

NEWS ANALYSIS

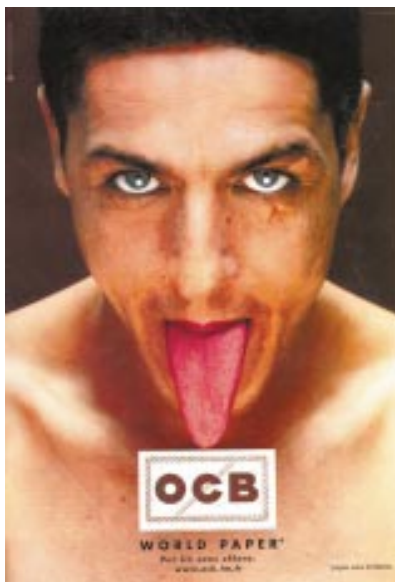
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France : rolling round the curbs

The French Tobacco Act (the "loi Evin") has led to the price of manufactured cigarettes doubling since 1992, and to sales decreasing 14.5% from 1991 to 1997. But during the same period, sales of roll-your-own tobacco (RYO) have doubled, because of their lower level of taxation. This phenomenon mainly concerns young people: almost 24% of 12 to 24 year olds say they smoke roll ups, against 17.7% for the overall population aged 12 to 75. These facts may explain why RYO papers have recently developed strong efforts to gain new customers.

Since the total ad ban came into force in 1993, traditional ways of advertising tobacco products have disappeared, including most indirect ads, the latter mainly disappearing as a result of 37 punitive sentences handed out over the last 10 years (details of French case law can be found at www.tabac-info.net).

Conversely, RYO cigarette papers, which are not covered by the law, have become more and more visible. In 1998, OCB (Odet Cascadec Bolloré), recently sold by the French company Bolloré Technologies to the US Republic Technologies, initiated a large media campaign targeting teenagers, using outdoor and printed ads mainly in magazines. On its web site (www.ocb.tm.com), OCB uses images of famous actors (Samy Naceri, star of *Taxi*), singers (Zazie, especially popular with young girls), and models (Pauline) as their ambassadors. The brand uses sexy, glamorous, and fashionable imagery, along with values such as humour, impertinence, multicultural openness, provocation, refusing conventional



OCB roll-your-own cigarette papers advertise with Samy Naceri, star of "Taxi", with the slogan "OCB et Samy: ça roule!!", making play of the verb "rouler"—to roll—in an expression that loosely translates as "things are going smoothly".



This OCB roll-your-own cigarette paper advertisement shows the singer Zazie, who is especially popular with young girls in France.

values, breaking the law, and sharing the joyful moments in life.

In addition to these marketing strategies, the intention to target young people is confirmed by the media planning (magazines on

movies and music), and by the proactive presence of the brand at a popular music festival at Vieilles-Charrures in Brittany, which is seen by young people as the "Breton Woodstock". In addition, fearing the coming of stricter legislation, the "OCB Urban Wear Designed by you" competition was launched towards the end of last year, also using the same sort of communications. OCB's competitor RIZLA +, while using less provocative ads, is also using a similar media campaign strategy.

It is striking how the RYO papers industry seems to follow the strategy of the cigarette manufacturers. These campaigns keep on showing positive images of smokers who are "cool", "hip" and "glamorous", and such messages unfortunately have a strong impact in a country where advertisements for manufactured cigarettes have been absent from the media for almost a decade.

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Oman: ships that pass in the night

Fresh from its narrow escape after encountering unforecast publicity storms in Pakistan (see *Tobacco Control* 2000;9:361), BAT's John Player Gold Leaf ocean going sailing boat slipped silently into a private marina in Oman on 8 November, and slipped just as silently out again three days later. No hyped-up mass media publicity, no parties, or discos. Not a free sample in sight, even for "young adults". A local agent arranged for some media personnel to meet the boat and its intrepid crew, but a subsequent search of newspapers and other media indicated that the boat had, as it were, sunk without trace.

Health officials in the Gulf sultanate believe that the distinctly low key nature of the visit was the result of strong pressure on municipal

authorities and the Ministry of Commerce not to grant the floating cigarette ad any promotional permits, as well as official representations to government owned newspapers. Nevertheless, the incident has renewed their conviction of the need for comprehensive legislation, to ensure that next time, tobacco companies do not even bother trying it on.

Brazil: tough nut cracked

Brazil is the world's fifth largest country, with a vibrant economy and a vast, impressionable, fashion conscious youth population. What better place to sell cigarettes? "There's an awful lot of starters in Brazil" might be the modern parody of the old song about coffee, this one possibly sung by officials of British American Tobacco's (BAT) local subsidiary Souza Cruz, which dominates the market. For many years it has been laughing all the way to the bank with the spoils from such strikingly promotion friendly brands as Hollywood.

So it comes as all the more of a surprise, and a tonic to weary tobacco control advocates everywhere, that last November, the Senate passed a tobacco advertising ban, covering ads on television and radio, and in newspapers and magazines, and outdoor billboards and merchandising. The new law also prohibits tobacco sponsorship of sports and cultural events, with a two year grace period to end sponsorship contracts. While the bill was due to return to the lower house of parliament for ratification of certain alterations made during its passage through the senate at the time of writing, it was expected to pass into law within a matter of weeks. It can be done, as a pioneering Norwegian might put it.

USA: bad housekeeping

Decent. As American as motherhood and apple pie. That's how one could view *Good Housekeeping*, the leading women's home and family oriented monthly magazine of good, sensible, responsible articles and advice about the whole range of issues facing modern American families. Even the title sounds like something that you might have found, probably near the family bible, inside the bare but clean front room of every decent settler's home.

At the front of the November 2000 edition, beside a photograph of the editor, was a trailer for what was



The Philip Morris advertisement in the November 2000 edition of "Good Housekeeping".

rightly billed as "a groundbreaking story about women and lung cancer that you're unlikely to read elsewhere". It began: "In December 1952, *Good Housekeeping* stopped accepting ads for cigarettes and tobacco products. At the time, research was just beginning to emerge about the link between smoking and lung cancer, and the editors believed that advertisements for a potentially harmful product were inconsistent with the magazine's consumer safety policy. That decision, almost 50 years ago, puts us in a unique position to report..." (the groundbreaking story).

Flip through the pages of *Good Housekeeping* as long as you like, and you will certainly not see a cigarette advertisement. But turn to page 76 in the November edition and there you will find a full page colour ad from Philip Morris. It is a classic example of the insidious new tobacco industry campaign to persuade us that they have changed, and really do not want children to smoke. It is classic in that it focuses on the parent's authority to teach their children how to behave. And it is classic, too, in that while buying credibility and spreading dissent among some of the industry's traditional adversaries, it nicely conveys the forbidden fruit image that complements traditional cigarette promotion. The boring, authoritarian "smoking is adult" theme must be a handy softener for the "smoking is cool" message so carefully orchestrated through the image management of fashion models, pop stars and Formula One drivers sponsored by cigarette companies.

How can the perfidy of the industry's new strategy be explained

to obviously responsible and well meaning institutions such as *Good Housekeeping*? Perhaps a start would be for a major education plan to tell them how the industry has been planning its rehabilitation for quite some time. While health advocates were still fooling themselves that after what came out in the Minnesota documents, not even tobacco executives would ever again pretend to be anything other than scheming liars and fixers of bogus research, they were busy panning the next chapter.

In 1991, a Tobacco Institute discussion paper on the industry's youth programme set out a "fairly simple" strategy:

1. Heavily promote industry opposition to youth smoking.
2. Align industry with broader, more sophisticated view of the problem—that is, parental inability to offset peer pressure.
3. Work with and through credible child welfare professionals and educators to tackle the "problem".
4. Bait anti-tobacco forces to criticise industry efforts.

The *Good Housekeeping* ad neatly exemplifies 1 and 2, and may possibly lead to 3. By writing about it this way, *Tobacco Control* may, as the industry sees it, be falling headlong into 4—unless major public health efforts go into getting the wider world to see what is really going on.

Turkey: Philip Morris's "youth programme" gets adult response

More good news from Turkey, just a few months after health advocates saw off, at least for the time being, the latest round in a covert attempt by the tobacco industry to establish Formula One motor sport in the soccer dominated country for the purposes of future cigarette promotion (see *Tobacco Control* 2000;9:268-9). Once again it features Philip Morris, whose initial success at collaboration with a prestigious university in Istanbul was one of the nastiest surprises of last year. Philip Morris approached Bosphorus University last September, with a project called "Power is Yours" targeting sixth and seventh grade (approximately 12 and 13 years old) students in Istanbul schools.

When the university asked—and received—permission from the Ministry of Education to implement the scheme, it somehow forgot to mention the name of the sponsor. However,

when the generous backer's name came to light later, journalists and international health advocates began to contact the dean of the university, urging him to abandon the scheme. National publicity was generated, bringing the matter to the attention of no less a public health guardian than the father of Turkey's tobacco control legislation, the country's president (see *Tobacco Control* 1997;6:10–11). He asked the Ministry of Education to explain how the project had been permitted, and the next thing we know, hey presto, the Ministry of Education stopped it as dead in its tracks as a Marlboro smoker falling down with a heart attack.

So far as we know, this is the first time that one of the industry's wretched "youth education" programmes has been stopped after getting underway, and the reassuring lesson is that it is never too late to protest. And encouragingly, Turkish colleagues report that every new trick that tobacco companies try to promote their business actually results in increased public awareness about the industry's tactics. Let's hope they don't give up trying.

Making the Maltese cross

People who care about health in Malta were alarmed towards the end of last year to learn who had been appointed to the most important new job in the country's educational system, the president of the board of governors of the prestigious new Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology. The brand new institution is scheduled to open early this year, with an initial student population of 4000, an ambitious target at half the size of Malta's university. It is intended to produce graduates to supply the needs of industry, thereby aiding and shaping the future of the economy. So who is to lead the bold new flagship college? Step forward Mr Victor Scicluna, president of the Malta Employers' Association and retired boss of Central Cigarettes Co, local subsidiary of BAT. Quite where he will stand when a cigarette company starts distributing free, glossy materials promoting cigarettes to the students, such as those seen in the Czech Republic (see *Tobacco Control* 2000;9:11–12), remains to be seen.

USA: the name of Philip Morris to sit on 28 million school desks

In the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement, the tobacco industry agreed to halt all marketing and promotion activities directed at children in the USA. Recently, however, Philip Morris may well have found a clever way to circumvent the spirit of this agreement. The Philip Morris Youth Prevention programme has been used as a vehicle through which to expose potentially 28 million school children to the name of Philip Morris on a daily basis—within the safety of their own classrooms.

Since spring 2000, Philip Morris has been a partner in the distribution of colourful book covers to schools around the USA (elementary, middle and high schools). The Philip Morris covers are emblazoned with the message, "Think. Don't Smoke"—and the name of Philip Morris. Some say that this youth focused initiative is little more than thinly veiled advertising, and that the inclusion of the company name is an attempt to build brand recognition. As ad testing research has shown, the company's anti-smoking messages (such as, "Think. Don't Smoke") are very weak, compared to other anti-smoking messages produced by state tobacco control programmes. At the very least, these book covers nicely supplement Philip Morris' ongoing, national television campaign promoting the company as a good corporate citizen.

The sponsorship of school book covers is common practice with companies who market to children. It is usually seen as a win-win situation. The school gets needed protection for its precious resources, and children get an average of 5.5 months exposure to the company's name and image. Even better, from the viewpoint of Philip Morris, Primedia Cover Concepts, which distributes the book covers, has the capability to target particular audiences. If, for example, a company seeks to increase its sales among young Hispanics, suitable schools can be identified for distribution of the relevant covers. The criteria by which schools were chosen to receive Philip Morris covers is not clear and may not have been a random process.



The Philip Morris book covers distributed to schools.

Philip Morris' book cover campaign has, however, hit a snag in some school districts. Teachers, administrators, and students have proven highly distrustful of the company's most recent foray into schools, seeing the book covers as both invasive and manipulative. Teachers and public health officials in the "receiving districts" have raised suspicions that Philip Morris is targeting either schools in low income areas, or states in which children have been exposed to higher levels of anti-tobacco messages through comprehensive anti-smoking campaigns.

Teachers and students have taken positive action to reject the covers and to challenge Philip Morris's intentions. The rejection of these covers has been done publicly, with student led demonstrations and press conferences.

The level of scepticism has been such that students have identified numerous "subliminal messages" within the covers' images—including reports of being able to see tobacco leaves, cigarettes, matches, and even Joe Camel (an RJ Reynolds product) in the covers' images. The possibility of "subliminal messages" has whetted the interest of the press, and has led to considerable newspaper coverage advocating school rejection of the covers.

This coverage is not quite, one would presume, the kind of public relations exposure for which "The People of Philip Morris", as they like to be known in their corporate advertising in the USA, were hoping.

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