Germany: tobacco industry paradise

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Arriving in Germany, visitors are immediately confronted with the social acceptability of smoking. Even in the international airport at Frankfurt, one of the first German airports to ban smoking, authorities re-established “restricted” but open smoking areas, so that passengers are continuously exposed to environmental tobacco smoke. On most German trains, visitors will find bistros with crowds of smokers. Although smoking in public is not allowed for people aged under 16 years, nobody pays attention to the restriction—typically, parents do not interfere when their children smoke as many parents are smokers themselves. Like Japan, Germany has vending machines on almost every corner. With 80 million inhabitants, Germany has more than 800 000 vending machines, one machine for every 30 smokers with free access for adults and children day and night.

In 1998, 37% of men and 28% of women aged 18–79 smoked. Smoking commences in Germany on average at 13.7 years, 13.6 for boys and 13.7 for girls. By the age of 16, 44% are regular smokers; sex specific information is not available. As smoking is being initiated at a young age, the teenage market is obviously critical to the tobacco industry.

Advertising
Since 1974 there has been a ban on tobacco advertising on radio and TV and for advertising that suggests that smoking is harmless, healthy, or enhances physical wellbeing. Advertising may not show enjoyment during the act of smoking.

As the examples in this paper demonstrate, the voluntary agreements on tobacco advertising are largely ignored. For example, West advertising showing the body builder (fig 1) might not show a woman under 30, but it shows intense physical activity. West has various billboard advertisements with reference to sports—for example, people on bicycles and holding the Olympic torch (see cover). Nil targets an intellectual audience and advertises with prominent smoking actors and film makers, the ads making statements such as “imprisoned but happy”. Advertising for “light”, “mild” and “ultra” cigarettes is as common as advertising for regular cigarettes despite a voluntary agreement of restricted use of those terms.

Because of the voluntary agreements, in 1999, Philip Morris and Reemtsma were forced to pay fines after a study by the public health centre in the Hohenschönhausen district of Berlin found that there was advertising in the direct vicinity of eight schools and youth clubs. After the cigarette companies disregarded a warning from the court and continued to advertise, fines of DM 50 000 (US$25 000) were imposed on both Philip Morris and Reemtsma.

Huge budget for billboard advertising
Over the last decade the German tobacco industry spent an estimated DM 5 billion ($2.5 billion) on advertising. In 1999, the latest year for which data are available, it spent DM 615...
Marlboro

According to Peter Paetzel, director of marketing for Philip Morris Germany, Marlboro is not going to change its advertising strategy. Philip Morris is convinced that the brand Marlboro is a symbol for values such as personal freedom, adventure, self determination, and life in harmony with nature. The recent introduction of the “Marlboro Woman” is an expansion of the Marlboro world, a logical step forward to win the female market.3

In addition to its massive billboard campaign, Marlboro sponsors events such as “Marlboro summer work”, “Marlboro music rodeo” and Formula 1 motor racing, whose champion Michael Schumacher is the definitive German Marlboro man (fig 3).

LUCKY STRIKE

In the last two years, British American Tobacco (BAT) has invested millions in advertising Lucky Strike in all media sectors. Sales increased by 7.5% between 1999 to 2000, and figures for 2001 look even higher. The rocketing sales of Lucky Strike saw BAT overtake Reemtsma, putting BAT into second place. BAT has not made public the volume it spends on promotion. Other forms of advertising the brand are: “Lucky Strike Originals Diners”, a competition to be a “Lucky Strike Trend Scout” in New York in the summer of 2001, another to win one of the most prestigious awards for designers the “Lucky Strike Junior Award”, and hip merchandise from the “Lucky Strike Originals Collection”.

GAULOISES BLONDÉS

This brand has been very heavily marketed. Gauloises Blondes Légères, the “light” version of the Gauloises Blondes family, increased sales by about 31% in 2000 (fig 4).

CAMEL

Since 1985 the market share of Camel in Germany has fallen from 9% to 3%. Following a successful marketing strategy run in the Swiss, Benelux, Greek, and Spanish markets, JTI Germany is repositioning the Camel brand that was acquired by the Japanese in 1999. According to board spokesman Robert J Ramselaar, Camel is to be positioned as a cigarette for a young, white collar audience, challenging Lucky Strike and Gauloises Blondes.

The days when Camel used a rugged looking man camping for their ads are over. Now Camel advertising concentrates on the marketing of Camel events. People can participate in the “Camel Snow Crew” and go snow boarding, skydiving, and camp in an igloo for a week, or participate in the “Camel Speed Vision”, a contest for young people connected to car racing. The latest launch in the summer 2001 was the “Camel Creative Challenge”: “Make art with the camel and win one week...
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New communication strategy

Until recently, the tobacco industry did everything to deny any responsibility for the consequences of smoking, but now it is doing everything possible to restore its image through corporate communication strategies similar to those it is conducting globally in the wake of the flood of damaging revelations from its internal documents. Below, we highlight some examples.

PHILIP MORRIS (PM)

In February 2001, an interview with Hermann Waldemer, new head of the board of PM Germany titled “Marlboro is not the problem, it’s the solution”, cited Waldemer pleading for non-smoking where non-smokers are present and described a new campaign with spots in cinemas where a 14 year old says “I don’t smoke!” to prevent youth smoking. In addition, PM launched a school campaign called “internet driver’s licence”, a computer software program that teaches children how to use the internet.

Waldemer says he agrees with some of the statements made by World Health Organization’s Director General, Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland. For example, he says he agrees with disclosure of tobacco contents and says he would at any time welcome the German Ministry of Health to conduct production inspections. But significantly, he disagrees with laws that regulate tobacco contents if this means that they would deliver a product of “lower quality”.

PM engages itself strongly in sociopolitics—for example, through cultural sponsorship and scientific grants. Copying its US campaign, it is planning a big new initiative “Violence against women in the family setting”.

Since 1983, PM has presented the Philip Morris Science Award. In 2000, the amount awarded was DM 200 000 ($100 000). The award has been presented to scientists who present “market-stable solutions and that enhance conscious use of modern technologies”. For nearly two decades, PM has promoted itself with its philanthropy giving awards to highly respected scientists, most of them in research institutions with the best reputations. To date, there has been no ethical code among German research institutions to refuse tobacco funding. There is a huge lack of awareness among scientists about how the tobacco industry operates, so that famous institutions such as the Frauenhofer Gesellschaft or the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft allow their scientists to accept tobacco money.

REEMTSMA

Reemtsma, the manufacturer of West and Davidoff cigarettes, is a big organiser of public relations events. The most prestigious event is the “Reemtsma media event”. Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, attended a party in 2001 together with the mayor of Hamburg. Thierry Paternot, head of the board of Reemtsma welcomed around 600 guests, among them Angela Merkel, leader of the Christian Democratic party, Olaf Scholz, senator of the interior, politicians Franz Münsterfering, Wolfgang Gerhard, and Rezzo Schlauch, supermodel Tasha de Vasconcelos, and many others.

Another big tobacco PR event is the Reemtsma Ladies Lunch in Berlin. In January 2001, the Fourth Ladies Lunch took place in Berlin. 200 VIP ladies were invited by the wife of the head of the Reemtsma board. The Ladies Lunch had the title “The more you know”, which is the slogan of Davidoff cigarettes and was visited by female members of the German parliament, actresses, fashion designers, TV stars, members of the nobility, and big business leaders. To top it off, the event took place in the restaurant of the German parliament.

JAPAN TOBACCO INTERNATIONAL (JTI)

JTI is a relatively new company, formed when the Japan Tobacco group purchased the international operations of RJ Reynolds Inc in

www.tobaccocontrol.com
1999. The company produces Camel cigarettes. JTI concentrates more on mainstream advertising than on lobbying. Nevertheless, it usually takes part in the industry’s lobbying activities.

These examples clearly show that Big Tobacco is involved in all sectors of German society, and that the acceptance of smoking and Big Tobacco is enormous. There is no ethical code in Germany that keeps opinion leaders and role models away from an industry whose products kill people.

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2 Bundeszentrale fuer gesundheitliche Aufklarung, Die Drogenaffinitat Jugendlicher in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 2001:31–44.
5 Deutsche Presseagentur, Lob und Preis, Frankfurter Rundschau, 10 April 2001:28.