

NEWS ANALYSIS

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USA: getting it wrong with women

It is strangely reassuring how even the biggest tobacco companies, able to hire the most sophisticated advertising and marketing skills in the world, continue to make mistakes. Philip Morris (PM) started the year with a comforting reminder of how even the biggest of all can make blunders, when it launched the latest round of ads for Virginia Slims.

This is the brand aimed at “young adult female smokers”, as its advertisers would probably say, or girls, as cynical health experts might prefer to describe the target audience. Virginia Slims advertisements have irritated feminists and health advocates alike since the earliest ads informed women, whom they addressed as “Baby”, that they had “come a long way”. Whereas it had been taboo for their mothers’ generation to smoke, they suggested, it was now OK to smoke, and a symbol of their new, hard won independence. After a drubbing from leaders of the women’s movement, whose concern at that



King George VI, the father of Britain’s current monarch, smoked from the age of 14, had a cancerous lung removed in his early 50s, and died of heart disease at the age of 56.

time was mainly about being patronised as “Baby”, the company dropped the offending B word and just told women they had come “a long, long way”.

More recently, there was the “Find Your Voice” campaign, featuring beautiful women from different cultures and countries (*Tobacco Control* 2000;9:134). However, that was discontinued after PM’s chief executive, Michael Szymanczyk, was questioned about the ads, presumably none too comfortably, during the historic Engle trial in Florida, which resulted in record damages against the industry.

In the latest ad campaign, PM urges women to visualise a physiologically challenging example of claiming power back from men: “See yourself as a king”. Apart from being offensive, the implied suggestion that a king is superior to a queen may be as baffling to hundreds of millions of British Commonwealth citizens as it would have been to the female pharaoh from ancient Egypt who is portrayed in the ad. But sex aside, the clearly intended associations of power, control, and the best things in life have caused angry critics to contrast the ad with PM’s elaborate and expensive attempts to portray itself as reformed and socially responsible. Nowadays feminists are among the first to spot how tobacco companies exploit women, and they have given PM a double beating: not only has it shown extraordinary political incorrectness, but once again has demonstrated the contempt with which it views women’s health.

However, perhaps the company has inadvertently taken its new public relations position to the ultimate extreme, subtly admitting the unparalleled dangers of its products. After all, “Find your voice” could have been a slogan specially designed to engage the dark, subconscious fears of young women who saw the powerful publicity generated by Janet Sackman, the former Lucky Strike model whose laryngectomy was necessitated from consuming the brand she once promoted. As for the “See yourself as



The latest ad campaign by Philip Morris targeted at female smokers—“See yourself as a king”.

a King” ads, what most people know about ancient Egypt’s pharaohs is almost entirely associated with their tombs, which so often received their occupants at a young age. And then there was King George VI, father of the present head of state of America’s old colonial ruler and now ally, the UK. Having smoked from the age of 14, he had a cancerous lung removed in his early 50s, and died of heart disease aged 56. Maybe PM wants young women to see themselves as *that* king?

BAT’s internet marketing plan

Normally, a company wants maximum visibility for itself and its products when paying large amounts of money for advertisements and other promotional activities. So it is instructive to see that British American Tobacco (BAT) appears to be doing everything possible to hide its participation in an internet campaign to attract unwitting young consumers to bars and clubs where it promotes its cigarettes.

According to a leaked internal memo, BAT plans to invest £2.5 million (around \$3.6 million) in building a new website (codenamed project Horeca) aimed at young people world wide. It appears BAT’s aim is to promote Lucky Strike and State Express 555 brands to young smokers, at a time when many countries are banning tobacco advertising. BAT has admitted that a prototype site, City Gorilla, was started in January, featuring Poland. Choosing a country with among the best anti-tobacco laws in Europe was presumably deliberate, on the basis that if the technique works there, it will work anywhere. A less challenging second country, Belgium, was added in March.

Venues promoting and selling BAT cigarettes are given a prominent position on the site, which will not be linked to BAT or have any other obvious tobacco associations, and will appear to offer independent advice on night life. In fact, young web surfers will be directed to bars, clubs or restaurants where BAT cigarette brands are being handed out or promoted, which they can then be encouraged to take or buy. BAT wants favourable distribution or promotional deals with its brands’ outlets, in return for giving them publicity on the site.

The memo shows that BAT is keen to conceal its intentions to promote cigarettes in apparently “neutral” venues. It states: “One perceived risk for

the Horeca portal is the possible association with BAT and thus tobacco. A key success factor is developing a customer perception that the site is trendy and “happening”. Any adverse news articles from trade or consumer press may prove damaging. BAT, which denies that the initiative is underhand, or that it is a tobacco marketing tool, hopes to attract 600 000 unique users by the end of 2001 and to achieve a top 50 rating as a wap/mobile telephone content provider within 12 months.

The World Health Organization or progressive governments may one day find ways to stop sneaky promotions like this. Meanwhile, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), the UK’s leading tobacco control organisation, has cleverly poked a stick in BAT’s promotional wheel. In yet another demonstration of a huge transnational company getting it wrong, ASH discovered that BAT and its highly paid consultants had forgotten to register other, similarly named internet sites. So while BAT’s test site is at www.citygorilla.com, ASH has put up a rival site cheerfully explaining the truth, and linked both to BAT and to health sites to explain just what is going on, at www.citygorilla.org.

The BAT site may also be used to collect personal details of smokers, for later direct marketing. BAT hopes to build a database of 40 000 smokers in its first year. This technique, known as “permission marketing”, represents another potential loophole in anti-tobacco legislation. And as we know, where there’s a loophole, there’s a tobacco company finding the best way through. (See also Ad Watch p 196—Ed)

Hungary: PM’s tender loving care for teenagers

Here’s one to make even the most cynical tobacco control advocate reach for the anti-emetic. No doubt shamed by BAT’s fine programme of sponsoring community facilities such as health clinics (*Tobacco Control* 2000;9:361), Philip Morris has started a website for Hungarian teenagers, to help guide their development as they struggle through adolescence into free, informed, choice-making adulthood. Children and teenagers are invited to write to PM’s experts, posing questions on all sorts of personal concerns and anxieties, with the promise that the experts will respond.

As PM comfortably assures its young friends, it does not want to find the best solutions to their problems instead of letting the teenagers themselves do it, and it certainly doesn’t want to tell them what to do. Instead, it will simply offer understanding and partnership, in really friendly terms, to help the youngsters find the very best answers to the questions they are most concerned about. Hungarian parents must feel deeply reassured by the knowledge that their children have such well intentioned, trustworthy, and reputable new friends.

Gauloises: to Oxford and the Middle East

Until recently, Gauloises cigarettes held minuscule market share outside France and Francophone Africa. Made by Seita, the former French tobacco monopoly, their distinctive aroma was as uniquely French as the click of boules played by old men in village squares on a summer evening. But now its new owner, Altadis, the company formed from the merger of Seita and the Spanish monopoly, Tabacalera, seems determined to make it a serious competitor in the international marketplace.

In a centuries old nightmare of the British psyche come true, the French and Spanish are invading. Gauloises has been paying students to promote the brand in venues frequented by university students in Oxford, Cambridge, London, and Brighton. As everyone knows, tobacco companies do not want children to smoke, and strenuously assert that nothing could be further from their marketing people’s minds. While many parents may think their university aged children still need a little protection, tobacco companies are allowed to make free with students, on the basis that the large majority go to university aged 18. That a few that are some months short of this magic age, when children suddenly become adults and are fair game, can be dealt with by chanting the glib, enticing mantra that promotions are “Only for smokers aged 18 years or over”.

One young woman recently described being recruited in a busy bar one Friday night in Oxford. She and fellow students were told that Gauloises had been pushed hard in London for two years, and sales had soared by 200%. The hand picked Oxford undergraduates were offered £50 (about \$75) for two hours’ work,



Gauloises advertisement now appearing in Middle Eastern countries, carrying the slogan "Liberté Toujours" (Always Freedom).

and attended a briefing the following week. Several were not regular smokers, but £50 for simply "dressing glamorous" and mingling, being charming, buying drinks, offering cigarettes, and above all, smoking, seemed too good to resist. If appropriate, they were told, they could offer whole packs of cigarettes, and leave them lying around on unoccupied tables. The priority, it was made clear, was that Gauloises should be associated with youth and glamour.

The marketing plan envisaged "hostesses" going into a bar first, offering full packs of Gauloises, with the students following later at the "integration stage", to give the illusion that, after the introductory week, students were now actually beginning to smoke Gauloises regularly. Such elaborate tricks to get highly fashion conscious, trend following young people to think that Gauloises is a fashion they cannot be seen to be without, are entirely legal in most countries.

Meanwhile, in Middle Eastern countries, where the vast majority of people are Muslim and not familiar with pin-up advertising, and where women traditionally do not touch tobacco, Gauloises ads have begun to appear showing a young woman, who could pass for a Middle-Eastern national, with the slogan "Liberté Toujours" (Always Freedom). It is not clear if this is an attempt to encourage Middle Eastern women to take up smoking, perhaps as a statement of wished for greater freedom, or whether the attractive model is more intended to lure young males to the brand. But what does seem certain is that Gauloises is going to be seen in many more countries, emulating the

promotional techniques of its better known competitors. It can only augur badly for public health; apart from the advertising itself, yet another transnational company now stands among the enemy ranks, to fight target countries' governments that try to protect their citizens from the assault.

Pakistan: pilgrimage to tobacco

Pakistan is fast becoming an adventure playground for young tobacco advertisers. After the massive media coverage surrounding BAT's floating cigarette ad (or "ocean going yacht") visiting Karachi last year (*Tobacco Control* 2000;9:361), the country continues to be subjected to a barrage of new advertisements. In cities, pop music is all the rage with youth, and thus a perfect way for cigarette brand promotions to infect them with misleading associations, while on television, a song is sponsored by a cigarette company every day. On one night earlier this year, all three TV channels carried a programme, Music Millennium, in which the stage was full of glamorous cigarette advertisements, and a host of pop stars performed. All this is in addition to a continuous torrent of regular cigarette advertising on TV. And to show how keenly it supports the country's economic development, one tobacco company is offering young entrepreneurs handsome loans for setting up new businesses.

Meanwhile, more traditional forms of promotion are not neglected.

Newspaper and billboard ads continue to flourish, carrying regular cigarette ads as well as increasing numbers promoting them via competitions. There has been a weekly draw for a car (Embassy brand, owned by BAT), another for a Mercedes, with the televised draw made by the country's leading movie actress (Capstan, BAT), and a third in which a 1 kg gold ingot is given away each week (Diplomat brand, Lakson). And almost unbelievably, in a promotion plumbing new depths of bad taste in a strictly Muslim country, BAT has even promoted its Gold Leaf brand through a weekly competition whose winners are given air tickets to Saudi Arabia, for the Umrah pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

Lest any of this excess should nudge the government into thinking about legislation, the leading companies, BAT and Lakson, have produced their own self regulatory code of conduct on tobacco promotion and sales. Predictably, it is a compilation of the most ineffective measures developed over years of successful efforts to prevent or delay legislation in the west. Ensuring maximum effects on both opinion leaders and children, BAT has added the usual advertising campaign proclaiming its youth education programme, complete with repeated emphasis on the belief of this "responsible corporate citizen" that smoking is "an informed adult choice". It has even introduced "on-pack inscriptions" to prevent under-age smoking". This will be a great relief to Pakistani parents. No doubt any errant child who foolishly picks up a pack of cigarettes made by



The "Stop!" advertising campaign being run by the Pakistan Tobacco Company (a subsidiary of BAT), declaring that "As a responsible corporate citizen, PTC firmly believes that smoking is an informed adult choice".

BAT will, on sight of the inscription, drop it instantly and go in search of a more traditional childhood pastime.

Against such a depressing background, it is encouraging to learn of any blow for health. One such is a calendar produced by the British based Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance company in aid of the Pakistan Cancer Society, with each two month spread featuring some creditable samples of anti-smoking posters designed by children. Another is the example set by Karachi's prestigious Aga Khan University, which began the year by making its campus smoke-free, while offering smoking cessation clinics for employees. Against the onslaught of current tobacco promotions, these may be small victories, but they are nevertheless important, demonstrating the emergence of Pakistan's tobacco control community from relatively small scale, sporadic activity into programmes affecting some important institutions.

USA: healthy book covers

Our last edition described a cynical campaign by Philip Morris to get its highly dubious messages in front of US schoolchildren, and simultaneously to try to win respect or favours from naive politicians (*Tobacco Control* 2001;10:8). So it is good to learn of a counter offensive from Los Angeles,

where people with health in mind, rather than the public relations or promotional concerns of tobacco companies, have been distributing book covers to school children. By February, 16 500 book covers designed by a specialist firm, AnimAction, had been distributed to schools serving 11–15 year olds in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), with another 30 000 planned to be distributed to high schools (16–18 year olds). The LAUSD is the second largest school district in the USA, with around 700 000 children enrolled representing a wide spectrum of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Australia: game, set, and advocacy match

Redheads are the largest selling brand of matches in Australia. The famous red haired woman logo first appeared on their matchboxes in 1946 and has gone through several incarnations since. The Australian manufacturing company was taken over by the tobacco company Swedish Match in 1998. Swedish Match's website (<http://www.swedishmatch.com/eng/>) shows the company manufactures nasal and oral snuff, and cigars, pipe tobacco, and matches.

On 1 March, Redheads launched an art competition encouraging entrants to design an image of the redheaded woman in an "international costume" to reflect Australia's multicultural society (www.redheads.com.au). The competition has three levels of entry—primary, and secondary schools, and a tertiary/open level. The website also encourages schools to contact them for educational material on fire safety with matches.

Matches are used to light barbecues, gas stoves, and candles. Their most common use is of course to light tobacco products. Given this, could it possibly have occurred to a tobacco company which also makes matches that having children from primary school starting to think about the attractiveness and design of matchbox art might make some of them more at ease with the most common purpose for which matches are used? Surely not.

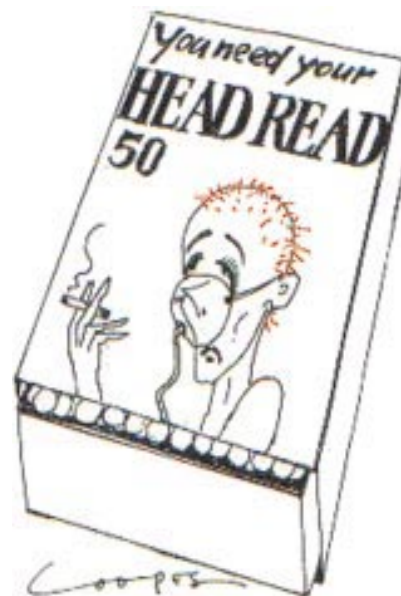


Current

Redheads, the largest selling brand of matches in Australia. The manufacturers launched an art competition, targeted at school children, to design a new image for the redheaded woman



Part of a calendar produced by the Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance company in aid of the Pakistan Cancer Society. Each two month spread features anti-smoking posters designed by children.



ASH Australia's submission to the competition to find a new Redhead matchbox design. Artist Jenny Coopes, Sydney.

ASH Australia felt that while such an idea could not possibly have occurred to the company, it was wise to err on the safe side. ASH decided to enter the competition in the open category with a drawing that they felt Swedish Match would be delighted to seriously consider as a new Redhead matchbox design. ASH felt sure that the company would agree the competition had nothing to do with encouraging smoking and that it would be a good opportunity to put another socially responsible message in front of children. Like many lung cancer sufferers, the woman in ASH's entry has lost some of her beautiful hair from chemotherapy and needs an oxygen mask to help her breathe.

At the time of going to press, the winning entry has not yet been announced.

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Not such a great Dane

Five leading tobacco companies met in secret on 2 June 1977 to plan a joint project to foster the idea that the harmfulness of tobacco smoke was not proven, but only a matter of "controversy". The conspiracy was called Operation Berkshire (see <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/321/7257/371>), and a central aim stated at the initial meeting was to "counter the increasing social unacceptability of smoking". This was entirely in line with industry thinking at the time: in 1979, a tobacco industry delegation attended the Fourth World Conference on Tobacco and Health in Stockholm, Sweden. A subsequent memo by one of the delegates, later leaked to the press, repeated an apparently well established industry fear that: "The social acceptability issue will be the central battleground on which our case in the long run will be lost or won."

In Denmark in 1988, the government formulated a programme of prevention whose goals included decreasing the number of existing smokers, and reducing the rate of recruitment of new smokers. In particular, the government hoped to prevent, as far as possible, cardiovascular disease and cancer in Danes between the ages of 25 and 65 years old.

However, at the same time, an internal memo of Philip Morris (PM) stated: "We have scored a major political coup in recruiting Mr Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, the president of the Council of Ministers of the European Community, to spearhead a European smokers' movement."

Uffe Ellemann-Jensen was minister of foreign affairs in Denmark, leader of one of the parties in the governing coalition, and well known from a long career as a television journalist. He was even elected "Mr Europe of the Year" in the European Community; and but for the wisdom of the Faroe islanders, from whom he needed less than 90 additional votes, he would now be prime minister.

Stig G Carlson, then director of PM's Nordic operations, recently commented that "it was a great step forward that the smokers' organisation Hen-ry persuaded Uffe Ellemann-Jensen. It showed that personalities with a public visibility supported the message of tolerance for smoking."

By contrast, Mr Ellemann-Jensen denies he was recruited by PM, as does the company's present director for the Netherlands and the Nordic countries, Mr Jules Wilhelmus. Nevertheless, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen figured in an advertisement for the smokers' organisation which, while carrying the organisation's logo, was designed and financed by Philip Morris.

Uffe Ellemann-Jensen states today: "I did not care whether I had been used in connection with the Danish

smokers' organisation. I still find that the organisation has a good purpose—to educate smokers to behave and accommodate. This I would not call misuse."

This is not a fair description of the main activity of the organisation. In a recent booklet on smoking in workplaces, it refuted that environmental tobacco smoke is a health hazard. The booklet may be read as if the World Health Organization supports this view, and as if workplace smoking breaks increase the productivity of smokers.

Another memo from Philip Morris stated: "I feel that the investment in Mr Ellemann-Jensen was money well spent."

There is more than a little truth in the memo. Of the Nordic countries in the nineties, Denmark remained the nation with the least restriction of the tobacco industry by law, the highest consumption of cigarettes per adult, and the highest mortality of tobacco related deaths in the age group 35–69 years. A recent poll showed that two thirds of Danes are tolerant of passive smoking. Today, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen is a member of the board of Scandinavian Tobacco Company's House of Prince in Latvia.

Operation Berkshire had a position paper circulating under cover of a letter stressing "the need for confidentiality and security", as neither company "would wish the paper to fall in the wrong hands". Fortunately, the social acceptability of this way of doing business has gone. To cite Uffe Elleman-Jensen himself: "I realise that as others use words like 'recruitment' and 'investment' and the talk is concerning a Danish minister of foreign affairs, all alarm bells should ring."

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