

AD WATCH

The empathy advertising campaign – preparing smokers for the inevitable social isolation

In 1978, in confidential research prepared for the US tobacco industry, the Roper Organization warned the manufacturers that the environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) issue represents “the most dangerous development to the viability of the tobacco industry that has yet occurred.”¹

There is a social change explanation behind this warning. The public will engage in many forms of risk behaviour but is reluctant to accept exposure to involuntary perils. With increasing knowledge of the risks of ETS, people begin to protest. Nonsmokers speaking out undermines the core of the marketing message of tobacco manufacturers – that is, that smoking is socially desirable and leads to expanded social opportunities.

Also threatening to the industry is the fact that increasing peer group pressure and changing social relationships around tobacco use, mostly among adults, create pressure for legislation to regulate where and when people can smoke. Legislation, in turn, leads to more peer agitation and social pressure. Both are powerful social change agents. The threat recognised implicitly by the Roper report is that these two change agents have become involved in a reinforcing circle of social change which threatens tobacco markets. Both rank ahead of public education as social change tools.

The US Environmental Protection Agency's designation of ETS as a Group A (known human) carcinogen² has accelerated this process. The manufacturers understand, better than most, the real and potential impact of this designation and the threat it poses. The accumulating bad news for the US tobacco industry caused *Time* Magazine to conclude, in its cover story of 18 April 1994, “In the US the battle against tobacco is turning into a rout.”

With the Group A classification in the background and the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration's threat to sweep the cigarette out of private-sector workplaces,³ the US print advertising campaign of Philip Morris for Benson & Hedges 100s should come as no surprise. Desperate industries tend to give birth to desperate marketing plans.

The “empathy campaign”, developed by the advertising agency Leo Burnett USA, shows smokers in one ad sitting on top of the wing of an airplane (figure 1). The headline reads “Have you noticed all your smoking flights have been cancelled?”* The tag line

* Canada's federal government recently announced that all domestic and international flights will be smoke-free as of 1 September 1994.

Have you noticed all your smoking flights have been cancelled?
For a great smoke, just wing it.

BENSON & HEDGES 100's

THE LENGTH YOU GO TO FOR PLEASURE

Finally, a welcome sign for people who smoke.
Call 1-800-496-5444 for more information.
© Philip Morris Inc. 1994
15 mg "tar", 1.1 mg nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.

**SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Cigarette
Smoke Contains Carbon Monoxide.**

Figure 1 Two-page ad on the inside front cover of *The Advocate*, 14 June 1994

Scenes from St Martin/St Maarten

The Leeward Islands of the Lesser Antilles are home to one of the jewels of the Caribbean Sea: the island of St Martin/St Maarten. Only 37 square miles (96 square kilometers) in size, and with a population of 47 000, it has been governed jointly since the 17th century by the Dutch and the French. As the smallest island in the world to be divided between two sovereign nations, St Martin/St Maarten has, according to one tour book, "set an example of international cohabitation".

The joint governance of the island was established on 24 March 1648, when nine French and Dutch settlers agreed on a pact signed at the Mont des Accords (Agreement Mountain). Legend has it that a Dutchman and a Frenchman stood back-to-back and started walking in opposite directions along the shoreline. When they met, a line was drawn to their point of departure to establish the boundary between the two sides. The Frenchman covered more territory, which explains why the French own 21 square miles (St Martin) and the Dutch only 16 square miles (St Maarten).

Tobacco and St Martin/St Maarten in history

St Martin occupies a very special place in tobacco history. It was the site of a conference held in January 1972 to attempt to answer the question "Why do people smoke cigarettes?". Sponsored by the Council for Tobacco Research (CTR), the conference was attended by 25 scientists, including William L Dunn, Jr, of the Philip Morris Research Center (Richmond, Virginia). After the meeting Dunn wrote a now-famous paper entitled "Motives and incentives in cigarette smoking", which first surfaced in the tobacco product liability lawsuit *Cipollone vs Liggett Group Inc* (plaintiff's exhibit #5171). The paper provides what may be the most poetic description of the critical role of nicotine in smoking behaviour. It is also one of the most embarrassing and damaging internal industry documents to have seen the light of day. [Excerpts were published as a filler in *Tobacco Control* 1993; 2: 346 and were cited in Dr David Kessler's testimony in Congress, which was reproduced in the last issue of *Tobacco Control* (1994; 3: 148-58).]

Just as St Martin has an important place in the history of tobacco, tobacco has an important place in the history of St Martin. Along with salt and cotton, tobacco was a major source of income for the 17th century settlers of the island. Now the island economy is based on tourism. Tobacco is no longer grown on the island, and the best-known indigenous product is guavaberry liqueur, made from rum and the berries (not to be

confused with guavas) that grow wild on the island's central mountains.

Does tobacco enjoy the same prominence in island life as it did 300 years ago? We consulted the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) report on tobacco in the Americas;¹ unfortunately, it provided little information on the use and promotion of tobacco in St Martin/St Maarten, no doubt because little information exists or has been published. The PAHO report (pp 330-1) did note that cigarette consumption data cannot be used to estimate domestic consumption in the Netherlands Antilles (which includes St Maarten and several other Dutch colonies) because of duty-free purchases by tourists and illegal trade in tobacco products. The report also noted that no surveys on tobacco use are available for the Netherlands Antilles. Nor was specific information on St Martin included in the chapter on French departments and territories in the Caribbean (pp 198-206).

So on a five-day trip to St Martin/St Maarten in March 1994, we set out to conduct our own investigation. Although our trip was brief, we were able to cover a substantial portion of the island.

Tobacco sales

Most of the cigarettes sold on the island were the popular American and British brands. The packs contained health warnings in English based on the requirements of the countries where the cigarettes were manufactured. A pack of 20 cigarettes cost US\$1.20, considerably less than the average retail price in the US (about \$2.00). Prices are lower in part because St Martin/St Maarten is a "free port" on both sides - ie, no import duties are assessed.

Cuban cigars were sold at various sites on the island, and whereas conservative media personality Rush Limbaugh needed "a little help from his friends" to find Cuban cigars on St Maarten last New Year's Eve,² we ourselves had no problem finding them. Cuban cigars were sold along the main shopping thoroughfare of Philipsburg (figure 1), the capital of St Maarten, and in the Princess Juliana Airport.

Smoking prevalence

There are no data on the prevalence of smoking on the island. But our impression was that smoking was common among the French residents and tourists (most tourists appeared to be French or American). Although shops that seemed to cater to island natives did sell cigarettes, we saw very little smoking among the indigenous population.

Cigarette marketing

Aside from Benson & Hedges ashtrays in some



Figure 1



Figure 2

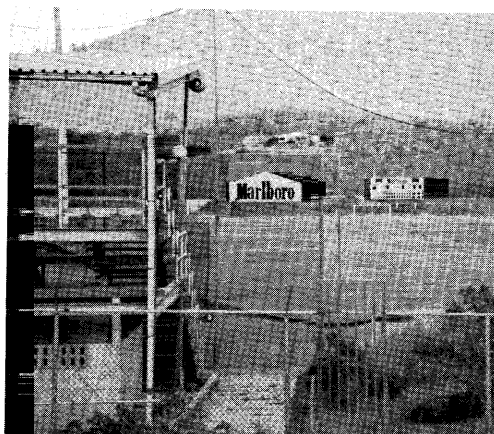


Figure 3

restaurants, we saw very little cigarette advertising and promotion on the French side. Presumably cigarette advertising was rare in St Martin because of the ban on cigarette advertising enacted in France a few years ago.

On the other hand, cigarette advertising was fairly common on the Dutch side. Marlboro signs, with or without the cowboy, appeared above many shops and stores (figure 2). These signs were reminiscent of similar signs that were ubiquitous in another Caribbean site visited by one of us – the Dominican Republic.³

We spotted a Marlboro billboard in the outfield of a baseball field (figure 3), and a clearly marked Marlboro delivery truck (figure 4). Again, both of these promotions were also

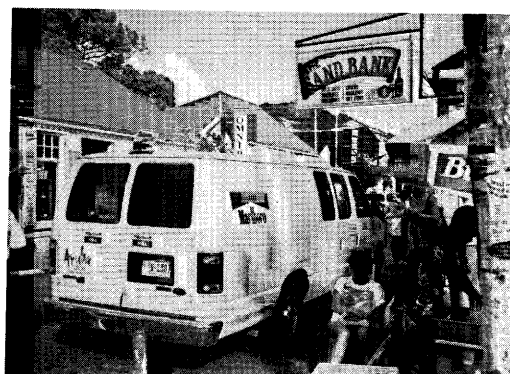


Figure 4

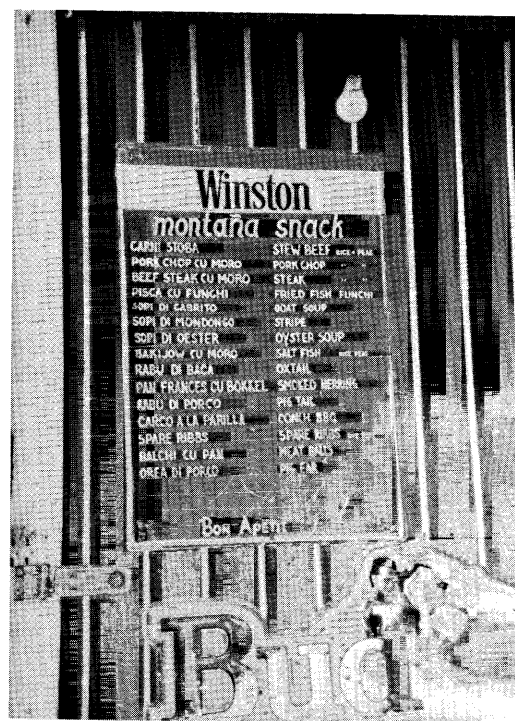


Figure 5

seen in the Dominican Republic. Interestingly, well-identified Marlboro delivery trucks were not seen in the US until the emergence of the Marlboro Adventure Team campaign.⁴ RJ Reynolds attempted to interrupt the Marlboro marketing monopoly on St Maarten with a Winston restaurant menu board (figure 5).

One unique promotion, which we have not seen elsewhere, were street signs in several places indicating that Marlboro cigarettes were on sale nearby (figure 6). These signs were *not* at the point of sale, but instead resemble the street or highway signs seen in the US that indicate the proximity of hotels/motels, restaurants, and gasoline (petrol) stations.

Dr John Slade wrote recently about cigarette companies' promotional offers of free or discounted products that *do not* bear cigarette brand names.⁵ Along these lines, a liquor store in Philipsburg was offering a free pint of Bacardi rum with the purchase of two cartons of Winston cigarettes (price \$22).

Although cigarette promotions were fairly common in St Maarten, they did not strike us as particularly prominent – until we spotted



Figure 6



Figure 7

the Marlboro Man cut-out in Philipsburg (figure 7). Like the Marlboro Man cut-outs seen elsewhere,⁶ this sign towers above other structures in the area and is impossible to miss.

Lasting impressions

Multinational tobacco companies have reached this Caribbean jewel, and have begun to tarnish its luster. Fortunately, their marketing activities, with the exception of the Philipsburg Marlboro Man, are not yet as prominent as they are in many other countries. Smoking does not seem to be highly prevalent among the indigenous island population, based on our casual observations. However, systematic monitoring and data collection are needed to clarify the picture of tobacco and health in St Martin/St Maarten. If tobacco control activities do not evolve to counteract the incursion of the multinationals, tobacco use and tobacco-attributable disease will spread through this and other isles of paradise.⁷

RONALD M DAVIS

Editor

NADINE M DAVIS

East Lansing, Michigan, USA

MARC L RIVO

KAREN TAGER RIVO

Washington, DC, USA

- 1 Pan American Health Organization. *Tobacco or health: Status in the Americas*. Washington, DC: PAHO, 1992. (PAHO Scientific Publication No 536.)
- 2 Rothstein M. Rush's judgment. *Cigar Aficionado*, Spring 1994: 46-55.
- 3 Davis RM. Promotion of cigarettes in developing countries. *JAMA* 1986; 255: 993.
- 4 Slade J. Cigarette marketing in the US copies developing country techniques. *Tobacco Control* 1993; 2: 332.
- 5 Slade J. Why unbranded promos? *Tobacco Control* 1994; 3: 72.
- 6 Davis RM. Honey, I blew up the Marlboro Man. *Tobacco Control* 1992; 1: 300-1.
- 7 Stanton H. Fatal impact in paradise. *Tobacco Control* 1994; 3: 5-6.



John Slade

Figure 2 Atlanta, Georgia (USA), May 1994

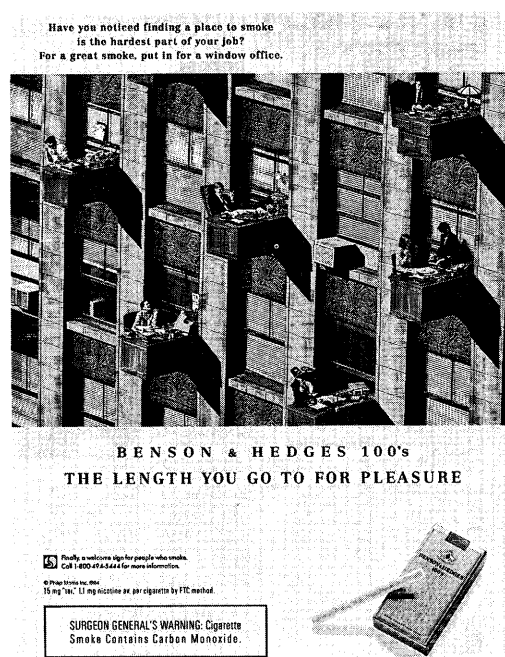


Figure 3 Newsweek, 30 May 1994

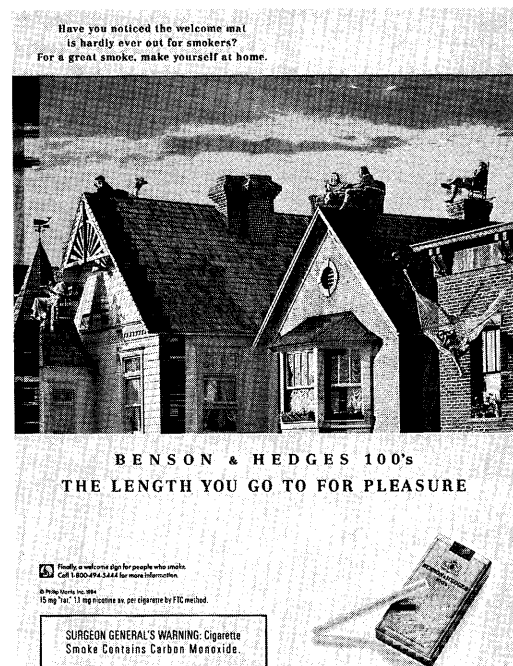


Figure 4 Newsweek, 20 June 1994

concludes "The length you go to for pleasure". The ad has appeared in many national publications, and interestingly, is one of the few cigarette ads to have appeared in a magazine (*The Advocate*) targeted to gays and lesbians. Gays and lesbians represent another population, besides smokers, that may yearn for empathy, which the tobacco industry is beginning to offer to this group.⁴ In addition to the ad's appearance in magazines and news-

papers, three-dimensional versions have been seen on billboards (figure 2).

Another ad depicts smokers sitting at desks affixed like one-person balconies outside office windows (figure 3). The headline asks, "Have you noticed finding a place to smoke is the hardest part of your job?"

A third ad presents addicts smoking on the roofs of houses (figure 4). The headline, "Have you noticed the welcome mat is hardly ever out

for smokers?", carries another surprising admission of the social unacceptability tied to tobacco products.

Philip Morris may be testing the waters with its "empathy campaign", which, for the most part, is targeted at smokers. Given the lengths that the tobacco industry has gone to promote social acceptance for its products, which advertising strategy might have given rise to these ads?

While we cannot be sure, we can guess. Obviously, the ads use satire to express empathy for smokers, as the manufacturers claim. But this industry is not known for being touched by the problems which its products visit on their users. Clearly there is more.

First, recognising that the social ostracism of smokers is going to accelerate, the advertisements are designed to make smokers more comfortable with being addicts and social pariahs. The ads seemingly offer empathy to smokers and suggest implicitly that they are not alone, one of the roles of support groups. They also encourage smokers to laugh at the predicament they face.

Second, the ads are designed to appeal to rebelliousness and defiance among smokers, the trait that helped many of them to become addicted in the first place. Martin Rothstein, former president of MacLaren: Lintas Inc, one of Canada's largest advertising agencies, says that the ads encourage smokers to take pride in their increasing isolation and to "thumb their noses at society" with its increasing restrictions on smoking. "Hunker down," the ads urge, like oppressed groups should.

While the ads primarily target smokers, US media critic Dr Jean Kilbourne believes they may also be trying to develop sympathy among non-smokers for the plight of smokers. The ads imply that the banning of smokers from indoor environments is taking on extreme dimensions and is being driven by zealots. "The ads suggest that non-smokers should lighten up. The industry wishes to depict smokers as people with a sense of humour and

non-smokers as humourless and straight. The strategy is to continue to position the debate not so much between smokers and non-smokers but rather between smokers and zealots," said Dr Kilbourne.

Whatever benefits the ads generate for Benson & Hedges, I believe that the industry, perhaps out of desperation, is engaged in a high-risk game. Mr Rothstein says "the downside of this advertising may very well be that it confirms the guilt that smokers feel about using the product and drives home the point that tobacco use indoors is anti-social behaviour. It may trigger the realisation among smokers that "My God, it finally has come to this, hasn't it?"

Because of declining sales for the Benson & Hedges brand and because of the general position of the industry, the manufacturer may be seeking new approaches in declining markets. Thus Philip Morris may be testing the empathy approach on a less important brand to determine the value of the strategy for other Philip Morris brands. Mr Rothstein doubts that these ads will encourage sales for Benson & Hedges.

To the extent that desperation is a component of the campaign and Benson & Hedges approaches the line where the campaign downside out-weighs any benefit, Philip Morris risks acceleration of the precise pressures which are undermining the social acceptability of its products.

GARFIELD MAHOOD
Non-Smokers' Rights Association,
Toronto, Canada

- 1 Roper Organization. *A study of public attitudes toward cigarette smoking and the tobacco industry in 1978*. New York: Roper Organization, 1978.
- 2 US Environmental Protection Agency. *Respiratory health effects of passive smoking: lung cancer and other disorders*. Washington, DC: Office of Health and Environmental Assessment and the Office of Research and Development, 1993. (EPA/600/6-90/006F.)
- 3 US Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Notice of proposed rulemaking: indoor air quality. *Federal Register* 5 April 1994; 59(65): 15968-16039.
- 4 Goebel K. Lesbians and gays face tobacco targeting. *Tobacco Control* 1994; 3: 65-7.