



## Tobacco advertising

Whether or not tobacco should be advertised has long been a controversial issue. As in many other countries, Australia now has laws that ban most forms of tobacco advertising, although some kinds of advertising are being phased out gradually, and can still be seen.

This TAP unit gives a brief overview of tobacco advertising in Australia, looks at the arguments for and against banning advertising of the product, and shows ways in which the tobacco companies can still get their message across.

## About advertising

Advertising is the process of attracting attention to and stimulating demand for a particular product or service. It involves the following key groups:

- \* The client is the group or company which makes or provides a product.
- \* The product is the item or service to be sold.
- \* Professional advertising agencies can be employed to design an image for a product, and place the resulting advertising where it will be seen by people.
- \* Media are the channels used to convey the advertising, for example newspapers, billboards, and television.
- \* The target market is the group of people at whom the advertising is particularly aimed.
- \* Consumers are the people who buy the products.

The advertising company and its clients work together to plan how to promote the item for sale among the target group. This usually involves careful research to find out the best way of appealing to this group. Knowing about the sorts of things the target market likes or dislikes, or wants out of life, helps the advertisers formulate a message likely to appeal to most. Often the themes used to shape advertisements are based on very general wants and needs, like wanting more friends, or to be more attractive to the opposite sex, or to have more confidence.

The advertising agency then works out a way to link the things people want with the product they want to sell. The people in the target group are encouraged to think they will get the things they want if they buy the product.

Music, slogans, words and images can be combined to make the advertising message. A number of different techniques can be used, including humour, repetition, unusual or exotic imagery, or even 'slice-of-life' settings (which seem like real life). The advertisement is then placed in media most likely to be seen by the target audience.

An advertising campaign may be highly sophisticated, using a number of media and costing many millions of dollars, or as simple as a sign on a noticeboard.

## Rules about advertising

The advertising industry is bound by codes of conduct agreed with the Media Council of Australia and the Australian Trades Practices Commission. These codes set standards for advertising. For example, the codes state that advertising should not be misleading or dishonest and that children are not to be exploited in advertising.<sup>1</sup>

In Australia, these codes are voluntary and self-regulated by the advertising industry. Additionally, advertisers and their clients have to abide by any relevant state or federal legislation regarding the promotion of their products.

## Tobacco advertising in Australia

Tobacco advertising has nearly vanished from the mainstream media in Australia - but this was not always the case. Until 1976, advertising continued on television and radio. Until the end of 1990, advertisements appeared in newspapers and magazines. In 1987 the Victorian State Government introduced laws to remove advertising from billboards, cinemas and from the outside of shops. These laws also banned advertising on leaflets and handbills, vehicles such as taxi-cabs and buses, and through competitions.<sup>2</sup> Similar legislation has now been introduced in most other states. The Federal Government is phasing in restrictions banning remaining forms of tobacco advertising, including sponsorship of sporting and cultural events, on billboards and in cinemas, and on non-tobacco merchandise. Point-of-sale information, broadcasts from outside Australia that allow tobacco sponsorship, some overseas magazines, and some sporting and cultural events of international significance are exempted (this is on the basis that these events are kept to a minimum and would be lost if the ban were imposed).<sup>3</sup>

Do you think that it must be difficult for tobacco companies to advertise their products now? You'd be surprised - here are ways they can still do it.

## Sponsorships

Sponsorship is the providing of financial support in return for receiving publicity. In Australia, the tobacco companies have been major sponsors of sports and of cultural events, such as ballet and theatre. Sponsorship has given the tobacco companies many benefits:

- \* It has helped them keep their name on television and on the radio, even though tobacco advertising has been banned in these media since 1976. In fact it is for this reason - continued advertising exposure, especially on television, that the tobacco companies have been so involved in sponsorship.<sup>4</sup>

- \* Sponsorship of major sports that are televised gives the tobacco brand state-wide, national and even international advertising. When you consider how often the brand names displayed around a sporting arena appear on television, the tobacco company also gets very good value for money.

- \* Sponsorship is advertising that works. A number of studies have shown that sponsorships are noticed and remembered by people, especially children.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup> An Australian example of how effective this advertising can be is shown by the most popular brands smoked by children in each state. In 1984 a national survey on the smoking habits of children asked children what brand they smoked most.<sup>9</sup> In New South Wales and Queensland, where Winfield received high exposure through sponsoring the major winter sport, rugby league, Winfield was the favourite brand among children. Escort was most popular in South Australia, where Escort sponsored the Australian Rules Escort Cup. Escort was not at all popular in any other state. In Victoria, Peter Jackson was most popular, followed by Winfield. Both of these brands were heavily advertised at that time through Victorian league football.<sup>10</sup>

- \* Sponsorship makes the cigarette companies look good. As sport is very popular, doing something to help sport is well regarded by sports fans.

- \* Linking a brand with an exciting, popular and highly skilled sport improves the image of the product in people's minds. It also undermines health messages by linking smoking with physical fitness and excellence.

- \* If sporting and other organisations are made to feel that they cannot survive without tobacco sponsorship, these groups will side with the tobacco companies if their advertising is being threatened.

Sponsorship by tobacco companies has been banned or strictly limited in most Australian states. In Victoria, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation has been set up to offer an alternative source of sponsorship money to sporting and other organisations. Similar Foundations have been established in South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia.

The Federal Government is phasing out all tobacco sponsorships except for events of international importance, such as the Formula 1 Grand Prix<sup>3</sup> which will have to apply for an exemption by the Health Minister.

### **Advertising at point-of-sale**

Point-of-sale advertising is the advertising you see displayed in shops that sell cigarettes. Point-of-sale advertising has always been important where manufacturers are competing for the last minute decision of the smoker. This kind of advertising is still allowed in some states, although there are regulations on position and size. With other kinds of cigarette advertising being limited, it is now even more important to the tobacco companies.<sup>11,12,13</sup>

### **Parallel promotions**

Parallel promotion is advertising by using tobacco brand names or company names on non-tobacco products. This gives the cigarette brands wider exposure, and makes it possible for the advertisements to avoid the restrictions that apply to tobacco advertising.

There have been many examples of parallel promotions in Australia, including: Dunhill pens, lighters, aftershave and other luxury items; Yves St Laurent perfumes and cigarettes; Freeport fashions and accessories; the Alpine diary and the St Moritz mail-order fashion catalogues.

Although Federal legislation has meant limited opportunities for parallel promotions the companies have made sure that they can continue special promotions through direct mail.

### **Direct mail**

Direct mail is advertising which you receive through the post. Direct mail can be used by tobacco companies in Australia in some states, as long as the material is only sent to people who have said that they would like to receive it.<sup>12,14</sup> One way people can express this wish is by entering a competition, or sending away for mail-order items; the reply coupons ask the customer to tick a box if they would like to receive other promotional material.<sup>15,16</sup> Direct mail is likely to be an important way that the tobacco industry will advertise,<sup>11,13,17,18</sup> and it is well established in the United States.<sup>19</sup>

### **Product placement**

Product placement occurs when a product or brand is shown in a film, or a picture, or even in an advertisement for something else. Nearly 50 feature films, many made for children, have been identified which contain brand-specific cigarette advertising.<sup>20</sup> Some examples of films showing tobacco advertising or making smoking look attractive include *Superman II*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, *Honey I Shrunk the Kids*, *Lethal Weapon II*, *Desperately Seeking Susan*, *Dying Young*, *Thelma and Louise*, *Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Reality Bites*.

The tobacco companies pay to get their brands shown in the movies, or provide equipment or other benefits for the movie-makers. Philip Morris, an American-based cigarette company that also sells cigarettes in Australia, paid \$350,000 to have James Bond and others light up one of their brands in License to Kill.<sup>21</sup>

The Walt Disney Corporation has announced that it will not let tobacco companies use their films for advertising any more,<sup>22</sup> and the tobacco companies in the United States have said that they will no longer place their brands in movies.<sup>20</sup> But through product placement, tobacco advertising will last forever - long after tobacco advertising has disappeared from other forms of media, exposure will continue on through movie classics, giving the message that smoking is tough, cool or glamorous.<sup>#</sup>

# The Victorian Smoking and Health Program (Quit Campaign) in conjunction with Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM), has produced a teacher resource: Giving the Name Away - Product placement in popular cinema.

## Should tobacco be advertised?

The Australian Government has decided that except in special circumstances, tobacco should not be advertised. Here are some of the arguments for and against advertising.<sup>23,24</sup>

### **Tobacco is a legal product in Australia. If it is legal to sell, it should be legal to advertise.**

Tobacco is only legal today because it was introduced to the community on a wide scale many years before its health dangers were understood. If tobacco smoking were discovered tomorrow, it is unlikely that any responsible government anywhere in the world would allow tobacco to be manufactured, much less advertised. It is not practical however, to ban a product to which a quarter of the adult population is addicted, and no-one would seriously suggest that they should.

The product may well be sold legally under certain circumstances, but it cannot be ethical to promote it when it causes so much preventable death and disability. Banning its promotion seems a reasonable middle ground.<sup>25</sup>

The argument also ignores the fact that tobacco is not sold freely in Australia. In most states (in 1995) it is illegal to sell tobacco to children under 18 years of age, and in South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania, the minimum age is 16. However, all children are exposed to tobacco advertising in the same way as are adults.

### **Tobacco advertisements do not encourage smoking - they only persuade smokers to change brands**

The tobacco companies claim that advertising does not increase tobacco smoking, and does not encourage non-smokers to start smoking. Instead, they claim that advertising is inter-company competition that encourages existing smokers to change or stay with a particular brand.<sup>26</sup>

While this argument may be true for some kinds of products with a limited market (for example car tyres, which are only of use to car owners), it is unconvincing when applied to cigarettes. Cigarette advertising has used themes with wide appeal like sexual success and glamour. These themes appeal equally to smokers and non-smokers. Car manufacturers would not argue that their advertising is intended only for existing car owners, rather than potential first car buyers.<sup>27</sup>

Even people in the advertising industry don't believe the tobacco industry's argument. A former president and chairman of the board of the world's second largest advertising agency has said:

'In recent years the cigarette industry has been artfully maintaining that cigarette advertising has nothing to do with total sales. Take my word for it, this is complete and utter nonsense. The advertisers know it is nonsense, the industry knows it is nonsense, and I suspect, the public knows it is nonsense. I am always amused by the suggestion that advertising, a function which has been shown to increase consumption with virtually every other product, somehow miraculously fails to work for tobacco products. The industry only advances this argument to try to undermine efforts to restrict tobacco promotion.'<sup>28</sup>

More recently, an Australian marketing consultant has commented that.

'It's time cigarette advertisers stopped the tripe that their advertising does not encourage people to take up smoking. Of course it does - it is high quality advertising that does its job very well.'<sup>29</sup>

Tobacco companies also have to attract new customers: since nearly 19,000 Australians die from tobacco-caused diseases each year,<sup>30</sup> and around 150,000 more quit smoking permanently each year,<sup>31</sup> it is essential that tobacco companies recruit new smokers in order to survive.

### **What about freedom of speech?**

The tobacco industry has often talked about freedom when arguing for the right to advertise without restriction.<sup>26</sup> Freedom is one of the basic things we value most in our society, but it is freedom with responsibility. There are many things that we are *not* free to do, because the community does not think that they are appropriate. The tobacco industry would argue that it should be free to promote in a glamorous way, a product that kills one in three of its users.<sup>32</sup> The other side of this argument is that society, and especially children, should be free of advertising pressure to take up or use a dangerous drug of addiction.

### **'If you ban tobacco advertising, what will be next - advertising for fast cars and junk food?'**

The argument ignores the fact that there is no safe cigarette and no safe level of smoking.<sup>33</sup> The other products are only dangerous when used incorrectly, or in excessive amounts.

## Tobacco Advertising - Activities

1. Look through some magazines and list all of the advertisements which catch your eye.

\* What was the first thing you noticed about each ad? How appealing are the colours?

\* How important is colour to the advertisement?

\* How does the advertisement make you feel?

\* Would you like to buy that product?

Compare your findings with a friend and discuss which particular advertisements appealed to you, and why.

2. Monitor sporting programs on television and note whether any cigarette promotion is shown. Note when and where the advertising took place, and which brand(s) were advertised.

3. Find out how and why the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (Vic Health) was set up.

4. Write an essay on why you think cigarette companies would want to be associated with sporting and cultural events.

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