



Public Education Campaigns: Why They Are Needed

Tobacco use kills about five million people in the world each year, a rate that will continue to rise if current trends continue. It is estimated that in nine years, tobacco use will kill 50% more people than HIV/AIDS and will account for 10% of all deaths worldwide.¹ The aggressive and deliberate actions taken by tobacco companies to expand their market around the world no doubt contribute to the tremendous toll of tobacco worldwide.

Tobacco Industry Marketing and Promotion Practices

The tobacco industry spends billions of dollars internationally to market and promote its products. According to the World Health Organization, "*Tobacco addiction is a communicated disease -- communicated through advertising, sports, marketing and sponsorship.*"² Tobacco industry documents reveal that tobacco companies have carefully studied the smoking habits and tastes of potential customers, many of whom are children, and used this research in the development of new products and marketing campaigns. Unfortunately, the industry's marketing and promotion campaigns have been extremely successful in luring new customers and maintaining existing customers.

Tobacco companies devote significant resources to encourage tobacco use all over the world and use every medium possible, from magazine and billboard advertising, to event sponsorships, movie appearances, brand merchandising, "brand stretching" (placing tobacco brand names on unrelated products, such as clothing, to remind the consumer--consciously or subconsciously-- of tobacco products), and product discounts or give-aways to raise awareness of their products and attract new smokers.³ In addition, tobacco companies engage in a variety of public relations efforts to promote their industry and their image.

Tobacco companies do not rely solely on marketing strategies to maintain their image and protect their interests. They also seek to influence policymaking and actively fight against efforts that might curb their practices. Tobacco companies undermine control efforts proven to be effective, actively lobby for or against legislation, hold fundraisers or conferences to support or educate on certain issues, and form "front" organizations to hide their connections to pro-tobacco support.⁴

Although tobacco industry advertising has been constrained in various countries, remnants of their earlier marketing efforts exist and have resulted in an environment in many countries that is accepting of tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke, while still not enough people know the true harms of both.

Public Education Campaigns Counter the Tobacco Industry's Marketing and Promotion Efforts

The aggressive targeting by the tobacco industry demands equally aggressive public education campaigns to prevent smoking initiation among youth (when most smokers start), to encourage smokers to quit, and to change the social context of tobacco use so that pro-tobacco messages are no longer dominant. Well-designed public education campaigns that are integrated with community and school-based programs and assistance for smokers who want to quit can successfully counter tobacco industry marketing. Specifically, public education campaigns:

- Discourage youth from starting to smoke. Public education campaigns provide effective counter messages to the tobacco industry's ever-present marketing and promotional efforts. Tobacco companies' sophisticated marketing campaigns glamorize smoking, making it look youthful and attractive. Public education campaigns counter the industry's misleading messages and can effectively alter the industry's carefully crafted positive image of tobacco use.
- Encourage and motivate smokers to quit. Public education campaigns can include messages about the health consequences of tobacco use and the harms of secondhand smoke. These messages

should be hard hitting and elicit emotions such as anger, fear, loss and sadness to prompt smokers to try to quit or not smoke around others. Evidence suggests that public education campaigns can have a greater impact on cessation than other interventions due to their ability to reach a large number of smokers.⁵

- Educate smokers about how to quit. Public education campaigns can include “how to quit” messages that are supportive, positive and provide smokers with quitting assistance, such as a phone number to call to receive counseling services or information, or a website with quitting resources.
- Educate the public about tobacco industry actions. Public education campaigns that expose tobacco industry marketing and product manipulation tactics can change community attitudes and beliefs about the tobacco industry and about tobacco in general and can lead to reductions in smoking.
- Educate the public about effective policy solutions. Public education campaigns can create public support for policy efforts aimed at preventing smoking initiation, and helping smokers to quit and reducing nonsmokers’ exposure to secondhand smoke.

Public education campaigns change the image associated with tobacco and tobacco use and provide information about how to address the problems associated with tobacco use. They achieve this by building awareness and knowledge and by changing key attitudes and beliefs which ultimately lead to changes in behavior.

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¹ Mathers CD & Loncar D, “Projections of global mortality and burden of disease from 2002 to 2030.” *PLoS Medicine* 3(11):e442, 2006, http://medicine.plosjournals.org/archive/1549-1676/3/11/pdf/10.1371_journal.pmed.0030442-S.pdf.

² WHO Press Release, “European Union Directive Banning Tobacco Advertising Overturned: WHO Urges Concerted Response”, 5 October 2000; <http://www.who.int/inf-pr-2000/en/pr2000-64.html>

³ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (TFK), *How do you sell death...*, November 2001, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/campaign/global/FCTCreport2.pdf>; Kaufman, NJ & Nichter, M, “The Marketing of Tobacco To Women: Global Perspectives,” in Samet, JM & Yoon, S (eds.), *Women and the Tobacco Epidemic: Challenges for the 21st Century*, Canada: WHO, pp. 69-98, 2001, <http://www.who.int/tobacco/media/en/WomenMonograph.pdf>.

⁴ Mackay, J, Eriksen, M, & Shafey, O, *The Tobacco Atlas, 2nd Edition*, Atlanta, GA: ACS, 2006.

⁵ Lois Biener, PhD, Rebecca L. Reimer, BA, Melanie Wakefield, PhD, Glen Szczypka, BA, Nancy A. Rigotti, MD, and Gregory Connolly, DMD, MPH. Impact of Smoking Cessation Aids and Mass Media Among Recent Quitters. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Volume 30, Issue 3, March 2006, Pages 217-224.