaign 'has helped me – at least once – stop gambling more than I should'
- Bilendi is still collecting data on the percentage of survey respondents (both regular gamblers, and all adults) who recognise the Senet Group advertising campaign, who agree with statements such as:

- “[the campaign] made me more aware that gambling can become a problem for some people”;
- “[the campaign] made me think more about my own gambling behaviour”.
- As CFG made clear in its previous complaint to the ASA, statements like this cannot be equated with the statement that “[the campaign] led me to approach gambling more responsibly” and there is a clear danger that the Senet Group will try to make this false equivalence between statements again in future advertising.

The main new feature of the October 2017 report compared to the April 2016 report is that there is now a long enough time-series of data points (six) for Bilendi to be able to draw graphs of summary statistics over time, which show increases in (for example) the degree of recognition of the Senet Group advertising campaign, awareness of betting “tips” (e.g. “only bet what you can afford”, “never chase your losses”) and the number of people warning others about their gambling behaviour. While some of the trends are interesting, none of this compensates for the flaws in the extrapolation of this kind of sample statistic to figures regarding millions of people in the general population.

In short, analysis of the new wave of research from Bilendi for the Senet Group suggests that none of the lessons of the ASA criticism of the methodological flaws in their 2016 research have been addressed.

## No evidence that Senet campaign reduces gambling-related harm

Presumably if Senet had any evidence that their advertising had any causal impact in reducing gambling activity, or even if there were a robust correlation between increased Senet advertising spending and reduced gambling activity, this information would have been made public. The fact that no such evidence has been publicly released suggests that no such evidence exists. On the contrary, the two gambling activities that are being investigated in the DCMS Consultation, B2s and remote gambling, the two areas of primary focus for the Senet Group’s campaign, have both continued to increase in GGY.

This is particularly remarkable in respect of B2 gaming machines as the Association of British Bookmakers’ voluntary code of practice, the DCMS’s regulations for bets of £50 or more and the negative media coverage of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals all appear to have had no impact. Furthermore, there is no evidence of any reduction in session length for B2 machine players. More worryingly, there has been an increase in problem gambling overall and specifically on B2s comparing 2012 to 2015.

In summary, there is no evidence that Senet style advertising is having, or will have, any impact in reducing the totality of gambling-related harm.

Howard Reed, Landman Economics, 16 November 2017