

# HOW TOBACCO ADVERTISING WORKS

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Most types of tobacco advertising have been banned in Canada for years—but that hasn't stopped cigarette companies from continuing to advertise their deadly products.

These companies are long experts at figuring out what we want and convincing us that their product will deliver it. Our governments have stepped in to curb this power, but this hasn't stopped tobacco marketers.

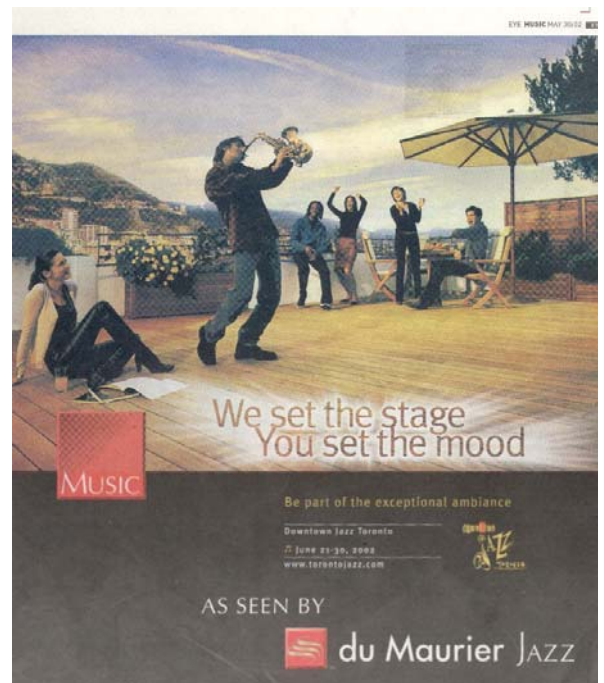
Instead, they've developed subtler techniques. Because one strong advertising message is not permitted, tobacco marketers have learned to combine smaller elements in order to achieve their two core goals:

- ◆ the development of brand identity
- ◆ the entrenchment of ideas and feelings related to smoking.

## REASSURING SMOKERS & RECRUITING STARTERS

In Canada, smoking is on the decline. More and more established smokers give up the habit every year, either by quitting or by dying. This means that if there weren't a constant influx of starting smokers, tobacco sales – and tobacco profits – would drop dramatically.

Under these circumstances, if they want to keep making money, tobacco companies need to coax established smokers away from quitting, and lull youth into starting. By creating an environment where smokers and non-smokers alike feel as positive about tobacco products and their manufacturers as possible, the companies



can retain smokers, recruit smokers, and achieve public and political support for tobacco-friendly policies. •

*“As young adults they look for symbols that will help reinforce their maturity, independence, and perceived individuality.”*

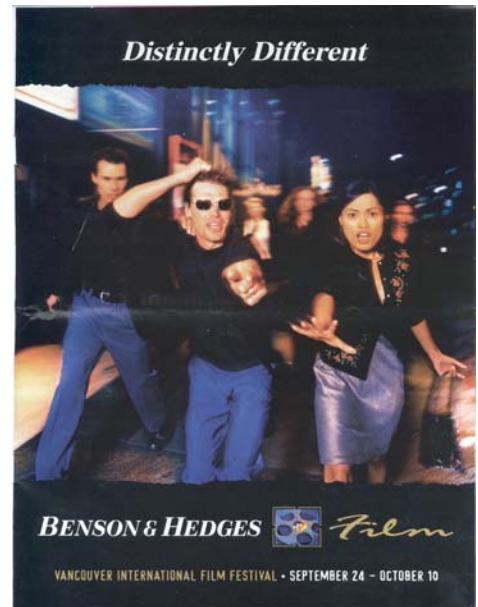
*- Export 'A' Marketing Document*

## IT'S ALL ABOUT IMAGE

All Canadian cigarettes are essentially the same. Because of this, it's very difficult for a company to tell consumers what's unique about a particular brand, the way they might with another kind of product. So instead of communicating information, tobacco companies communicate image.

This means that instead of basing campaigns on a brand's attributes, tobacco companies base campaigns on a brand's 'personality'. For example, one brand might be given a marketing personality of 'independent and masculine,' another 'glamorous and feminine.'

Of course there's nothing about one particular kind of cigarette that makes it inherently more rebellious or more sophisticated than any



other kind – but by slowly establishing networks of associations, tobacco companies can make you believe that there is. •

## BADGE PRODUCTS

By conducting extensive research into lifestyles and values, tobacco marketers determine how different segments of the population feel about themselves and their world, then craft nuanced identities that feed into each segment's innermost desires.

Finding out that many young people feel reined in by authority, for example, has prompted marketers to develop brands that represent independence and rebellion.



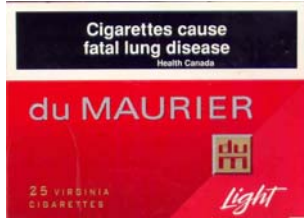
This message from Export A's Extreme Sports Series campaign appeals to boys' insecurities about manhood.

Once a brand's personality is established it becomes an emblem of the lifestyle that product represents, or a 'badge product'. This means that by using a brand with a particular image, a smoker can identify herself with that same image: the brand's personality becomes her personality.

This technique works especially well on youth, so many of whom are engaged in daily struggles to establish their identities.

## VISUAL BRANDING

The associations between specific brands and their images are held together by visual branding. Trademark colours, lettering, and graphic design create visual cues which prompt associations that draw diverse elements of a tobacco promotion campaign together. These cues are especially important in an environment in which direct trademark advertising is limited, as established visual branding can continue to deliver the message of a



brand long after the actual trademark name has been removed. By designing sponsorship ads, merchandise, and websites to look like cigarette packs, marketers can effectively advertise their product without mentioning it by name.



*“The contribution of communications toward successful trademark positioning is based upon the long term, consistent application of relevant imagery messages.”*  
- ITL Marketing Document

## FRIENDLY FAMILIARITY

Once established, these visual cues are incorporated into the public consciousness through a continuous stream of exposure to trademarks, logos, and colours. This continuous exposure exploits a phenomenon known as the familiarity effect. According to this psychological effect, things encountered frequently are trusted as benign, while things encountered rarely evoke suspicion.

Tobacco marketers exploit this effect by regularly and repeatedly exposing the public to cigarette branding and cigarette mes-



saging, including images of independence, social approval, and good health. Logos and messaging are displayed in magazines and newspapers; in buses, subways, and transit shelters; on billboards and in sports arenas; on t-shirts, baseball caps, and jackets; and on clocks, signs, change trays, and shopping baskets in retail outlets.

This persistent messaging gives the general impression that tobacco use is desirable, socially acceptable, and prevalent, while at the same time entrenching the image characteristics of particular brands. •



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**PHILANTHROPY**

By donating to charities, tobacco companies buy themselves an aura of good corporate citizenship. This wins them favour with the public and with policy makers – both of whom are therefore made less likely to blame the industry for the damage caused by its products, and more likely to support tobacco-friendly policies. •



**MERCHANDISING**

By creating clothes and accessories bearing trademark colours and designs, tobacco companies turn ordinary consumers into walking billboards. Hats, t-shirts, lighters, and matches act as ad-

vertisements, bringing brand imagery to every venue where they're used or sold, many of which are venues where promotional access would otherwise be denied. •

**SPONSORSHIP**

Sponsorship allows tobacco companies to connect the character of the event with the character of their product. If the event is classy, the product appears classy by association; if the event is edgy, the product appears edgy by association.

Sponsored events provide trademark exposure in ways that would otherwise be disallowed. For example, while broadcast advertising is not allowed, a tobacco-branded car race can be broadcast on television without restriction. Similarly, while print advertising of tobacco products is not allowed, print advertising of tobacco sponsorships is allowed (until 2003).

Funding sporting and cultural events helps tobacco companies look like good corporate citizens. This gener-



ates a kind of good will toward the company that can generate support for it in policy and other matters.

Event sponsorship therefore allows tobacco companies both to enhance consumer awareness of their brands through trademark exposure, and to shape their audience's attitudes, feelings, opinions, and beliefs about those brands at the same time. Down the line, these contribute to increased sales. •