

Recruiting the Replacement Smoker

The tobacco industry tries to recruit young people to replace those current smokers who are dying or quitting. **How can the industry justify marketing an addictive, deadly drug to young people, especially when kids under the age of 18 cannot even buy cigarettes legally?**

They don't try to justify it. They try to deny it. For example, here is what R.J. Reynolds says about its advertising:

“We don't advertise to children. ...All of our cigarette ads are what we call ‘brand advertising.’ Their purpose is to get smokers of competitive products to switch to one of our brands, and to build the loyalty of those who already smoke one of our brands. ...Getting smokers to switch is virtually the only way a cigarette brand can meaningfully increase its business. That's why we don't advertise to young people.”

The Truth: Trying to gain business by getting current smokers to switch brands is a losing strategy. Studies show that smokers tend to be extremely loyal to their brand of choice. Only 10 percent of smokers switch brands each year. IF tobacco companies are going to keep the money rolling in, they need to recruit new smokers – and they know it!

How do we know that the industry targets youth?

Tobacco industry documents (which were secret until the courts forced them to be made public) are filled with statements about the importance of recruiting young smokers. Here are just a couple of examples:

- A 1971 tobacco marketing plan stated that: “young smokers represent the major opportunity group for the cigarette industry. We should therefore determine their attitudes to smoking and health, and how this might change over time.”
- A 1988 tobacco marketing plan said: “if the last ten years have taught us anything, it is that the industry is dominated by the companies who respond most effectively to the needs of younger smokers.”
- A 1989 J.J. Reynolds document specifically identifies young people as “the only source of replacement smokers.” It notes the importance of young people to the future of tobacco industry profits, noting that less than one-third of smokers start after age 18, and only 5 percent of smokers start after age 24.

The following observations about teen smokers appeared in an Imperial Tobacco report:

Starters no longer disbelieve the dangers of smoking, but they almost universally assume these risks will not apply to themselves because they will not become addicted. Once addiction does take place, it becomes necessary for the smoke to make peace with the accepted hazards.

...The desire to quit seems to come earlier now than before, even prior to the end of high school. In fact, it often seems to take hold as soon as the recent starter admits to himself that he is hooked

on smoking. However, the desire to quit and actually carrying it out, are two quite different things, as the would-be quitter soon learns.

It's not only older teens that are targeted. Numerous tobacco industry documents indicate that the industry has perceived kids as young as 13 to be a key market. For example, a RJ Reynolds document states:

Evidence is now available to indicate that the 14-18 year-old group is an increasing segment of the smoking population. RJR-Tobacco must soon establish a successful new brand in this market if our position in the industry is to be maintained.

How do ads target youth? *Just a couple examples...*

- Full-page, glossy cigarette ads appear regularly in Cosmopolitan, Vibe, Maxim, Rolling Stone, People and Sports Illustrated, among others. According to the magazine themselves, many readers are teens.
- These ads create and reinforce the images of smoking as cool, acceptable, and popular among independent-minded, active, fun-loving people.
- An August 2001 study in the New England Journal of Medicine showed that the cigarette companies increased their advertising in youth-oriented magazines after formally agreeing to stop all advertising to youth.
- One of the most successful youth marketing campaigns involved the cartoon character, "Joe Camel." Within four years after the Joe Camel campaign was launched, the number of young U.S. smokers who preferred Camels jumped from less than 1 percent to 30 percent. Sales to kids 12 to 19 years of age grew from \$6 million in 1988 to \$476 million in 1991. Even one-third of three-year-olds knew who "Joe Camel" was. In 1997, R.J. Reynolds agreed to stop using Joe Camel. However, their more recent ad campaigns have also featured cartoon-like images, as well as humorous ads designed to mock the health warning labels that are on cigarette packages.