

# News analysis

## BAT: caught out again

Caught red-handed in January last year developing its anonymous City Gorilla website promoting the most "happening, cool nightclubs in town" (as the youthful target audience might put it), which just happen to be stuffed with British American Tobacco (BAT) cigarette brands (*Tobacco Control* 2001;10:92), the British based transnational tobacco company has been found out again. Once more the promotional tool it was secretly developing is a website that looks like an independent guide to bars and nightclubs in European cities.

A previously confidential internal memorandum revealed that [www.citygobo.com](http://www.citygobo.com) was set up by BAT to encourage people to attend venues where it sells and promotes cigarettes. The Citygobo domain was registered last July by CG Ventures, which has the same address as BAT's London headquarters. BAT, which is spending around US\$3.6 million to make the site the main source for information on fashionable bars and restaurants, denied that it was a marketing tool for cigarettes, saying it wanted to create "the best web-based nightlife guide to strengthen our relationships with the venues". (On learning about the scheme, the Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) team on the other side of London immediately set up [www.citygobo2.com](http://www.citygobo2.com) to reveal the truth about the BAT project to web-surfing teenagers.)

Tobacco control advocates believe young people visiting the bars will be subjected to heavy marketing for BAT's "coolest" brand, Lucky Strike. "It is interesting that the first cities featured are in Belgium and Poland," said Luk Joossens, senior consultant to the European Union on anti-cancer initiatives. "These are countries where an advertising ban is in place, but opportunities for point of sale promotions still exist. Trendy bars are the only place where you can target this audience." BAT, which said the website was

still in a "pilot" stage, insisted that cigarettes were sold legally in these establishments and pointed out that the "average" age of night clubbers was 18, without apparently understanding that as some were clearly quite a few years older, a similar number must therefore be younger than 18, the youngest age at which children, according to tobacco industry rhetoric, may first "choose" whether or not to start.

Interestingly, the magic 18 is a substantial seven years less than the youngest age for advertising models that BAT sets for itself in the ill fated self regulatory code it has proposed together with Philip Morris and Japan Tobacco, in an effort to head off an effective WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. But perhaps that is to ensure that 18 year olds still have role models significantly older than themselves, on the principle that the coolest fashions to impressionable young minds are those espoused by people a few years up the age ladder.

On the same principle, it is fairly obvious that if, like the CityGobo website, you make something cool for an 18 year old, it becomes cool for younger children, too. Internal tobacco industry documents show that tobacco companies have long used this technique to attract very young smokers. As restrictions progressively reduce opportunities for overtly linking cigarettes with things that young people think are most cool and "happening", rather than with foul breath, skin ageing, miserable disability, and premature death, we shall see many more tricks like this in the future.

## The wolf changes its sheepskin

Last November, Philip Morris (PM) announced that it was going to ask its shareholders' approval to change the company's name to the Altria Group, Inc. PM is the world's 48th largest economic entity with a market capitalisation value of \$105 billion, placing it ahead of the value of all stock combined in nations such as Greece, Ireland, and Chile. The company produces Miller beer, Kraft, and other well known food products in addition to its cigarettes mainstay. Chairman and chief executive officer, Australian born Geoffrey C Bible, said he proposed the

change for two reasons. One was "a need for clarity" and the other reason was "the evolution of Philip Morris Companies Inc".

PM's internal documents, however, reveal very different reasons for the company seeking to change its name. A corporate marketing strategy document written for PM in December 1993 by an "identity consultant", as part of PM's "Identity Development Program", shows that PM was attempting to escape the stigma of selling tobacco products by attempting to "re-position" its image in consumers' minds.

The document concludes that the key to escaping the damaging association with tobacco is changing the name of the company. Among the problems caused by PM's close identification with cigarettes were the following: "As awareness of tobacco issues increase, Philip Morris increasingly reacts/defends." "As 'tobacco' image of Philip Morris increases, market value of Philip Morris decreases." Australian research conducted for PM by the Wirthlin Group paints a similar picture, with tobacco companies rated lowest on "truthfulness and credibility".

Interestingly, the first target audience listed for this corporate repositioning is employees, suggesting that PM's employee morale suffers from the shame of working for PM, a comment echoed by an Australian recruitment company executive interviewed by the *Financial Review*: "I don't think there's any doubt that it's harder to get enthusiasm for tobacco companies. There is a trend. If you have 10 qualified candidates and you tell them it's a tobacco company, five might say they don't want the job."

Mr Bible's press release says the proposal to change the company's identity "...comes two years after a successful effort to improve the image of the Philip Morris family of companies. Research indicates that the companies are viewed as changing for the better and becoming a more responsible



The logo for the new name of Philip Morris.

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As part of its rebranding effort, lung cancer will place posters like this in doctor's offices.

An ersatz poster spoofing the name change of Philip Morris.

corporate citizen, among other indicators of favourable public opinion."

My public health colleagues are intrigued with the new name, some suggesting it is an anagram of "A Trial". What we have here is a nomen nudum, a name without a proper description. Altria is a faux Latin word that echoes "altus", meaning height. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary offers a closer sound match: altricial, from Latin and French, meaning to nourish, refers to a class of birds helpless at birth, and too young to forage for themselves—quite apposite when the company's internal documents about its potential customers as young as 12 are considered. PM has used the rather military *veni, vidi, vici* as part of its company symbol for years. I came, I saw, I conquered is probably a good description of their intentions, although *venenum in auro bibitur* (poison drunk from a golden cup) or *graviora manent* (the worst is yet to come) could be considered in the new-found clean spirit.

The key to the proposed switch may derive from the way the new name will be pronounced. If it's to be a US southern accented Altria—"I'll try a . . ."—then stand by for "I'll try a Marlboro" (or an Alpine, or a Kraft cheese sandwich).

The Satire.com website had a field day with the name change: "Just days after Philip Morris declared it will change its name to the Altria Group, lung cancer today announced it will change its name to Philip Morris. According to lung cancer officials, the chance to snap up a brand that is more

widely associated with lung cancer than lung cancer itself was too enticing to pass up . . . For a time, patients will have to get used to hearing 'We suspect you have Philip Morris' instead of 'We suspect you have lung cancer'. But in terms of comprehension, I think they will instantly understand what they're being told." An ersatz poster has the following caption: "I don't worry about getting Philip Morris. I'm too young, right?"

SIMON CHAPMAN, with contributions from ANNE LANDMAN, STAN SHATENSTEIN, BERT HIRSCHORN, and STEVE HAMMAN

## India: BAT's bravery award

As we know, one of the basic principles of tobacco promotion is to address the subconscious fears of the target audience: smokers, and potential "starters", as tobacco companies so cynically refer to our children. Some of these fears are rather banal—for example, that our breath, hair and clothes will smell bad if we smoke—and can be addressed by the association of cigarettes with concepts diametrically opposite on any scale of values, such as fresh mountain air and fragrant, beautiful models. Other fears, of course, are about the much more serious health problems caused by smoking, hence the value to tobacco manufacturers of associating smoking with sports and other tough, physical activities at which only fit and healthy people can excel.

But how else can we be reassured about well founded fear? Most non-smokers are fearful about the risks of

smoking, and timid about trying it, and at some level almost all smokers are deeply afraid of the consequences of their habit, and about continuing to ignore the overwhelming medical, economic, and social pressures to quit. One obvious way for tobacco companies to address such fears is to link smoking with bravery, a concept that must have been discussed between the tobacco industry and government health officials in several countries, as it has been specifically proscribed in some of the discredited "voluntary agreements" signed by numerous foolish or naive governments in the past.

In the UK, for example, the agreement regulating print and billboard tobacco advertising in the 1980s stated that advertisements should not suggest that smoking was "a manifestation of courage or daring". Of course, the whole point about these schemes is that the tobacco companies only agree to what they know they can easily circumvent by other means; thus Mr Aleardo Buzzi, the PM executive responsible for Marlboro's Formula 1 motor racing operations, told an advertising journal in 1983: "What we wanted was to promote a particular image of adventure, of courage, of virility."

In South Africa, Rembrandt, now subsumed into BAT, used a surf rescue helicopter with a huge assortment of ground backup vehicles, all plastered with its John Rolfe cigarette brand identifiers, to capture the attention of child-rich crowds at seaside holiday resorts, until it was grounded by the country's new tobacco control legislation (*Tobacco Control* 1998;7:9 and 1999;8:363-4). Earlier, Rothmans had used a similar device in New Zealand



Red and White cigarette ads disguised as advertisements for a national bravery award.



for its Winfield brand. Both rescue helicopters exploited a perfect blend of bravery, life saving, and excitement, achieving three major tobacco advertising deceptions simultaneously.

For the last decade in India, PM's Red and White cigarette brand has pulled no punches in an audacious, all bravery promotional scheme. Red and White cigarette ads disguised as advertisements for a national bravery award last year boasted that since 1990, the awards scheme "has honoured the true heroes of society. Ordinary citizens who have performed extraordinary deeds of physical courage and supreme selflessness." They went on to say that past winners included "saviours of people's lives and property. And organisations battling social evils such as dowry, child marriage and environmental pollution." The ads ended with an appeal for nominations (with a coy implication that people might consider nominating themselves) in two categories: physical bravery, and social acts of courage. Prizes ranged from a bronze medal plus around US\$100 to a gold medal and US\$300.

To complete the association of the brand with bravery, PM ensures that publicity for the programme positions the brand and the company as brave, too, by championing some of the most controversial and stubbornly tenacious remnants of India's ancient culture. Dowry payments made by parents under contracts for the marriage of their daughters have long plunged some of the very poorest families into apparently impossible, never ending debt or servitude. Some arch traditionalists and small time money lenders must resist the idea of ending the system as vehemently as PM resists an end to tobacco promotion.

Yet this is consistent with PM's careful casting of itself as the good guy in similar social struggles all over the world—for example, as benefactor to groups fighting hunger and poverty, HIV, and the deprivation of minorities. Surely its public relations team must already be drafting plans to sponsor women's emancipation programmes in post-war Afghanistan?

## Niger: beauty and the beast

While much attention is given, deservedly, to the expansionist tactics in the developing world of the big three tobacco transnationals—Philip, BAT, and Japan Tobacco—several smaller tobacco companies are busily emulat-



Capitalising on Letka (The Flock), a highly successful 1960s film mixing cartoon and human characters that is still remembered by Czech movie goers, the slogan on this Czech tobacco ad says: "The legend returns!". The brand is made by the Czech company Tabak. Any detailed interpretation of the ad's imagery may best be left to practitioners of the psychoanalytic traditions for which middle Europe is famous.

ing them. In Niger, as in other French speaking west African countries, the dominant tobacco company since colonial times has been Seita, the former French tobacco monopoly now merged into Altadis along with its Spanish counterpart Tabacalera.

Last year's Miss Niger beauty contest demonstrates how the new, smaller tobacco companies can give the big boys a run for their money when it comes to saturation brand coverage in the youth market. The contest was sponsored by Fine cigarettes, manufactured by Seita/Altadis and distributed by Sitab Niger. The wife of Niger's President attended, together with the tourism minister and, significantly for this highly fashion and music conscious nation, a clutch of famous clothes designers and musicians. The event attracted droves



Traditional wrestling, the most popular sport in Niger, is sponsored by Fine cigarettes, which are manufactured by Seita/Altadis.



The Miss Niger beauty contest is also sponsored by Fine.

of young people and gained extensive television and newspaper coverage. Attractive young women distributed Fine cigarettes, T shirts, caps and bags.

Fine also sponsors a biennial international festival of African fashion. Fine's sister brand Excellence sponsors the National Youth Festival, a cultural and sports event attended by more than 3000 young people, and traditional wrestling, the most popular sport in Niger, which is covered live on television. Even the courtyard of Niger's parliament carries a Sitab cigarette brand advertisement.

It is not hard to envisage the odds stacked against any politician or government official who might try to ban tobacco promotion in Niger: just imagine finding yourself accidentally dropped into the ring at the Fine national wrestling contest.

## Thailand: trying to swing it on the golf course

Even in countries with the strongest tobacco control laws, tobacco companies will always explore whether they can get away with breaking or getting round them. So it was that last October Thai health workers were informed that a large group of sportsmen from Malaysia were participating in a golf tournament sponsored by Japan Tobacco's Mild Seven cigarette brand, and that in breach of Thailand's strict tobacco ad ban, a substantial amount of promotional material had been set up at the Royal Gems golf course outside Bangkok. Banners were in place at the course, in front of the lodge, in the dining area and elsewhere, all proclaiming the tournament as "All Golfers' Mild Seven Astro Masters" (Astro was another sponsor), together with the sponsors' logos.

By the time health officials reached the course next morning, however, pieces of paper had been pasted over the banners to obliterate the name and



A banner at a Bangkok golf tournament, with the name and logo of Mild Seven covered over.

logo of Mild Seven, the main sponsor. While unable to prosecute the organisers, the officials had the satisfaction of knowing that Japan Tobacco may have learned how serious Thailand is about enforcing its law.

## New ad code cosmetic: official

It's particularly disappointing when your traditional friends and admirers drop you in it. In fairness, however, a Wall Street analyst cannot have intended her memo about BAT's business prospects last year to be made public, but only to reassure stockholders. The analyst wrote that the new international marketing standards announced with much fanfare by BAT, Philip Morris, and Japan Tobacco were unlikely to affect the companies' profitability. In other words, the analyst rated then, in health terms, . . . worthless.

In words eerily reminiscent of a US Tobacco Institute document of 1983 which reassured readers that BAT's US subsidiary Brown & Williamson "will not support a youth smoking program which discourages young people from smoking", the Wall Street analyst dismissed the new code at a stroke. "We have analyzed the 9-page agreement and believe that the multinationals' strategy is proactive and is a way to improve their image," wrote Ms Bonnie Herzog of Credit Suisse First Boston Equity. "Also, by proactively setting new international standards," the briefing continued, "the multinationals could be trying to counter a number of proposals that the WHO has been working on to curb the amount of cigarettes that are consumed on an international level."

The refreshingly realistic and unstuffy analysis, which might have been written specially for this column, added that in many countries existing laws are stricter than the provisions of

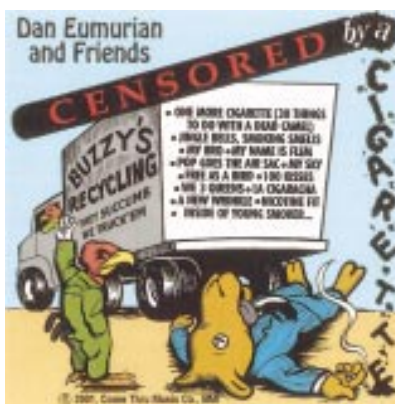


This picture from a newspaper in Mauritius offers a classic illustration of highly focused efforts to buy favour from a developing country government, presumably to reduce any risk of effective tobacco control action. BAT recently awarded educational bursaries to these 10 students from economically deprived areas.

the international marketing standards; and that Credit Suisse believed the "modest amount the multinationals actually spend on these types of practices will be redirected into other types of marketing promotions [such as] point of sale activity."

## USA: 30 things to do with a dead Camel

Teachers, youth leaders, and health educators wondering how to get some of the more subtle messages about the tobacco conspiracy across to teenagers may find help in Wisconsin singer-songwriter Dan Emurian's latest CD



Cover of a CD entitled "Censored by a cigarette", containing songs directed at teenagers warning them of the devious strategies employed by tobacco companies.

"Censored by a cigarette". The 16 songs (our headline is borrowed from the subtitle of one of them) are performed by Emurian, accompanied by friends young and old. They are pitched at ages ranging from infants to adults, many of them to classic tunes that will be well known around the world. Those most likely to appeal to teenagers combine irreverent and subversive children's humour (*Pop! Goes the Air Sac* and *My Name is Flem* give you the general idea) with a more sophisticated explanation of some of the tobacco companies' most devious strategies. So while *A New Wrinkle* ostensibly deals with smoking's effects on the skin, it also explains how "Tobacco companies promise to lay education on us/ Like a fox holding school for the chickens/ 'Don't come into my den until you're older, but then?/ It's the grownup thing to do.' The plot thickens." Further information from [www.PianosNSongs.com](http://www.PianosNSongs.com); or from Emurian at Come Thru Music Co, BMI, 1634 Barlow St, La Crosse, WI, USA.

## Uganda: health comes in from the sidelines

Health advocates in Uganda were justly proud when the first anti-tobacco billboard at a sports ground in





The first anti-tobacco billboard at a sports ground in East Africa was unveiled at the Kampala Rugby Football Club in Uganda last year.

East Africa was unveiled at the Kampala Rugby Football Club last year. It resulted from a Ush2 000 000 (US\$1250) sponsorship package for the Kobs Rugby Football Club put together by The Environmental Action Network (TEAN), a group of young Ugandan lawyers, and Kampala's Bon Appetit Restaurant. A particularly pleasing irony is that the same billboard was previously used by BAT for Embassy cigarette ads. Kobs is a leading rugby team that draws its players from secondary schools, and the sponsorship package stipulates that the players will wear No Smoking logos on the leg of their shorts, and will sign a no smoking pledge to keep their game smoke-free. There are also plans to play recordings of health warnings against tobacco during Kobs games.

BAT has long been a major sponsor of sports in Uganda (*Tobacco Control* 2000;9:129–30), but the Kobs billboard reflects the increasing strength of the local anti-tobacco lobby, which is drawn from the medical, legal, sporting, media, and other sectors. In May 2000, a three year campaign resulted in BAT withdrawing its 10 year sponsorship of the Sportsman of the Year Gala of the Ugandan Sports Press Association (*Tobacco Control* 2000;9:269–70).

## USA: talking to the lads

A clearer image is emerging about the likely trends in tobacco promotion over the next few years in countries where tobacco control measures or social pressure make life increasingly difficult for tobacco companies. "Permission marketing", in which tobacco manufacturers gather the names, addresses, and lifestyle details and preferences of consumers who claim to be smokers, is growing fast as the companies try to build up massive databases

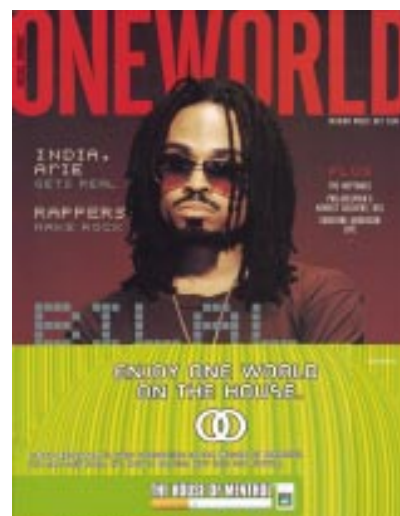
to ensure that even if they lose the right to use significant sectors of the advertising media, they can still address potential customers by mail. This is particularly useful for reaching groups with popular interests and high levels of disposable income, such as younger men, often single and without responsibilities—or "lads", as many advertisers call them.

One of our least laddish, more cuddly informants (Deep Whisker, a cat whose owner in the American south shares his pet's interest in tobacco promotion) last year received a number of revealing mail shots clearly aimed at this market by BAT's US subsidiary Brown & Williamson (B&W). First into the cat-basket came *Real Edge*, a publication so unashamedly laddish that B&W has this to say about it inside the cover: "*Real Edge* is edited for adults, with adventure and entertainment at its core. Filled with sports cars, women, aircraft, high-tech electronics, strange places and events and even stranger people, *Real Edge* is focussed on one thing: having a good time . . . It is published for adult men." The mag did not let belie its publisher's claims, being filled with all the bare flesh, sports pictures, and toys for boys that any cat could wish for, plus copious promotion for B&W cigarette brands.

Next through the catflap came *One World*, an independent publication aimed at African Americans and other ethnic minorities (our informant's breed and fur-type are not known), in which B&W had bought a generous five full pages of advertising space, topping off a bulk purchase for its



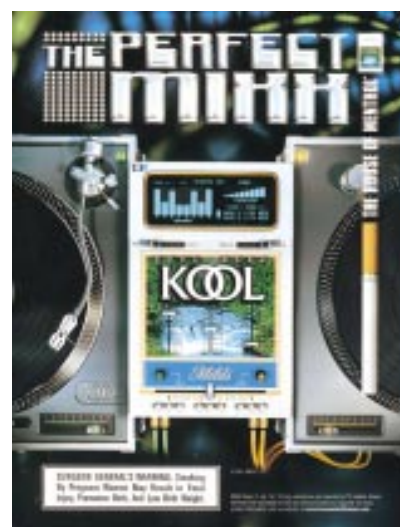
Cover of a recent edition of *Real Edge*, a "lad's" magazine mail shot financed by BAT's US subsidiary Brown & Williamson.



*One World* magazine mail shot, targeted at African Americans and other ethnic minorities, with a special wrapper promoting Kool cigarettes, plus five pages of B&W advertisements.

mailing list with a special wrapper promoting Kool cigarettes. This invited Deep Whisker to "Unwrap Something Authentic" (a good word for addressing minorities, that), and to "Enjoy One World on the House". Other mail shots have arrived from the list, too, including a Kool brand promotion linked to a music tour, with cards for getting friends added to the mailing list, and special offer coupons for buying cigarettes.

Doubtless we can expect more of this the world over, until such time as the deliberate association of positive, attractive images with the most dangerous consumer product the world has ever known is treated with the seriousness it merits.



The back cover of the *Real Edge* magazine naturally carried a full page ad for the Kool B&W brand of cigarette.