

COVER ESSAY

Trust? No—verify

John Slade

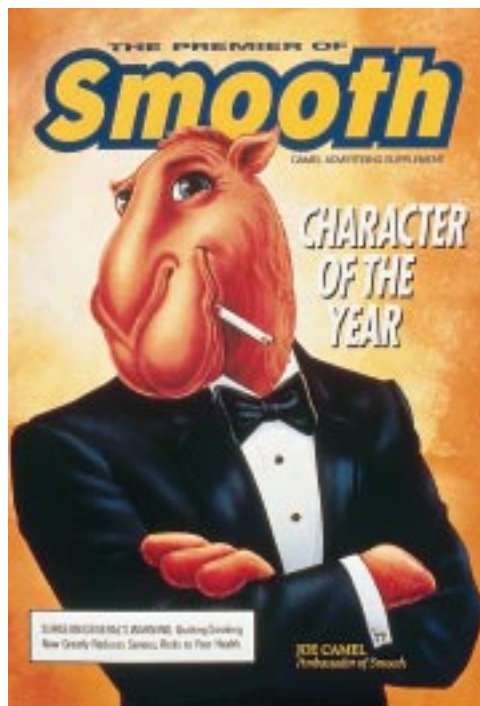


Figure 1 Joe Camel.

Joe and his cartoon-character friends began populating advertisements for the Camel brand in the United States in 1988 and continued doing so for the next decade (figure 1). As described in a fawning retrospective produced for RJ Reynolds: "Between 1988 and 1997, the Joe Camel campaign was one of the most recognized ad campaigns in America, and that was due largely to its fans, devotees of Joe who appreciated the wit and irreverence he personified."¹

The campaign also was among the most notorious. Beginning in December 1991, a number of researchers called attention to the way the Joe Camel character was attractive to



Figure 3 "Free fall" camel.

young people.²⁻⁴ Concerns about the youth appeal of the campaign led to calls by public health and medical leaders for Reynolds to withdraw it, to a private lawsuit in California (which the company eventually settled),⁵ and to a suit by the United States Federal Trade Commission (which was withdrawn in light of the master settlement agreement (MSA)).⁷ Some shareholders asked that the campaign be stopped.

In August 1997, RJR/Nabisco announced that it was stopping the Joe Camel campaign. This came at a time when the company seemed to want to show a more conciliatory face during expected negotiations with the United States Congress over tobacco control legislation. It soon became clear, though, that Joe Camel was alive and well in Argentina and in as many as four other markets outside of the United States.⁸

This prompted the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas to file a shareholder resolution with RJR/Nabisco for the spring 1998 annual meeting asking that the company stop using Joe Camel anywhere in the world. The company challenged the resolution before the Securities and Exchange Commission but lost the challenge in February 1998. Faced with having to offer the resolution to shareholders, the company then informed the proponents that Joe Camel was going to be withdrawn anyway from those few overseas markets where it was in use (personal communication from DF Sternlieb, RJR/Nabisco, to Reverend Michael H Crosby, 27 February 1998). Although the company refused to offer a timeline, the proponents accepted this as a show of good faith and withdrew the resolution.⁸

Department of
Environmental and
Community Medicine,
Robert Wood Johnson
Medical School of the
University of Medicine
and Dentistry of New
Jersey, New Brunswick,
New Jersey, USA
J Slade

Correspondence to:
Program in Addictions, 317
George Street, Suite 201,
New Brunswick, New Jersey
08901, USA;
jdsllade@ix.netcom.com



Figure 2 Camel lips.



Figure 4 1999 Camel calendar cubes.



Figure 5 Camel protected from the rain.

In the meantime, another cartoon camel cigarette promoter was alive and well in Spain in February 1999. Its venues have included bus shelter advertisements (see cover), billboards (figure 2), vending machines (figure 3), and a small cube puzzle that folds and refolds into a 1999 calendar (figures 4, 5, and 6). The calendar cube was distributed with a popular magazine.

RJ Reynolds seems to be saying that it will remove Joe Camel here and abroad when it is convenient, but it will continue to use other cartoon camels where local law and regulation



Figure 6 Camel on the slopes.

permit it. Advocates got what they asked for, the removal of Joe Camel, but no more.

The MSA limits the use of cartoons in cigarette advertising so the Spanish camel would not now be permitted in the United States. Outside of that country, the limits of the MSA do not apply. More recently, Japan Tobacco (JT) has purchased RJ Reynolds' international business. It remains to be seen how JT approaches advertising imagery and whether it will continue to use cartoon characters in its advertising.

- 1 DeSmith D. *A camel named Joe: The illustrated story of an American pop icon*. Boston, Massachusetts: duCap Books, 1998.
- 2 Fischer PM, Schwartz MP, Richards JW Jr, et al. Brand logo recognition by children aged 3 to 6 years. *JAMA* 1991;266:3145-8.
- 3 DiFranza JR, Richards JW Jr, Paulman PM, et al. RJR Nabisco's cartoon camel promotes Camel cigarettes to children. *JAMA* 1991;266:3149-53.
- 4 Pierce JP, Gilpin E, Burns DM, et al. Does tobacco advertising target young people to start smoking? *JAMA* 1991;266:3154-8.
- 5 Mangini vs RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company. California Civil Case No 939359.
- 6 Geyelin M. Reynolds sought specifically to lure young smokers years ago, data suggest. *Wall Street Journal* 1998 Jan 15:A4.
- 7 US Federal Trade Commission. *In the matter of Rj Reynolds Tobacco Company*. Docket No 9285.
- 8 McQuilkin S. Cartoon symbol turns up overseas. *Winston-Salem Journal* 1998 Apr 1:D1.

Note to readers

We hereby solicit your ideas and contributions for future covers of *Tobacco Control*. As with previous covers, we would like future covers to be colourful and creative—with a tobacco control theme. Original artwork, anti-tobacco posters, photographs, and cartoons may all be considered. Material with an international flavour would be particularly desirable. A cover essay will generally appear in each issue to provide appropriate background information and commentary on the cover.

Please send ideas and submissions (original or high-quality, camera-ready photographs) to the editor at the address on the inside front cover.—ED