iCLEAR

COMPLIANCE
INTELLIGENCE



Read between the lines

October 2026

MONTHLY ROUND-UP

01 Weight-loss pills and online pharmacies

02 AI trading apps

03 Fake closing-down sales

04 Social responsibility (1.3)

05 Emerging themes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ASA is reading between the lines

October's cases share one thread. Very few of the banned ads said anything that was clearly false. They implied it. A pharmacy ad never named the drug. A jewellery brand never gave a real closing date. The ASA judged each one on the impression it left.

Five online pharmacies were caught promoting prescription-only weight-loss medicines, including the first ads for the new Wegovy pill. AI-powered trading and betting apps made making money sound easy, and two jewellery brands ran "closing down, everything free" offers that came with a delivery bill.

October had less rulings than the previous month, with 17 formal rulings against September's 37, and every one was upheld. Eight were flagged by the ASA's own monitoring system. This report turns those cases into practical lessons for teams planning and approving campaigns.

THE EDITORIAL TAKEAWAY

If a consumer can reasonably infer it, the ASA treats it as though it's been explicitly said.

Check the overall impression of every asset, including the landing page and every click after it, before it goes live.

THIS MONTH'S HEADLINES

The October picture

17

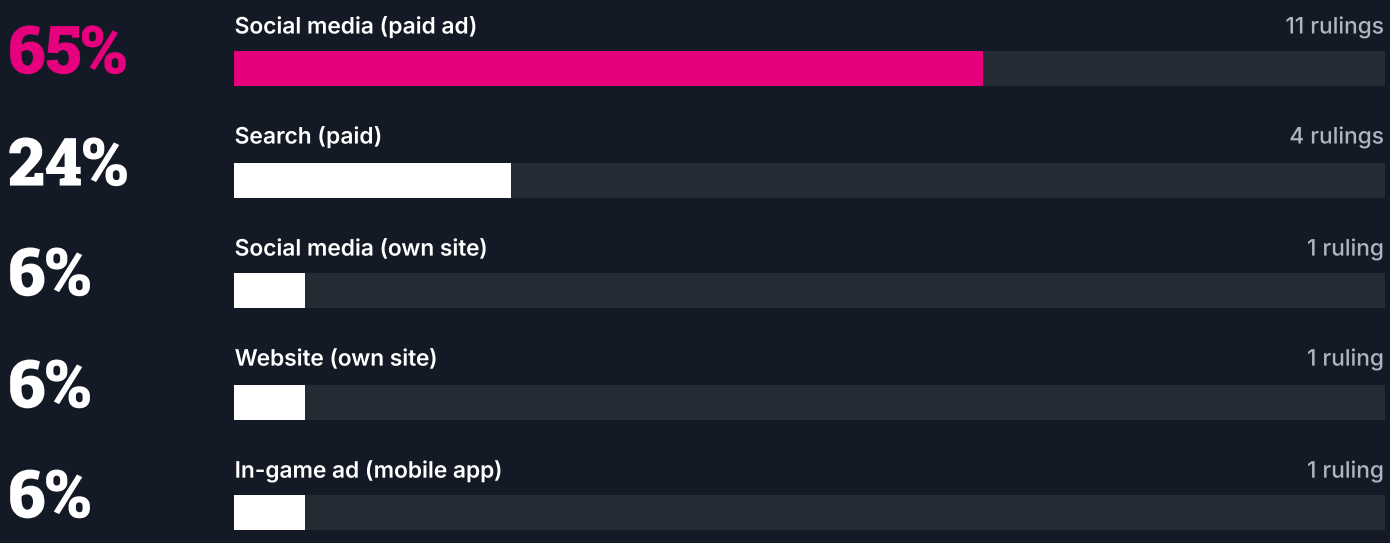
RULINGS

17

UPHELD (100%)

Where the ads ran

RULINGS BY MEDIA CHANNEL



Top 3 CAP Code rules breached

3.1

8 CASES

Misleading advertising

Ads mustn't materially mislead or be likely to.

12.12

5 CASES

Prescription-only medicines

You can't advertise prescription-only medicines to the public.

3.7

4 CASES

Substantiation

You need documentary evidence before you make an objective claim.

Rule 1.3, social responsibility, also had 4 cases.

Top 3 sectors

01 **Weight loss, medicines and health**
Six rulings: five online pharmacies and a blood-testing app.

02 **Finance and gambling**
Four rulings, led by two AI trading education platforms.

03 **Clothing, shoes and jewellery**
Two online jewellery brands running fake closing-down giveaways.

Key takeaways

The click-through counts.
The ASA looked at where each pharmacy ad led as well as at the ad itself.

"Coming soon" is still advertising.
Making a teaser of a medicine before it was licensed broke the rules.

"Free" has to mean free.
Items sold as free with £13.95 to £19 delivery didn't pass the "free" claim.

Blaming the agency doesn't help.
Two advertisers said a third party made the ad. Both rulings were still upheld.

01

FEATURE ARTICLE

The pill before the pill



Wegovy tablets: advertised before they arrived

On 11 June 2026 the MHRA licensed Novo Nordisk's Wegovy pill, the first oral GLP-1 tablet for weight management, as a prescription-only medicine. Simple Online Pharmacy had already run an Instagram ad ten days earlier saying "NO NEEDLE. COMING SOON." Pharmacy Online later ran a website pop-up announcing "THE WEGOVY PILL JUST GOT APPROVED IN THE UK", with a pre-order button shown to every visitor.

On 7 October the ASA published its first rulings against ads for oral weight-loss medicines. Both pharmacies were found to have promoted a prescription-only medicine to the public. "These are powerful medicines, so it's important that ads don't encourage people to seek treatment," said Catherine Drewett, Investigations Manager at the ASA.

01 | FEATURE ARTICLE

Three more pharmacies broke the same rule without naming a drug at all. MedExpress said its product “helps silence food noise”. Juniper offered “50% Off” on “All Doses In Stock”. The Care Pharmacy showed a pen-shaped product with a dosage window. The ASA looked at the imagery, the wording and where the click led. Juniper argued its multi-page journey shielded people from prescription content. The ASA found the journey still ended on a page naming a prescription-only medicine.

KEY LESSON

You don’t have to name a drug to advertise it. Pen imagery, dosage language, appetite claims and the landing page can add up to a prescription-only medicine.

Why this matters for marketers

New treatments create a race to be first, and that’s when approval steps get skipped. One pharmacy said an external agency made its ads. The MHRA has warned that “where breaches occur, we will not hesitate to use the full range of regulatory powers”, so the cost of getting launch ads wrong is rising.

WHERE ICLEAR FITS

AI-assisted pre-checking can flag prescription-medicine signals in copy and imagery before an ad goes live, across every variant your team or agency produces.

It supports the approval process. It doesn’t replace human judgement or guarantee compliance.



02 | INDUSTRY IN FOCUS

AI trading apps: “Just AI that does the hard part”

What the ads said

Three October rulings came straight from the ASA’s Active Ad Monitoring system, which uses AI to find likely breaches. All three were for apps selling AI as a shortcut to making money. Finelo’s Brianna Trades ads said “Starting with trading doesn’t need a finance degree. Just AI that does the hard part.” ChartPrime promised “Precise Buy & Sell Signals” next to money-face emojis.

AI Scorecast claimed its football predictions had “a 97% accuracy rate” and didn’t respond to the ASA, which is a breach in itself. Finelo argued it offered education and simulated trading, so the financial rules shouldn’t apply. The ASA applied them anyway. Neither trading ad warned that investments can go down as well as up.

A checklist for fintech and betting-tech marketers

Practical steps for any ad that mentions money, returns or winning:

01 Add a clear risk warning to any ad that mentions trading or investing.

02 Be sure to have evidence for accuracy and success figures before they appear in an ad.

03 Avoid copy that makes money sound easy or fast.

04 Check ads against the financial rules even if you describe your product as education.

05 Reply promptly if the ASA gets in touch.

THE COMMERCIAL POINT

If your ad talks about money, returns or winning, the financial and gambling rules can apply even when your product is software.

RETAIL IN FOCUS

03

The closing-down sale that never closed



Harrison & James told YouTube viewers it was “CLOSING SUNDAY - EVERYTHING FREE” after 46 years, then charged £13.95 for delivery. It told the ASA the closure depended on selling stock, so there was no fixed date. Proud & Free posted “We are closing Proud & Free” and offered free jewellery “UNTIL MIDNIGHT”, with shipping from £19. It didn’t reply to the ASA and has been referred to CAP’s Compliance team. Both rulings were upheld.

The tactic is spreading. In a blog post on 4 November, Tim Gaunt of TSD created a fake “farewell sale” ad to a website built in one evening, with a fictitious retiring craftsman and an AI-generated founder photo. He also cites UK consumer group Which?, whose researchers found seven ads in one week claiming a high street chain was closing down. Expect more of these “closing down sales” as Christmas trading picks up.

KEY LESSON

Urgency works because people trust it. Closing-down and free claims need to be true on the day the ad runs.

Before running a “closing” or “free” offer

01	Only say you’re closing if you are, and give a real date.
02	Only call something free if the customer pays no more than the unavoidable realistic cost of delivery.
03	Keep review scores current and backed by evidence.
04	Show your trading name and a geographical address.



04 | RULE IN FOCUS

Social responsibility (1.3): context is part of the creative

Rule 1.3 says ads must be prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and society. Four October rulings breached it, and each one got there a different way.

Last Light: Rebirth UPHELD	An in-game ad inside the Sudoku.com puzzle app showed a sleeping female character having her tights removed and being hit with a fly swatter. The advertiser blamed a third-party agency, and the publisher said its filters didn't catch it.
RiseGuide UPHELD	A YouTube ad for a communication app showed a South Asian woman dismissed by colleagues before trying the app. Four people complained. The ASA found it reinforced harmful stereotypes, even though the colleagues were shown in a bad light.
bestbookiesandbettingsites.co.uk UPHELD	A betting comparison ad appeared when someone searched "self exclusion bookies". The site relied on negative keyword lists, which the ASA said weren't robust enough.
AI Scorecast UPHELD	An AI football prediction app implied users would very likely profit from gambling.

04 | RULE IN FOCUS

What marketers should take from this

Rule 1.3 covers where an ad appears and who it reaches as well as what it shows. Showing bad behaviour in a negative light doesn't protect an ad if the overall message still reinforces a stereotype, and a game setting doesn't change that.

Ask publishers and agencies how their filters work.

01
Where an ad appears

02
Who it reaches

03
What it shows

KEY LESSON

Test your placements and negative keywords as hard as you test your creative.

Approving the ad doesn't cover every app or search it might appear next to.

Four patterns to take into your next campaign

01

Implication counts

Unnamed drugs, undated closures and "AI does it for you" promises were all judged on the impression they left.

02

New products, same rules

The Wegovy pill arrived under the same prescription-only rules as the injections. Being first to market bought no leeway.

03

AI is on both sides

AI-powered apps featured in the rulings, and the ASA's own AI monitoring found three of them.

04

Silence makes it worse

Two advertisers didn't respond to the ASA. Both were found in breach without their side of the story being heard.

BEFORE YOU PUBLISH

Compliance checklist

- [ ] **Impression**
  Would a consumer infer a product or promise you haven't stated?
- [ ] **Journey**
  Have you checked the landing page and every click after it?
- [ ] **Timing**
  Is the product licensed and available before you mention it?
- [ ] **Pricing**
  Do your "free" and "closing" claims hold up?
- [ ] **Audience**
  Have you tested your exclusions and negative keywords?
- [ ] **Representation**
  Could any character or group be read as a stereotype?
- [ ] **Partners**
  Has agency-made creative been through your own approval?

OUR PERSPECTIVE

Check the impression, then the wording

October's cases point to one lesson. The ASA reads ads the way consumers do. A team that only checks for banned words will miss what an image, a pop-up or a landing page implies. Earlier review gives you time to spot issues and fix creative before it goes live.

iClear helps advertisers pre-screen advertising against relevant UK advertising standards, giving teams another way to spot potential issues earlier in the workflow. It's a support layer. It doesn't guarantee compliance or replace informed human approval.

LOOKING AHEAD

Christmas will test every "free" and "final" claim

Expect close attention to urgency and free-gift claims as Christmas trading picks up. Weight-loss treatments will stay under watch as oral options reach more people. The ASA has already started November with rulings on mobile game ads that misrepresent gameplay, including games like King's Farm Heroes Saga.