

AD WATCH

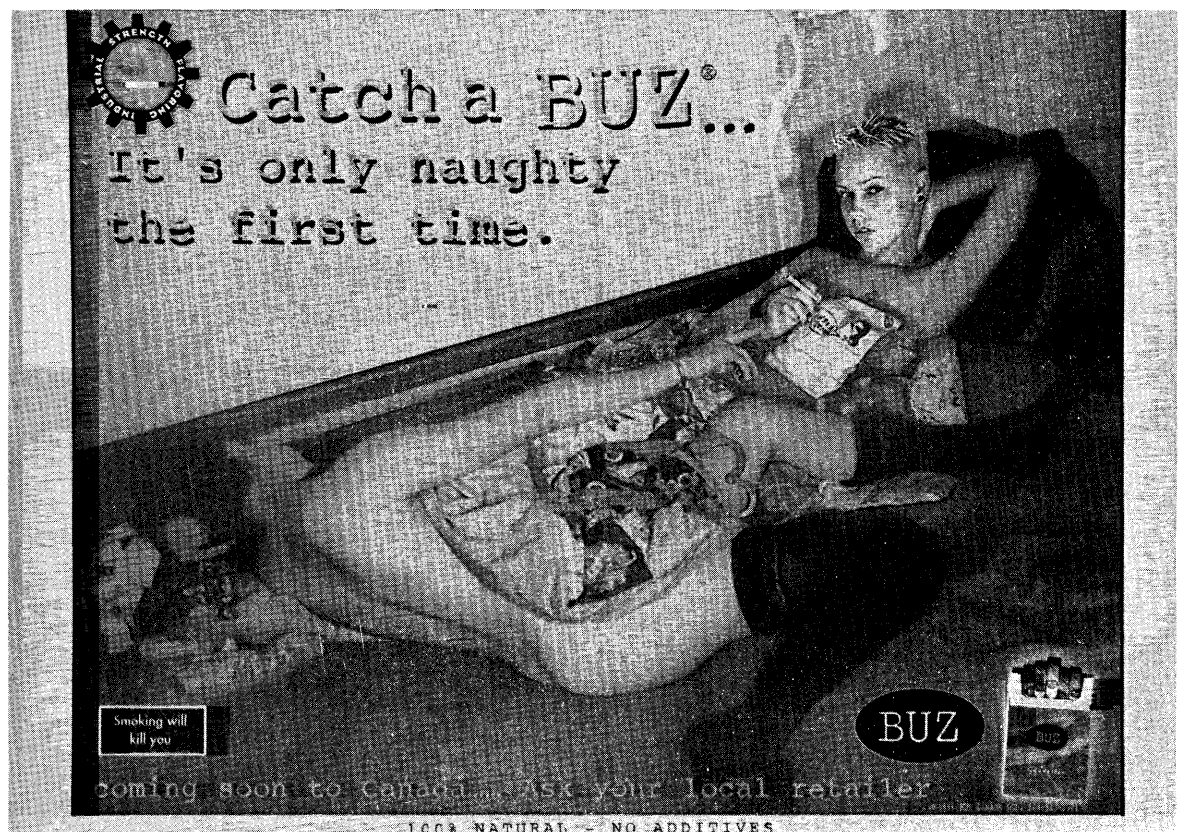
The BUZ in Canada without an ad ban

Almost immediately after Canada's Tobacco Products Control Act was declared unconstitutional by its Supreme Court on 21 September 1995, a BUZ ad (figure) appeared, almost as if it were a test of what the public and the government would tolerate. Meanwhile, the three major players in the Canadian tobacco industry - affiliates of British American Tobacco (BAT), RJ Reynolds, and Philip Morris - worked to get an insider's cosiness with policy makers. They stated that they would continue to act as if the law were still in effect until they had completed a joint "consultation" process with government. This meant, however, the continuation of ads in brand names in all media, even radio and TV. While not directly merchandising cigarettes, these ads promoted many new and old promotional events: motor sport races, golf and tennis events, jazz festivals, country music, family fireworks competitions, fashion foundations, fishing derbies, etc (see *Tobacco Control* 1993; 2: 8-10). All of this continues, although even the majority of the Supreme Court who found the law unconstitutional thought so-called lifestyle advertising more problematic than purely informational advertising (page 20, paragraph 158).

For several successive weeks in October

1995, a small weekly entertainment newspaper in Vancouver, with the ironic name of *Terminal City*, featured this pioneering two page centre spread. It directly promotes BUZ cigarettes with "industrial strength flavoring" as "coming soon to Canada". A small US based firm, National Tobacco Corporation, doing business as BUZ Canada Ltd, paid a reported \$1900 per insertion, in its pursuit of what has been termed a Calvin Klein or Benneton strategy - being intentionally outrageous in order to get word-of-mouth discussion and unpaid publicity in more expensive media.

This ad would be provocative in association with any product, much less cigarettes, and has provoked angry phone calls from both health advocates and lesbians. Two lovers, somewhat androgynous but apparently women, are sharing a (postcoital?) cigarette, naked except for stockings and draped in tousled bedclothes. Their alternative grunge or punk lifestyle, indicated by the handcuffs still partially attached to one, and the multiple body piercings, tattoo, and short dyed hair of the other, is known locally for its hopeless and fatalistic attitude, leading one to seek sensory satisfactions with minimal concern for risks and future consequences. The slogan, "Catch a BUZ...it's only naughty the first time",



suggests the psychoactive effects of marijuana and “forbidden fruit” that one can enjoy with only transitory guilt or shame. These cigarettes are explicitly portrayed as an illicit pleasure suitable for the rebellious young, along with sexual experimentation, other drugs, and permanent body ornamentation.

The seller states that “Our target is the hip, younger crowd from 19 to 25.” My students guessed the models’ ages to be from 14 to 23. A company spokesman told reporters that they intend to sponsor “quite a few events: skateboarding events, snowboarding events, you know and stuff like that.”<sup>1</sup>

While both local and national media have discussed the appearance and novel characteristics of this ad, to date nothing has been done by either provincial or federal authorities. The neglectful tolerance of the ad, which one letter to the editor described as making “Joe Camel ads look harmless by comparison”, will certainly make it far more difficult for either

authority to constrain the major firms’ new initiatives when they appear. And appear they certainly will. Not only can they now do so perfectly legally, including being on radio and TV, but they can also now claim that they advertise “with reluctance” and only to defend their market shares from this new upstart entrant. The corporate documents in evidence in the just-concluded Canadian constitutionality trial show that, because of brand loyalties, their battle for market share induces a strategic, research, and media plan focusing on children as young as 15, whether now smokers or not.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Buz cigarette ads get nonsmokers’ rights group fuming. *Georgia Straight* 1995, 19–26 October; 29(1452): 7.
- 2 Pollay RW, Lavack AM. The targeting of youth by cigarette marketers: Archival evidence on trial. In: L McAlister, ML Rothschild, eds. *Adv Consumer Res* 1993; 20: 266–71.



Submitted by Daniel J Zaccaro.