TAG! YOU'RE IT: HOW BIG TOBACCO SHIFTS BLAME BACK ONTO THE PUBLIC

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The Public Health Advocacy Institute is a non-profit public health and tobacco control legal research organization located at Northeastern University School of Law in Boston.
Agenda

- Use of Corporate Social Responsibility and Personal Responsibility Rhetoric:
  - “Youth Smoking Prevention” Campaigns
  - Secondhand Smoke “Accommodation Strategy”
  - Smoking Cessation & Smokeless Tobacco

- Additional Resources (Issue Briefs)

- Question and Answer Period
Research Objectives

- Examine internal tobacco industry documents for evidence of:
  - The strategic use of corporate social responsibility (CSR) rhetoric and initiatives
  - How CSR tactics influence and interact with themes of individual personal responsibility
Standard Tobacco Industry Argument

- We are a law-abiding industry
- We make a legal product
- Therefore we have the right to exist and continue business as usual

http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/zjx92a99
3/29/99
The Industry’s Image Problem

“the tobacco industry is seen as the worst in fulfilling its responsibility to society,” and “[PM] is already seen as being among the least socially responsible... companies... in the United States.”

-2001 PM Survey

http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/kuf31c00 (emphasis added)

08/21/01
Even Smokers Hate the Tobacco Companies

When surveyed, smokers, former smokers and never-smokers:

- mistrust the tobacco companies
- felt that they lied and were motivated solely by profits
- did not buy the companies’ CSR efforts

-2000 PM Survey Report
http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/npb06c00
2/29/00

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Trying to Build A Better Corporate Image

THE STRATEGY:

- Emphasize corporate responsibility
- Convince public “we’ve changed”
- Counteract old perceptions
Lack of Normalcy Has Serious Consequences

“our products will become relegated to the same position in society as condoms and pornography – sold in plain wrappers from under the counter.”

-1995 PM Sr. VP speech warning PM that it needed to normalize tobacco products, http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/avt18d00

10/29/95
Corporate Normalization

“... at the end of the day, we want to be seen as a normal corporation, one with legal, regulatory and public opinion challenges to be sure, but with challenges that are manageable and do not threaten the legitimacy of the company.”

-2001 speech by Steve Parrish, PM Sr. VP of Corp. Affairs, describing the company’s goal of achieving “corporate normalcy,”
http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/wmr82c00 (2001)
Tobacco Industry Denormalization

Denormalization uses counter-marketing and intervention efforts to:

- remove the legitimacy and normality garnered by tobacco industry CSR efforts
- generate support for additional tobacco regulation and tobacco control interventions

Personal Responsibility: A Winner for Big Tobacco

- The industry uses buzz words and phrases like:
  - “personal responsibility”
  - “free and informed choice”
  - “individual choice”
“freedom of choice and free enterprise are particularly salient examples of areas where there is some residual of goodwill among the public.”

-2000 PM survey,
http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/npb06c00
2/29/00
Using CSR & Personal Responsibility to Blame the Public

Big tobacco has used personal responsibility rhetoric in 3 major CSR efforts to shift blame onto the public and consumers:

- “Youth Smoking Prevention”
- Secondhand Smoke “Accommodation Strategy”
- Smoking Cessation Campaigns
“Youth Smoking: It’s Not Our Fault!”

Tobacco industry “youth smoking prevention” programs say that the problem of youth smoking stems from:

- Bad parenting
- Peer pressure
Tobacco: Helping Youth Say No

A Parent’s Guide to Helping Teenagers Cope With Peer Pressure
Common YSP Themes

- Smoking is a legitimate choice
- Use of overt and subliminal messages which glamorize smoking
- Smoking portrayed as an adult activity, creating a “forbidden fruit” image
- Programs are purposely ineffective
Presenting Smoking As a Choice

PM’s “Think. Don’t Smoke.” YSP Program sought to “[r]einforce each teen’s ability to make his or her own decisions.”
-2000 PM Internal Memo
http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/iwo02c00 (2000)

RJR’s YSP “Right Decisions, Right Now” curriculum included the discussion topic: “whether there should be rules about [] things or if they should be left up to the individual students to decide.”
http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/ave82a00. 1/10/00
Focus on Youth Responsibility, Not Corporate Responsibility

- The teacher’s guide to the RJR’s “Right Decisions, Right Now” curriculum stated:
  - “This study guide . . . focuses on responsibility – defining it and giving students a solid foundation on which to form their own attitudes and actions. Too often, young people associate the concept of responsibility with blame . . . .”

- [http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/qhn20d00](http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/qhn20d00) (2000)
Lorillard continued its “Tobacco Is Whacko If You’re a Teen” campaign after receiving feedback from teens that the slogan was:

- Confusing
- Alienating
- A further inducement to smoke
Purposely Ineffective YSP Programs

- PM’s “Think. Don’t Smoke.” effectiveness evaluation focused on:
  - whether the youths who saw its commercials understood that the slogan “Think. Don’t Smoke.” meant “don’t smoke.”
  - not on the program’s overall effectiveness to reduce youth smoking

- The American Legacy Foundation study found:
  - PM failed to evaluate its program for effectiveness in reducing youth smoking
  - PM’s program might serve to dilute Legacy’s truth© campaign’s more successful approach.
  - As a result of the study, Philip Morris stopped airing its “Think. Don’t Smoke.” advertisements.
YSP Programs FAIL the Smell Test

- “[F]or no aspect of the tobacco issue are the motives of tobacco companies more suspect than the issue of underage smoking.”

- Survey results showed that the public suspected the industry of engaging in “reverse psychology” to encourage more kids to smoke.

- 2000 PM survey of smokers and non-smokers
  http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/npb06c00
  2/29/00
Big Tobacco LOVES Young People

Secondhand Smoke Is Dangerous . . . for the tobacco companies.

Declining Social Acceptability of Smoking = Decline in Sales

Harm to non-smokers from SHS takes away traditional “freedom of choice” argument

Fewer Smokers + Fewer Places to Smoke = Declining Profits
Can’t we all just get along?

- Big Tobacco’s “Accommodation Strategy:”
  - Accommodation and courtesy can address SHS concerns
  - No regulation is needed
  - Smokers and non-smokers just need to communicate better
Options

PHILIP MORRIS USA

Finding balance and comfort for both non-smokers and smokers
A Brave New Vocabulary

SHS Health Harms = Annoyance

Blowing Smoke Around = Ventilation

Smokers = The Oppressed Minority

Anti-Smoking Advocates = Militants
Everyone Else Needs To Be More Responsible!

The “Accommodation Strategy” shifts the burden of responsibility away from tobacco companies and onto others:

- Emphasizes negotiation between smokers and non-smokers
- No need to make cigarettes less toxic
- Puts the onus on the hospitality industry to install ineffective and costly ventilation systems
PM’s “Societal Alignment” strategy includes a smoking cessation program called “QuitAssist.”

PM hopes “QuitAssist” will help it seem like an enlightened and altruistic company, but continues to emphasize personal responsibility, not corporate responsibility.
but not too many of you!

- PM counts on few people being able to quit.
- Downplays medical interventions to quit to avoid emphasizing the pharmacological effect of cigarettes.
- Uses confusing domain name: www.philipmorrisusa.com vs. www.quitassist.com

“I was probably trying for at least a year before I was successful at stopping... Knowledge is the key.”

Zahilde, smoke-free for 2 years and 6 months
Can’t Quit? Go Smokeless!

THE STRATEGY:

- Acquire smokeless tobacco companies
- Put smokeless tobacco on a “continuum of risk”
- Promote smokeless as an alternative to quitting
- Promote “dual use consumption” of smokeless tobacco and cigarettes

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We’ve Seen This Before!

Considering all I’d heard, I decided to either quit or smoke True.
I smoke True.
The tobacco industry has its own “dual-use” strategy:

- Use CSR campaigns to normalize the corporations’ image
- Use personal responsibility rhetoric to shift blame away from the industry and back onto the public.
A Mosaic of Bad Corporate Behavior

Credit: Popgive.com
A Mosaic of Bad Corporate Behavior
A Mosaic of Bad Corporate Behavior
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Additional Resources

- Visit [www.phaionline.org/responsibility](http://www.phaionline.org/responsibility) for information on how to access detailed issue briefs on the following topics:
  - The tobacco industry’s use of corporate social responsibility rhetoric & tactics
  - Denormalization of tobacco industry corporate social responsibility initiatives
  - Tobacco industry “youth smoking prevention” programs
  - Secondhand smoke “accommodation strategy”
  - Industry smoking cessation programs

- Download last year’s archived webinar and issue briefs at [www.phaionline.org/makeover](http://www.phaionline.org/makeover)
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