

decode Youth Smoking Prevention

With increasing public scrutiny and the threat of future tobacco regulations, the tobacco industry introduced *youth smoking prevention programs* in the 1980s.ⁱ The industry's main goal however, was not to prevent youth smoking, but rather to counter growing concerns over tobacco marketing practices aimed at youth.ⁱⁱ

As outlined in tobacco industry documents, *prevention programs* were actually created to prevent further tobacco regulations, enhance the industry's public image, and build key relationships with legislators, educators, and other influential parties.ⁱⁱⁱ As one tobacco document notes, the success of the program would be determined by whether or not it led to a "reduction in legislation... restricting or banning our sales and marketing activities," and "greater support from business, parents and teacher groups."^{iv}

At face value, recent *prevention* ads give the impression of warning against youth smoking. Common themes include reminding youth that smoking is for adults and stressing the "law" as the reason not to smoke.^v While seemingly sincere, these carefully crafted themes actually deliver mixed messages to youth. They also reinforce messages in cigarette ads.

Cigarette ads have long appealed to youth by promoting smoking as a symbol of adulthood. Cigarettes are promoted as a badge of independence, freedom, sophistication, and as a rejection of authority.^{vi} *Prevention ads* remind youth, who want "to look older than they really are," that smoking is adult behavior - the very behavior the tobacco industry's own research proved was a leading cause of youth smoking initiation.^{vii} Consider Lorillard's ad, which claims, "Tobacco is wacko...if you're a teen." In other words, smoking is OK if you're an adult.

Using "the law" as the reason not to smoke reinforces the forbidden nature of smoking, further increasing its appeal to rebellious youth.^{viii} It also allows the industry to avoid discussing addiction or health consequences. Philip Morris's *prevention ad* tells youth to "Think. Don't Smoke." As basic reverse-psychology explains, when you tell youth not to do something, they're going to want to do it.^{ix} Here too, the forbidden nature of smoking is used as a lure for youth. Equally concerning is that, "Think. Don't Smoke." May even prompt youth who have not been thinking about smoking to do so. Sure enough, an independent research study found that the "Think. Don't Smoke." ads actually increased teens' intentions to smoke.^x

In addition to serving the industry's own political purposes, *prevention programs* were also leveraged to argue against public health campaigns. Specifically, the tobacco industry used its *programs* to argue that public health campaigns – though proven highly successful in reducing smoking consumption and prevalence – were unnecessary since tobacco *prevention programs* were taking care of the "problem." In their argument, tobacco companies protested that public health programs use "wrongful scare tactics" and "present smoking as repugnant and unhealthy."

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ⁱ Landman A, Ling P, Glantz S. "Tobacco Industry Youth Smoking Prevention Programs: Protecting the Industry and Hurting Tobacco Control," *American Journal of Public Health*, June 2002, Vol. 92, No. 6, p. 917-930.

ⁱⁱ Chilcote S. Tobacco Institute. [Comments of Samuel D. Chilcote Jr. Executive Committee]. 9 Dec, 1982. R. J. Reynolds Collection. Bates No. 503907679 -7698. <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/qss75d00>. (Retrieved Jan 2004).

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Tobacco Institute. Responsible living for teenagers: A public service proposal for the tobacco industry [report]. May 1982. Tobacco Institute Collection. Bates No. 04210397/0441. <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/bvb51e00>. (Retrieved Jan 2004);
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Slavitt J. TI youth initiative. 12 Feb, 1991. Philip Morris Collection. Bates No. 2500082629. <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/sj119e00>. (Retrieved Jan 2004).
- ^{iv} Slavitt J. TI youth initiative. 12 Feb, 1991. Philip Morris Collection. Bates No. 2500082629. <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/sj119e00>. (Retrieved Jan 2004).
- ^v Landman A. *et al.* "Tobacco Industry Youth Smoking Prevention Programs: Protecting the Industry and Hurting Tobacco Control," *American Journal of Public Health*, June 2002, Vol. 92, No. 6, p. 917-930;
DiFranza J *et al.* "The Tobacco Institute: Helping Youth Say "Yes" to Tobacco." *Journal of Family Practice*. 1992 Vol. 34, No. 6, 694–696.
- ^{vi} See "decode Marlboro," http://www.tobaccofreeca.com/decode_marlboro.html, and decode Virginia Slims," http://www.tobaccofreeca.com/decode_virginia_slims.html.
- ^{vii} Author unknown. Younger adult smokers lifestyles and attitudes. Undated. Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company Collection. Bates No. 170052241/2255. <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/mnq83f00> (Retrieved Jan 2004);
Elmo Roper & Associates; RM Bruskin Associates; Canadian Gallup Poll; CRS. A study of attitudes toward cigarette smoking and different types of cigarette. Jan 1959. R. J. Reynolds Collection. Bates No. 515717250/7484. [Http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/pfu61d00](http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/pfu61d00) (Retrieved Jan 2004);
DiFranza J *et al.* "The Tobacco Institute: Helping Youth Say "Yes" to Tobacco." *Journal of Family Practice*. 1992 Vol. 34, No. 6, 694–696.
- ^{viii} DiFranza J *et al.* "The Tobacco Institute: Helping Youth Say "Yes" to Tobacco." *Journal of Family Practice*. 1992 Vol. 34, No. 6, 694–696.
- ^{ix} DiFranza, J *et al.* "The Tobacco Institute: Helping Youth Say "Yes" to Tobacco." *Journal of Family Practice*. 1992 Vol. 34, No. 6, 694–696;
Teenage Research Unlimited. *Counter-Tobacco Advertising Exploratory: Summary Report*. Northbrook: Teenage Research Unlimited, January-March 1999.
- ^x Farrelly, M. *et al.* "Getting to the Truth: Evaluating National Tobacco Countermarketing Campaigns." *American Journal of Public Health*, Jun 2002; Vol. 92; p. 901 – 907;
Teenage Research Unlimited. *Counter-Tobacco Advertising Exploratory: Summary Report*. Northbrook: Teenage Research Unlimited, January-March 1999.
- ^{xi} Landman, A. *et al.* "Tobacco Industry Youth Smoking Prevention Programs: Protecting the Industry and Hurting Tobacco Control," *American Journal of Public Health*, June 2002, Vol. 92, No. 6, p. 917-930;
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