

ISBA



125 YEARS OF CHAMPIONING UK ADVERTISERS

125 Years



We are at the heart of a network of over 170 member companies, representing around 3,000 brands

Join us and our members for a walk down memory lane, as we celebrate 125 years of advocacy, change and reform on behalf of Britain's advertisers – and as we look to the future.

From calling on press barons to publish their newspaper sales figures in 1900, to leading the world in giving brand owners the ability to accurately measure the reach and frequency of their ad campaigns across different media channels over a century later, ISBA has been the voice of British advertisers for 125 years.

Formed when Queen Victoria was still on the throne, ISBA is the oldest association of advertisers in the world.

The roots of this media industry institution have grown far and wide since that time. We are at the heart of a network of over 170 member companies, representing around 3,000 brands with a combined spend of over £5 billion – as well as being instrumental in many of the industry partnerships, frameworks and guidelines which hold our industry to account.

Whether through our political advocacy, or our work in ensuring that advertising practices are fair, transparent and competitive, ISBA's purpose has been unwavering throughout: to support and champion advertisers to survive and thrive through change.

Amid ongoing political and economic instability, and as we navigate the unknown territories being created by AI and Big Tech, the words of one of our former presidents, Lord Alf Robens, feel just as relevant today as they did in 1975:

“There is no doubt advertisers will require to present an even more united front against the future attacks on our industry, no matter from what sources they may come.”

We do indeed need that united front, summoning advertisers' collective strength in the face of uncertainty. But the way our industry has evolved to meet new challenges and opportunities over the past 125 years clearly demonstrates that we are well-positioned to do just that.

ISBA has played a central part, which we feel is well worth celebrating in our 'quasiquintennial' year.



“There is no doubt advertisers will require to present an even more united front against the future attacks on our industry”.

Lord Alf Robens, 1975

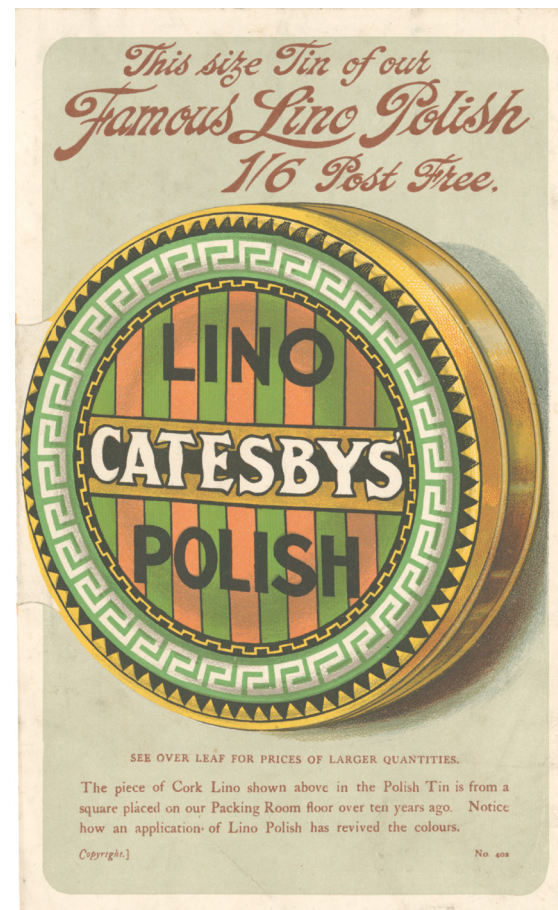
Finding our voice

19th century Britain holds the key to understanding why ISBA is here today. The 1800s were a time of rapid industrial, economic and social change, and this naturally had a significant impact on the media landscape.

A critical catalyst for change was a sharp rise in literacy rates, particularly among the working class, which made newspapers and magazines more accessible. Publishers raced to match changes in behaviour and there was a spike in the number of newspapers. Combined with the speed, scale and affordability enabled by technologies born from the Industrial Revolution, the first age of mass media arrived.

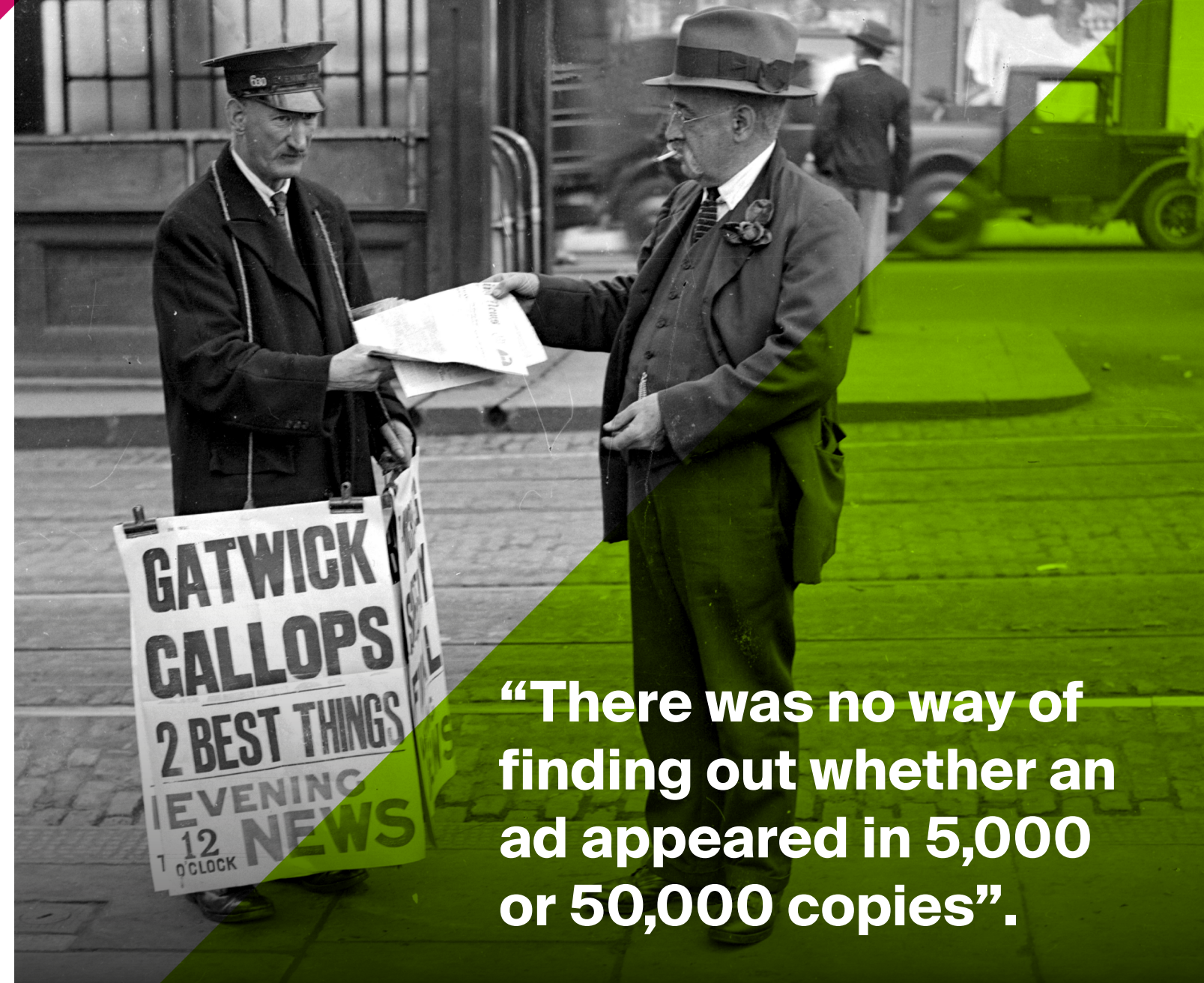
Suddenly, there were new opportunities to sell goods and services beyond posters and sandwich boards. Many vendors made things that needed to be marketed at scale to keep them in business, and newspapers were the answer. Vendors became advertisers.

The trouble was, given how highly guarded circulation figures were at the time, these advertisers couldn't tell if they were getting value for money from their spending; rates for advertising in the same newspaper were not consistent, and there was no way of finding out whether an ad appeared in 5,000 or 50,000 copies. The 'industry', as it then was, was a world away from establishing the econometrics or media mix modelling research methods of today, and there was certainly nothing to study consumer motivations and buying behaviours.



United by a growing frustration that they couldn't make a fair profit, seven men joined forces and issued a rallying cry to organise fellow advertisers to challenge the status quo.

One of ISBA's seven founders, Catesby.



“There was no way of finding out whether an ad appeared in 5,000 or 50,000 copies”.

It took this small yet mighty group - two house furnishers, a watchmaker, a 'patent medicine vendor', a maker of stylographic pens, a chemist and a Managing Director of a mysterious 'public company' - nine years to form the organisation that would later become ISBA. The Advertisers' Protection Society Limited (APS) was officially launched on 20th December 1900.

The earliest records of members show that the rallying cry was successful, with textile companies, chemists, retailers and jewellers joining the charge. Among them were the modern day high street jeweller H. Samuel, Taylor's Drug Company - which went on to be a subsidiary of Boots - and Scott Adie, a tailor to the Royal Family.

Shortly after its formation, the APS started communicating with its members via newsletters, reports and books, publishing the first issue of the APS Monthly Circular in 1901. This continued without fail until 1920, except for sporadic publication during the First World War.

During these formative years, the APS took it upon itself to work out the number of newspapers being sold and was subsequently taken to court, charged with libel. In 1910, the APS won the case - and set the industry on course for audited media measurement.



Becoming ISBA

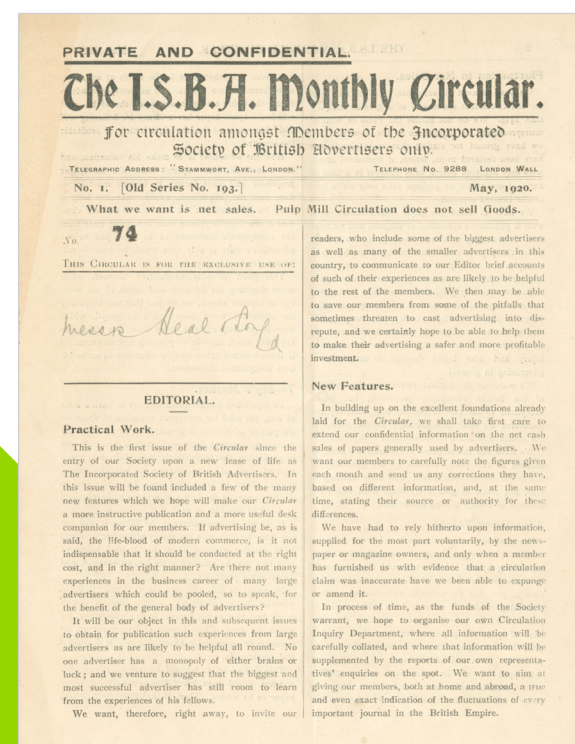
At the turn of the 20th century, newspapers were still at the height of their power and influence, widely available and inexpensive. The Daily Mail became the first weekday paper to [sell one million copies](#) in 1911.

In 1917, recognising the valuable role advertising could play in the war effort, the Prime Minister of the day, David Lloyd George, requested a meeting with the most influential advertising agency minds. This meeting led to the formation of the Association of British Advertising Agents, later to become the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA).

The early 1900s saw rapid innovation and the evolution of mass media as television, radio and cinema came on the scene. The 1920s were a particularly momentous time for radio, which became the first mass and commercial broadcasting medium. The first radio ad ran in New York in 1922 – a 15-minute long slot promoting Queensboro Corporation apartments.

While the UK was a few decades behind commercial radio in the US, another evolution was happening. The APS was growing and had become the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers in 1920.

But this wasn't just a name change. With 105 members by this point, it was ISBA putting its weight behind its members and declaring a united front.



It also marked a turning point in raising ISBA's profile and influence in government. In 1921, ISBA held its first ever National Advertising Conference, inviting Sir Charles Higham as guest speaker. Higham was a prominent advertising consultant in WW1 and a Conservative MP for Islington South. Fast forward to two decades later and, in 1947, ISBA was successful in persuading the Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Dalton, to drop a tax on advertising from his Budget.

As mass media continued to evolve and consumer behaviour with it, ISBA's role and remit changed too.

In 1926, ISBA and the IPA founded the Advertising Association to promote the rights, roles and responsibilities of advertising domestically and internationally. This further strengthened the significance of UK advertising on the global stage.

In 1931, ISBA established the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), providing audited, transparent data to advertisers for the first time. This is at the very heart of ISBA's role in the industry and we can trace a direct line from the ABC's founding to ISBA's work on cross-media measurement today.

The 1930s and 1940s were something of a 'coming of age' for cinema advertising, largely thanks to better production and the efforts of ad agencies. With 1.5 billion UK cinema admissions in 1945, it felt a shame that the ads were playing with the houselights on, and that people weren't getting to experience the magic of the ads ([some of which can be seen here](#)). It was ISBA that successfully campaigned to turn the lights off in 1948, instead putting the metaphorical spotlight on advertising.

Commercial TV is also celebrating a big milestone this year, having been around for 70 years. ISBA played a key role in its formation, working with ITA (now the Independent Broadcasting Authority) in 1954 to develop the very first principles of TV advertising. ITV launched the following year and, with it, the first TV ad in the UK. It was for [Unilever's Gibbs SR toothpaste](#), created by Young & Rubicam (which merged with VML in 2018), beating ads from 23 different brands to win the spot. From then on, commercial TV took off, with TV ad spend growing from an estimated [£10m in 1956 to £86m a decade later](#) (rather modest, compared with the tens of billions spent today). There was a boom in outdoor advertising too; not all of it good, however, which resulted in the introduction of an 'Anti-Clutter' Code to deal with "unsightly" outdoor ads in 1961. It was operated by ISBA and almost half a million ads were moved or removed over 10 years.

In 1962, one of the foundation stones of our modern self-regulatory system was laid as ISBA, the IPA and the Advertising Association came together to form the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). The ASA took responsibility for the supervision of the advertising codes of practice. What we now justifiably refer to as a world-leading regulatory system - for the first time provided the public with the reassurance that the advertising they saw was subject to a set of rules, created to protect them from misleading or harmful messages.



Any advertisement aimed at him, must satisfy us.

"Advertisements should not encourage children to make themselves a nuisance to their parents, or anyone else, with the aim of persuading them to buy an advertised product."

That is just one of the down-to-earth regulations in the British Code of Advertising Practice. There's an entire section of the Code that deals with children, designed to protect them (and their parents) from misleading or irresponsible advertising.

Other sections cover all the important areas of advertising from cigarettes to slimming.

Any advertisement that appears in print or in the cinema must be able to satisfy the Advertising Standards Authority that it abides by the Code. So if you see one that isn't legal, honest, decent and truthful – tell us.

For your free copy of "The Code and Children," please apply in writing to:

THE ADVERTISING STANDARDS AUTHORITY ✓
A.S.A. Ltd, Brook House, Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HN.

This period is widely regarded as the start of the 'golden age' of advertising, whereby copywriters were being bolder and more creative as they looked to connect with growing audiences in new and exciting ways.

It took commercial radio until 1973 to make waves in the UK, which is when the Government began offering licences to commercial radio stations for the first time. Like TV, ISBA played a key role in helping the Government to understand advertiser requirements for a commercial radio service. The first broadcast was on 8th October at 6am on LBC - [a 60-second spot ad for Bird's Eye fish fingers](#).

At the same time as we were promoting reform at home, we went active abroad, holding our first International Industrial Advertising Conference in Brussels.



A new dawn

The 1990s to 2000s fundamentally changed how advertisers communicated with consumers, with the arrival of the internet ushering in a future that no one in our industry could have anticipated, nor prepared for.


The first major moment for digital advertising came in the form of an online banner ad in 1994. The [AT&T ad](#), which simply asked: 'Have you ever clicked your mouse right HERE?', with an arrow pointing to 'YOU WILL', piqued the curiosity of [44% of people who saw it](#) and set the course for an online display advertising market worth [£16.7bn in 2024](#).

With online advertising came CTRs, CPMs and third-party cookies, allowing advertisers to follow internet users across the web and target them with ads. There was a revolution in being able to personalise and measure digital media – albeit that risks to user privacy and trust in advertising came alongside.

Google, Facebook and YouTube led the way in opening up an uncharted world of social media, influencers, video advertising and programmatic trading. With more data, media and content to serve to more eyeballs than ever before, advertisers, agencies, platforms and publishers had to forge new relationships and find a way to make a fundamentally transformed system work. ISBA had to shift gears again, to guide and protect our members.

Even as we did so, we maintained our focus on traditional media, including stopping a Swedish ban on TV advertising to children from reaching UK shores. We were instrumental in encouraging the Government to extend the self-regulatory system to the broadcast arena, while in 2003 ISBA was instrumental in establishing Contract Rights Renewal (CRR), a mechanism to protect advertisers' interests following the merger of Carlton and Granada into ITV. Today, advertisers operate in a very different landscape. Media fragmentation and the rise of digital marketing has meant that ISBA has recently advocated for a review of CRR.

Ensuring advertising practices are fair has after all, been in our blood from the very beginning.

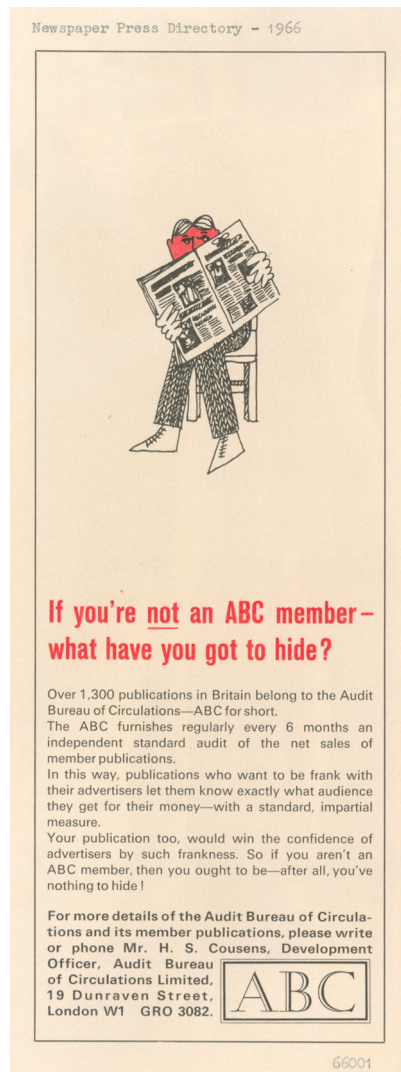
A photograph showing a group of people sitting on a bench outdoors. They are all looking down at their smartphones, which they are holding in their hands. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting it's daytime. The people are dressed in casual attire. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the individuals and their mobile devices.

“With more data, media and content to serve to more eyeballs than ever before, advertisers, agencies, platforms and publishers had to forge new relationships and find a way to make a fundamentally transformed system work”.



Setting a standard

Change and disruption is rarely far away, and so it remains critical that ISBA is ready to respond and act. Much of the policy and practice we have shaped over the past 125 years remains embedded in our industry today.



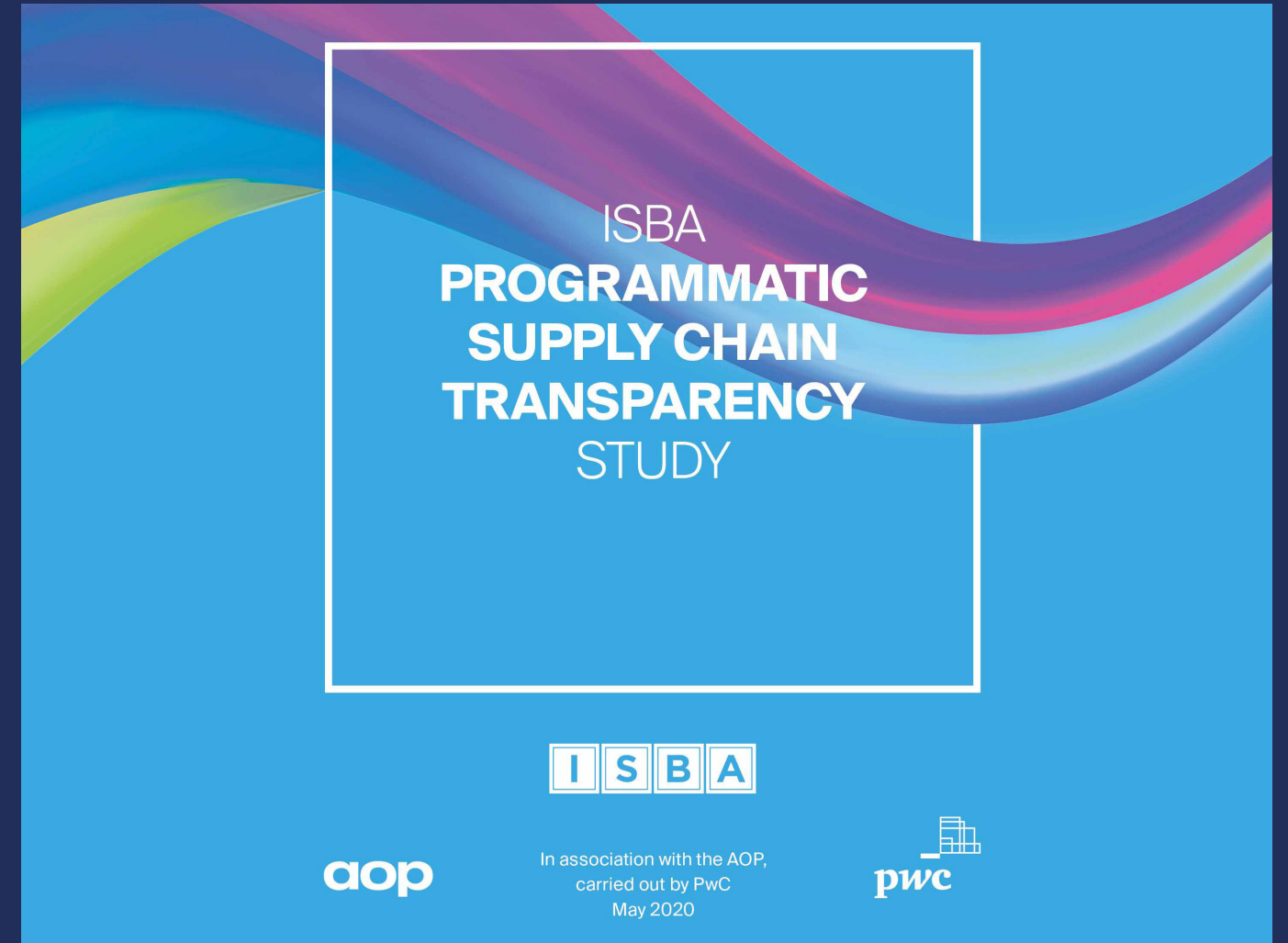
It was ISBA that founded the UK's first joint industry currency (JIC), ABC, back in 1931, setting the first industry standard for circulation measurement and paving the way for a further six JICs by the end of the century. ISBA also helped launch the ICC Advertising Code of Standards in 1939, which is now considered the benchmark for almost 50 self-regulatory codes around the world.

Given the major changes happening to media over the 1960s and 1970s, these decades were crucial for collaboration and campaigning. Two integral organisations were formed during this time - first the Advertising Standards Authority in 1966, and then JICRAR in 1974. JICRAR was a joint industry committee for commercial radio research, founded as a result of pressure from ISBA and the IPA.

Even as we worked to strengthen the industry's organisations and capacity, we continued to engage with government. ISBA gave evidence to Parliament on various matters, including the Trade Descriptions Act designed to prevent businesses misleading consumers; and we prevented the creation of a monopoly in the poster industry. We also took the lead in thinking about social issues. The UK's strict rules on alcohol advertising are the product of collaborative working between ISBA members and interest groups which date back to 1975, when our alcohol manufacturing members drew up a new code of conduct for advertising their products.

During the late 1980's ISBA spoke for advertisers once again and lobbied for a new terrestrial TV channel. In 1997, when Channel 5 launched ISBA ensured that advertisers benefited from the new channel's availability.

The rise of programmatic advertising in the 2010s as the most popular way for digital media to be traded presented new challenges for advertisers, agencies and publishers. Without action, this complex and opaque network threatened to derail industry relationships and damage the reputation of digital advertising altogether. ISBA's pioneering [Programmatic Supply Chain Transparency Study](#), launched in 2020 with the Association of Online Publishers, marked the first time that that supply chain had been mapped end-to-end. Along with our guidelines on problematic Made for Advertising websites and Audience Extension Networks, ISBA has helped shape a more transparent and trustworthy ecosystem for everyone involved.



That includes consumers, whom advertisers must earn the right to advertise to. That means building and maintaining trust, why is why ISBA launched an [Influencer Marketing Code of Conduct](#) in 2021 and, in 2023, began our [accessible advertising drive](#) with the ambition that all ads are accessible to all, regardless of visual or hearing impairment.

Our longstanding collaboration with the AA and IPA, meanwhile, continues to this day, recently seeing the launch of an [All-Party Parliamentary Group for Advertising in 2025](#). When new governments come into power, we must make sure advertising remains on their agenda and that our members have a voice.



A voice for the new world

Our APS forefathers likely felt the same way in 1891, but our world is changing at an unprecedented rate. Many of the events taking place globally – particularly changes in leadership in the US, AI and Big Tech – challenge the fundamentals of ISBA’s current approach to inclusion, sustainability and responsibility.

Rest assured, they remain high on our agenda and are the guiding force behind our priorities in our 125th year. These priorities are big, bold and will further empower brand owners to create an advertising environment that delivers positive societal and economic impact.

As digital media continues to evolve, it is more essential than ever to ensure plural relationships deliver value transparently and sustainably.

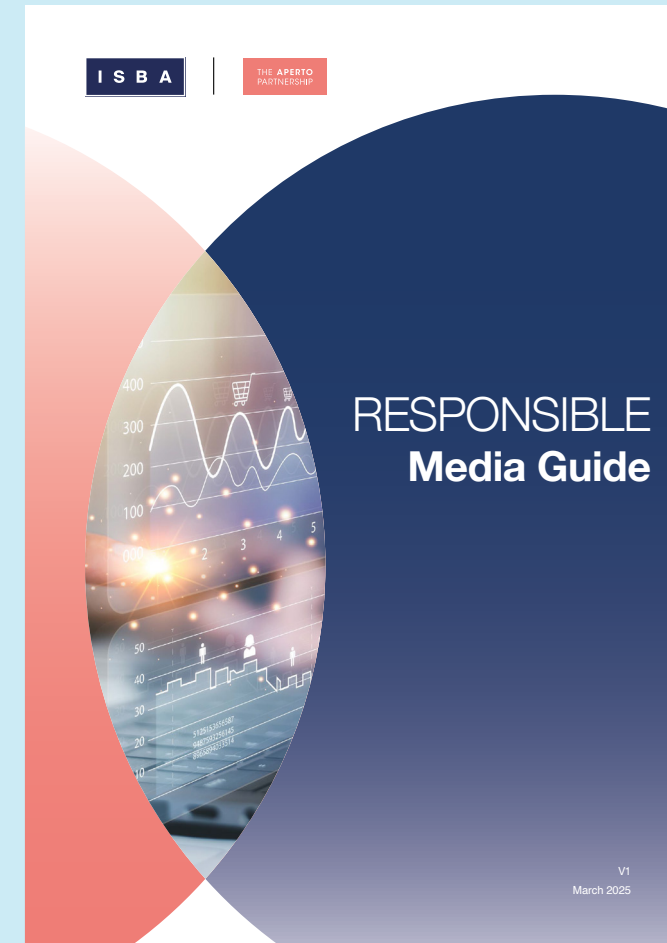
Since 2019, ISBA has been spearheading the development of [Origin](#), the UK’s first cross-media measurement solution, which following Beta trials with 32 ISBA members and their media agencies will next, expand its availability to more advertisers. Origin gives the industry a comprehensive picture of reach and frequency across all forms of media for the first time and is based on global principles established by the [World Federation of Advertisers](#). Origin is being closely watched by other markets around the world and the US will soon be launching its solution based on the same principles with other countries in early planning stages.

The rise of generative AI, retail media and commerce media, meanwhile, requires new frameworks and guidance for best practice and responsible adoption. These innovations raise new opportunities and risks which ISBA is navigating with members and industry peers.



“Since 2019, ISBA has been spearheading the development of Origin, the UK’s first cross-media measurement solution”.

Our industry also has a critical role to play in addressing social and environmental issues. Within that, ISBA’s role is to enable and empower the industry to create an inclusive and sustainable advertising environment.



We are continuing our work with Ad Net Zero, the industry’s initiative to put its own house in order on climate change. In anticipation of further legislative and regulatory changes, we will provide members with the tools they need to make the case for action on marketing sustainability, while our [Responsible Media Guide](#) will support members to develop their own model frameworks.

Being involved in these issues isn’t an optional extra, but an expectation – from the people who work in our industry, the people who watch our ads, and the politicians and regulators who make the rules we live by. That also applies in individual sectors, including food and drink, where ISBA has led the industry in engaging on the ‘less healthy’ food and drink (LHF) restrictions. We’ve helped our members navigate the ASA process of giving them guidance on what they will and won’t be able to put in their ads, as well as urging the Government to clarify the law so that brand advertising can continue – incentivising reformulation. This has been business critical for a vast swathe of our membership, and an example of when speaking with one voice has secured essential change.

Our final priority is to ensure our members continue to benefit from the learning and knowledge-sharing the ISBA network has afforded for 125 years. As the industry changes, so too do the skills and knowledge required to carry out new practices. It is our responsibility to help members navigate the media landscape, ensure brands have access to best-in-class skills and talent, and that marketing teams are well-equipped to deal with change.

As we look to the future, we expect there to be many twists, turns and bumps in the road. But looking back, we feel confident in our industry’s ability to work together to demonstrate value and meet today’s challenges. ISBA will continue to lead from the front, championing advertisers, collaborating with partners, and standing up for what’s right – today, tomorrow and for another 125 years... in whatever form and world that may be.





ISBA President's 1900-2025

The 48 men and women who have served as ISBA President over the last 125 years include Lords, Barons, politicians, industrialists and most significantly the leaders of some of the UK's best loved brands. ISBA is honoured to have been supported by these fearless, passionate, and talented ambassadors.

1900-08	W.B. Warren (Chairman)	
1908-22	Sir William Treloar	
1922-27	H. Cecil Taylor	
1927-28	C.W. Eve (Chairman)	
1928-30	Sir Hugo Hirst	
1930-31	Lord Luke	
1932-35	Sir Francis Goodenough	
1936-39	Rt. Hon. L.S. Amery	
1939-42	Lord Rowallan	
1942-44	Lord McGowan	
1944-46	Lieut-Col. J.M. Horlick	
1946-47	Clifford Harrison (Chairman)	
1947-48	Colonel W.A. Bristow	
1948-50	John Ryan	
1950-53	Sir Harold Bowden	
1953-55	P.G.E. Warburton	
1955-58	Clifford Harrison	
1958-61	W.E. Phillips	
1961-63	A.C. Buck	
1963-1964	A.E.V. Houchen	
1964-66	F.B. Kitchen	
1966-68	Sir Brian Bonsor. Bt	
Jan-Mar 1969	S.G. Cameron	
1969-71	Selwyn Lloyd	
1971-73	Ronald Halstead	
1973-76	Lord Robens	
1976-78	Hedley B. Greenborough	
1978-80	Sir Adrian Cadbury	Cadbury Schweppes
1980-83	Peter J Prior CBE	HP Bulmer
1983-86	Donald N A McLure	Beecham Group
1986-88	Leslie Simmens	Pedigree Petfoods

1988-90	Ronnie G Gray	Lever Brothers
1990-91	Victor J Steel	Mansfield Brewery
1991-92	Sir Graham Day	Cadbury Schweppes
1992-94	Graham Robson	Spillers Foods
1994-96	Simon Bullimore	Mars
1996-97	Ian Ramsay	CPC
1997-98	Simon Bullimore	Mars
1998-00	Peter Blackburn	Nestle
2000-02	Dick Spelman	Halifax
2002-05	John M. Sunderland	Cadbury Schweppes
2005-08	John Clare CBE	DSG International
2009-11	Mark Hunter	Molson Coors
2011- 2013	Jon Woods	Coca-Cola
2014 - 2018	Simon Litherland	Britvic
2018 - 2020	Elizabeth Fagan	Boots UK & Ireland
2020 - 2022	Peter Duffy	Moneysupermarket
2022 - 2024	Marg Jobling	NatWest Group
2024 - Present	Pete Markey	Boots UK

“Having a collective voice through ISBA, to represent us and advocate on our behalf is more important today than ever”.

President 2024-Present,
Pete Markey, former CMO Boots UK





Only ISBA represents brand owners advertising in the UK.

ISBA offers a powerful platform for advertisers and brand owners to shape the future of the UK advertising industry. Whether you're joining as a full member or engaging as a partner, the benefits are extensive and tailored to support marketing professionals at every level.

Get in touch with our Membership Team
on EmmaS@isba.org.uk