

How Tobacco Ads Target Teens

The Hook · Star-Struck · Why Should You Worry? · Nasty Nicotine · Knowledge Is Power · Take a Stand Against Tobacco · Christy Turlington, Spokesperson for the CDC's Anti-Smoking** Campaign, Tells Teens · Kicking Butts · Reality Check Don't Fall for the Myths! · See for Yourself**

"No Boundaries. No Bull," reads the full-page cigarette ad in a recent issue of *Rolling Stone*. The tobacco company and its ad agency would say the rebellious tone of the in-your-face ad is not aimed at teens. But the magazine sits on the shelves of an Ohio public library's young adult/teen section. And the same issue carries a full-page ad for candy.

Coincidence? Probably not.

Crafty marketing? Almost certainly.

The Hook

For decades, tobacco companies have focused marketing efforts on teens. Why? Because companies want to replace older smokers who die from tobacco-related illnesses. As a 1981 Philip Morris document said, "Today's teenager is tomorrow's potential regular customer, and the overwhelming majority of smokers first begin to smoke while in their teens."

Relatively few people start **smoking** or switch brands after age 18. So tobacco companies developed ad campaigns to lure teens. Themes included rugged independence, freedom, popularity, individuality, social acceptance, and carefree fun. Giveaways and promotional products became popular too. All these youth-appealing themes are still prominent in tobacco marketing.

In 1998, 46 states and the four major tobacco companies agreed to settle lawsuits for billions of dollars in tobacco-related health costs. The tobacco companies promised they would not "take any action, directly or indirectly, to target youth . . . in the advertising, promotion, or marketing of tobacco products."

The very next year, however, the money tobacco companies spent on magazine ads shot up 33 percent to \$291.1 million. Sixty percent of that went for ads in youth-oriented magazines. Those magazines have at least 15 percent or 2 million readers ages 12 to 17. In 2000, magazine ad spending dropped back near presettlement levels to \$216.9 million. Spending for youth-oriented magazine ads was still 59 percent. Tobacco ads in adult magazines such as *Time* reach many teens too. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that tobacco advertising reaches more than 80 percent of teens.

"They're being heavily targeted by the industry," says Dr. Michael Siegel at Boston University's School of Public Health. "They need to resist and rebel

against the tobacco industry's attempt to recruit them as essentially lifelong customers."

Dr. Siegel and his colleagues have documented tobacco marketing's success with teens. With cigarettes costing \$3 or more per pack, price should play a big role in consumer choices. But the most popular brands among teens are the ones most heavily advertised.

Similarly, African-American teens tend to use the menthol brands advertised most in ethnically oriented magazines. "It's hard to explain the brand preferences of African-American youth on the basis of any factor other than advertising," notes Dr. Siegel.

Even "anti-**smoking**" ads sponsored by the industry can give the opposite message. Some ads funded by tobacco companies stress how conscientious storeowners don't sell tobacco to underage buyers. An implicit message is that **smoking** is a "grown-up" thing. However, three-fourths of adults *don't* smoke. Likewise, ads about good works by "the people at" a large tobacco company ignore the disease, pain, and suffering caused by their products.

In Logan, Utah, a tobacco company gave away book covers that said, "Think. Don't Smoke." But, the word "don't" was a different color, notes 18-year-old Marin Poole, "So THINK SMOKE stood out." One design featured an angry snowboarder. "The snowboard looked like a lit match, and the clouds looked more like smoke than clouds," Marin says. Her campaign to get the book covers out of Logan High School, plus other anti-**smoking** efforts, earned her the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids' 2001 Youth Advocate of the Year award for the western region.

Cynthia Loesch won the award for the eastern region. In 1998, her group persuaded a major Boston newspaper to stop accepting tobacco ads. Cynthia continues to educate people--both adults and youth--about tobacco. "It's a fact that cigarettes do absolutely nothing for you, and all they lead to is illnesses and eventually death," says Cynthia.

Star-Struck

Stars **smoking** in films or off-screen include Leonardo Di Caprio, Neve Campbell, Sylvester Stallone, Gillian Anderson, Ashley Judd, Sean Penn, John Travolta, and more. In a recent Dartmouth University study, young people were 16 times more likely to use tobacco if their favorite actor did. In another Dartmouth study, middle school students allowed to watch R-rated films (more inclined to show **smoking** and drinking) were five times more likely to try cigarettes and alcohol than those whose parents wouldn't let them watch R-rated films.

Even G, PG, and PG-13 movies often show tobacco use. In *The Muppet Movie*, for example, three cigar-**smoking** humans interacted with the Muppets.

"When movie stars are **smoking** in their movies or in front of young people, they're almost just as responsible as the tobacco industry is for addicting young people," maintains 17-year-old Shannon Brewer, the 2001 National

Youth Advocate of the Year for the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. "Whether or not they use it all the time, it's an influence on kids because it's saying that's what it takes in order to be that star."

Of course, not all actors smoke--and some take a stand against tobacco and other drugs. Actor Jeremy London, model Christy Turlington, and various other celebrities, for example, work with the CDC, American Lung Association, or Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids to present positive role models.

Yet too many moviemakers use cigarettes and cigars as quick cliché props. "If they're creative producers and directors, they should be able to portray attractive characters through other means," challenges Dr. Siegel.

Why Should You Worry?

Very few legal products are deadly when used as directed. Tobacco, however, is America's No. 1 killer. According to the CDC, 430,000 Americans die each year from tobacco-related causes. Inhaled smoke and chewed tobacco directly affect the user. Secondhand smoke affects people who live, work, or socialize with smokers.

Nicotine is tobacco's addictive "hook." At least 63 of the other 4,000 chemicals in tobacco cause cancer, according to the American Lung Association. The list of toxic ingredients also includes tar, carbon monoxide, arsenic, hydrogen cyanide, acetylene, benzene, and formaldehyde.

Lung cancer and cancers of the stomach, pancreas, mouth, throat, and esophagus are all linked to tobacco. Tobacco also kills by causing heart attacks, strokes, and other circulatory diseases.

Besides direct deaths, tobacco makes people more susceptible to bronchitis, pneumonia, asthma, and other illnesses. Tobacco reduces lung capacity and impairs an athlete's performance. **Smoking** during pregnancy increases risks of miscarriage, premature birth, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Tobacco messes with your mind too. Some teen smokers say **smoking** relaxes them. But researcher Andy Parrott at the University of East London found that teen smokers' stress levels increased as regular **smoking** patterns developed. Any perceived relaxation was just temporary relief of nicotine withdrawal between cigarettes. In short, cigarette **smoking** *caused* stress.

In another study reported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, teen smokers were nearly four times as likely as nonsmokers to develop serious symptoms of depression. Depression is a mental illness that hampers day-to-day functioning. Severe cases can even lead to suicide.

Beyond this, tobacco stains teeth and nails. It dulls skin and hair. Smoke reeks and lingers on hair and clothing. Instead of making people attractive, **smoking** does just the opposite.

Nasty Nicotine

About 60 percent of current teen smokers have tried to quit within the past year, reports the CDC. Most started out thinking they could quit at any time. But nicotine addiction seizes control before teens realize they're hooked--sometimes within days or weeks after the first cigarette.

Pure nicotine is deadly. Tobacco, however, delivers just enough nicotine (1 to 2 mg in the average cigarette) to hook users. You might say that cigarettes are engineered as highly effective drug delivery devices.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that nicotine increases dopamine levels in the brain's "reward circuits" within 10 seconds of inhaling. The neurotransmitter dopamine increases feelings of pleasure. Nicotine also decreases the brain's levels of monoamine oxidase (MAO), an enzyme that breaks down excess dopamine.

Nicotine's peak effects dissipate within minutes. Users then need more nicotine to sustain the feeling. So, they smoke more. Depending on a person's arousal state, nicotine can be both a stimulant and a sedative.

When addicted users don't get nicotine, they experience withdrawal. Symptoms include cravings, anxiety, nervousness, and irritability. Thanks to nicotine, the tobacco industry often hooks customers for life.

Knowledge Is Power

Media messages that show tobacco favorably entice teens to smoke. But anti-**smoking** advertising can counter those influences. Dr. Siegel and his colleagues found that teens who regularly receive anti-**smoking** messages are twice as likely not to smoke as teens who don't get that exposure.

Instead of thinking that "everybody" smokes, teens were more likely to believe that only about one-fourth of American adults and teens smoke--which is true. In other words, getting the facts about **smoking** helps teens tell the difference between tobacco companies' media myths and reality, notes Dr. Siegel.

In fact, researchers at the University of Michigan found that from 1996 to 2001 the percentage of eighth graders who were **smoking** dropped to 12 percent from 21 percent; tenth graders who were **smoking** fell to 21 percent, down from 30 percent. Among 12th graders, the number of smokers dropped to 30 percent in 2001, down from a 37 percent peak in 1997. This drop in teen **smoking** is attributed to anti-**smoking** campaigns.

Anti-**smoking** ordinances and restaurant bans help too. Such rules reduce bystanders' exposure to secondhand smoke. Plus, they keep people from being constantly assaulted by tobacco's pervasive odor. "In towns that don't allow **smoking** in restaurants," notes Dr. Siegel, "kids are more likely to perceive that fewer people in their community smoke. They're not constantly smelling it and being exposed to it."