# Advertising industry’s drinking problem has reached breaking point

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### Alcohol is the essential lubricant that oils the advertising industry’s conferences, awards and networking events. But is it stopping advertisers from doing our best work? Mumbrella's deputy editor Josie Tutty argues it is.

“How many units of alcohol do you drink per week?”

It was the dreaded question, one I’d been mentally preparing for, just in case the doctor threw it my way. It was November, and so with some degree of honesty I replied: “About five or six?”

Early November was the calm before the storm, where the Christmas invites had been sent, but the parties were still a few weeks off. My colleagues were eyeing their December calendars with trepidation, and we were all trying to stay off the booze.

I was in the doctor’s office to get the results of a bone density scan. In 2016, I had a minor slip on a concrete step outside my house in London, which for most people would result in nothing more than a bruised bum and an embarrassed smile. I broke my back.

NHS budgets wouldn’t stretch to finding out why someone in their early twenties received a fracture from a relatively minor fall, which was why, two years later and living in Australia, I was getting the results of a density scan for the first time.

The doctor told me I had osteoporosis, and that until I get further tests, they’re still not quite sure why.

But there’s something else I’m concerned might be playing a part in my diagnosis: alcohol. After a few weeks of paranoid Googling and chatting with specialists, I’ve discovered that one of the very many things alcohol can have a detrimental effect on is bone health.

What I didn’t tell the doctor was my guesstimate was me on a very, very good month, and if I had clicked ‘attend’ on every industry event that landed in my inbox, that number could be a hell of a lot higher.

Alcohol is the essential lubricant that oils our industry’s conferences, awards and networking events. We consume it because standing around without a drink in our hand feels wrong. We drink it to dull the awkwardness of talking to people we don’t know. We drink it because it’s fun.

Avoiding events provides me with a nagging doubt that I’m not quite doing my job properly. Drinking orange juice (the one universally accepted non alcoholic drink provided at these things) leads to suspicious looks, and comments ranging from ‘don’t be boring’ to the classic ‘go on, one won’t hurt.’

In short, it gets subtly defensive. The person drinking immediately feels as if the person not drinking is judging them. So it’s easier to have one or two, than be faced with a barrage of pointed questions designed to uncover a history of alcoholism or a hidden pregnancy.

And that’s just adland.

Throw journalism and PR into the mix, where stories are uncovered from gossiping with a contact over a wine and relationships are forged in the haze of a boozy lunch, and it starts to feel like we can’t do our jobs without it.

As a team, we have devised strategies. We order beer and hold onto the bottle for longer than is strictly necessary. We order soda and lime because people assume it has vodka in it. If one of us doesn’t want to drink, they will hold someone else’s drink for them, so it looks like they have something in their hand.

While I’m not yet completely sure that alcohol is the culprit behind my back, I do know that a hangover stops any early morning gym sessions in their tracks, and weight-bearing exercise is the one thing guaranteed to help.

But it’s not just about physical health. We all work better when we’ve had a good night’s sleep and woken up in a positive mood. I write, edit and communicate better when I’ve gone a while without drinking and managed to fit in some exercise here and there.

A glance at [UnLtd, Never Not Creative and Everymind’s recent study of 1,800 media and marketing industry workers](https://mumbrella.com.au/over-half-of-the-media-and-marketing-industry-shows-symptoms-of-depression-555420)shows there’s more to the story. It revealed 56% of our workforce show symptoms of depression, 20 percentage points more than the national average. It also revealed a 29 percentage point increase in the symptoms of anxiety compared to national data. While the study didn’t specifically delve into the link between these stats and alcohol consumption, other studies have shown booze can increase the likelihood of both depression and anxiety. I’m sensing there is a link.

So the next time someone tells you they’re not drinking at a work event, let them. From anxiety exacerbated by the brain-altering qualities of alcohol, to dodgy bones, to simply wanting to go to the gym in the morning, the reasons are random and unpredictable.

I am part of the problem. Those who know me will be laughing as they recall the number of times I’ve said ‘I don’t feel like drinking tonight’, only to be caught with a wine in my hand a few hours later. No one is physically forcing wine down my throat, and I’m aware that ‘woman required to drink too much prosecco’ is the most first world problem anyone has ever had.

But if we want to make the best work we possibly can, we’re a lot more likely to be up to the task when we’re actively taking steps towards better mental and physical health. It’s mind-boggling to consider how many collective work hours have been lost to hangovers, bad moods, and days overshadowed by anxious thoughts. Plus, I’d rather not do my back in again, thank you very much.

So, if you fancy a catch up in 2019, let’s go for a cup of tea?

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