

Tobacco Industry Still Advertises to Youth

By Alex Kuczynski¹

As part of a settlement with the states in 1998, the biggest tobacco companies said they would stop advertising in magazines with significant numbers of young readers. Three years later, that promise is largely unfulfilled. Ads from three of the four major tobacco companies continue to appear in magazines like *Rolling Stone*, *People*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Sports Illustrated* and *TV Guide*.

Three of the four biggest tobacco companies — R. J. Reynolds, Brown & Williamson and Lorillard — say they continue such advertising because the limits they agreed to in 1998 were only guidelines, not laws. Bill Lockyer, the attorney general of California who participated in the settlement three years ago, disputed the tobacco companies' version.

In the 1998 “Master Settlement Agreement,” the tobacco companies pledged that they would not advertise in magazines if more than 15 percent of the readers are under 18, or if more than two million of the readers are under 18.

Mr. Lockyer said the companies were violating what they had pledged in writing. According to the agreement, the companies promised never to “take any action directly or indirectly to target youth” in the “advertising, promotion or marketing of tobacco products.” He is suing R. J. Reynolds over it.

Mr. Lockyer says that based on his research, Americans age 12 to 17 will be exposed to at least 50 cigarette ads in magazines each year. He adds that the tobacco companies have a compelling reason to violate the settlement. “They kill their customers every year,” he said, “and they need to recruit new ones.”

Two forms of research that became available for the first time in 2001 make it clearer how many young magazine readers there are. Spurred in part by the issue of tobacco advertising, Mediamark Research and the Simmons Market Research Bureau have in recent months begun to release specific data on readers 12 to 18.

For example, *People* magazine would fall under the settlement terms because it has 2.7 million readers under 18. But *People* carries many tobacco ads.

Sports Illustrated has 4.9 million readers under 18. But the magazine still carries ads for Camel cigarettes, which are made by R. J. Reynolds, and other brands.

The magazine reaped close to \$40 million in ad revenue from tobacco ads in 2000,

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according to Competitive Media Reporting, an organization that monitors magazine advertising.

And 23 percent of *Rolling Stone's* readers are under 18. But *Rolling Stone* still carries ads for R. J. Reynolds brands in practically every issue. And a *Rolling Stone* executive expects to double the number of Reynolds ads in coming years. *Rolling Stone* also carries Brown & Williamson ads.

True, the child-friendly Joe Camel — rendered illegal by the settlement — no longer appears in *Rolling Stone*. But it is not rare to find a teenage idol on the cover and an ad for cigarettes on the back.

A study released by *The New England Journal of Medicine* reports that the settlement appears to have had little effect on cigarette advertising in magazines and on the exposure of young people to those advertisements.

Jan Smith, a spokeswoman for R. J. Reynolds, said, “We do not advertise in magazines that target minors.” She said Reynolds also looked at the editorial content of the magazine and considered the presence of other advertisers — for example, for cars or liquor — to gauge whether it was truly a publication for adults.

Steve Kottak, a spokesman for Brown & Williamson, said it intended to market only to adults. “The purpose of our advertising is to encourage adult smokers to choose our brand,” Mr. Kottak said. “The intended audience is 21 years or older. We select publications on that basis.” But Mr. Kottak added that the company did advertise in magazines with more than two million readers under 18.

Magazine publishers said they were comfortable with the tobacco ads. The publisher of *People*, Peter Bauer, said in a statement that magazines were not legally restrained from accepting tobacco ads and that the guidelines applied to the tobacco companies, which could choose to follow them or not.

"*People* is primarily written for 36 million adults who are mature enough to make informed decisions regarding the purchase of the legal products advertised in our pages," he said.

Michael Rooney, publisher of *ESPN Magazine*, said that he did not have qualms about accepting ads from Brown & Williamson and R. J. Reynolds even though the magazine did have a large teenage readership. “I think we do our job and they do theirs,” he said.

Some publications refuse cigarette ads. *The New York Times* stopped accepting cigarette ads on May 1, 1999; at that time, at least a dozen other American newspapers also rejected them.