

# Smooth Moves: Bar and Nightclub Tobacco Promotions That Target Young Adults

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During the 1990s, tobacco industry sponsorship of bars and nightclubs increased dramatically,<sup>1,2</sup> accompanied by cigarette brand paraphernalia, advertisements, and entertainment events in bars and clubs.<sup>3–7</sup> Young adults are not immune to late smoking initiation, and they are vulnerable to concentrated tobacco industry marketing. The 1998 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse shows a steady increase in the smoking rate among young adults (aged 18–25 years) from 34.6% in 1994 to 41.6% in 1998.<sup>8(p22)</sup> Wechsler et al. reported an increase in smoking prevalence among college students from 22.3% in 1993 to 28.5% in 1998.<sup>9</sup>

These results are consistent with the association found in other studies between changes in tobacco marketing and parallel increases in smoking in the target population (e.g., women in the 1930s and 1960s and youth in the 1980s and 1990s<sup>10–13</sup>). In contrast to the view that smoking initiation occurs only before age 18, smoking initiation in young adults (18–24 years) occurred frequently during the early and mid 20th century and continues to be high among young adults in some ethnic groups.<sup>8,14–18</sup>

We used previously secret tobacco industry documents to describe why and how the industry uses bars to encourage smoking among young adults. (We use the term “bars” to include bars and nightclubs.) We sought to answer the following questions: (1) How did bar promotions develop, and what were the concomitant marketing benefits? (2) How did these promotions benefit the industry in the research, social, and political arenas? (3) What are the connections between bar promotions and other industry marketing programs, including advertising in the alternative press and studies of peer influence?

**Objectives.** This article describes the tobacco industry's use of bars and nightclubs to encourage smoking among young adults.

**Methods.** Previously secret tobacco industry marketing documents were analyzed.

**Results.** Tobacco industry bar and nightclub promotions in the 1980s and 1990s included aggressive advertising, tobacco brand-sponsored activities, and distribution of samples. Financial incentives for club owners and staff were used to encourage smoking through peer influence. Increased use of these strategies occurred concurrently with an increase in smoking among persons aged 18 through 24 years.

**Conclusions.** The tobacco industry's bar and nightclub promotions are not yet politically controversial and are not regulated by the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between the industry and the states. Tobacco control advocates should include young adults in research and advocacy efforts and should design interventions to counter this industry strategy to solidify smoking patterns and recruit young adult smokers. (*Am J Public Health.* 2002;92:414-419)

## METHODS

We used standard techniques<sup>19</sup> to search tobacco industry document archives made available by tobacco litigation during the 1990s. The documents came from 4 sources: the Mangini collection of RJ Reynolds marketing documents at the University of California, San Francisco (<http://www.library.ucsf.edu/tobacco/mangini>), tobacco industry document Internet sites (Philip Morris, <http://www.pmdocs.com>; Brown & Williamson, <http://www.brownandwilliamson.com>; RJ Reynolds, <http://www.rjrtdocs.com>), and Tobacco Documents Online (<http://www.tobaccodocuments.org>).

We started with keyword searches on “bars,” “nightclubs,” “young adults,” and “promotions,” then searched for related documents, using authors, titles, dates, and Bates document numbers. Initial searches yielded thousands of documents; approximately 250 had content relevant to bar and nightclub promotional activities, the alternative press, and young adult peer influence. While the industry often uses the term “young adult” to refer to teenagers, it was clear from the context that the documents we identified were genuinely discussing young adults.

## RESULTS

### Development of Bar and Nightclub Promotions

Early plans for bar promotions were prepared for RJ Reynolds in the mid-1980s as part of a general industry trend toward increasing use of promotions<sup>20</sup> to reach young adults. RJ Reynolds' 1983 marketing plan strategy discusses the benefits of a “field marketing” strategy using person-to-person interaction at parties, concerts, and nightclubs to “reinforce Camel's masculine psychological image within the context of programs which are lifestyle oriented” and to integrate smoking with nightlife, music, and sports.<sup>21</sup> A proposal by Entertainment Marketing and Communications International submitted to RJ Reynolds in the mid-1980s emphasized the value of the bar setting to reach young people starting to smoke: “In general, this showcase nightclub audience targets perfectly new and current users at a time when brand loyalty is being tested and established.”<sup>22</sup> A Romann & Tannenzholz proposal to Philip Morris also described how its bar and nightclub program would compete with Camel's for the “entry-level” smoker.<sup>23</sup>

At a 1989 brainstorming session for the Camel Smooth Moves campaign, many of the elements of bar promotions “to elicit consumer involvement,” including cigarette sampling, free Camel accessories, amateur band talent contests, comedy clubs, races, beaches, winter resorts, and “cruising,” were presented.<sup>24</sup> A memorandum between RJ Reynolds executives described details of the promotional activities at Florida nightclubs during US universities’ spring break in 1989:

The Camel night club entertainment really was “cool.” As you entered the club smokers received cigarettes, lighters, Camel t-shirts and a key which you brought over to the Camel tent for a chance to win the car. Once inside the club the classy Smooth Character girls, dressed in bright blue, sang and danced. The crowd was alive when the girls performed. Also, there was a really hip guy with sun glasses who led the girls.<sup>25</sup>

A detailed report from a marketing firm describes how RJ Reynolds’ spring break promotions at Daytona Beach nightclubs used live music, contests, games, and distribution of free cigarette samples:

The centerpiece of Camel’s Spring Break program is the “Smooth Moves.” Essentially the Smooth Moves consists of a male emcee and three very attractive and talented women who perform a professionally produced vocal/dance routine in Daytona’s most popular clubs. . . . At each of the individual club promotions involving the Smooth Moves performance, several additional promotions will also be executed.

1. Smooth Moves Photoboard. . . .
2. Find Your Smooth Character Game. . . . All males entering will receive a male card. . . . All females entering receive a female card. . . . The objective is for both males and females to find their Smooth Character. If they find 2, 3, or 4 correct matches (tips) for the Smooth Move they have, they visit a prize center located in the club to receive a Camel prize.
3. Sampling will occur at each club promotion. Samplers will be distributing Camel Lights and Camel Filters along with a car key to smokers only. The key is an entry into a localized Smooth Car Sweepstakes where smokers have a chance to win a Nissan 300 ZX Turbo, or a variety of beach related Camel premiums.<sup>26</sup>

Brown & Williamson’s bar promotions training manual outlines similar activities, such as a “Kool Theme Song Sing Along,” a dance contest, and cigarette sample distribution.<sup>27</sup> Philip Morris events also included provocative games and cigarette sampling.<sup>28</sup>

### Benefits of Bar Promotions to Tobacco Companies and to Bars

The tobacco industry cultivated brand presence in bar environments; this advertising grew more aggressive over time. Tobacco companies first provided bars with supplies to saturate the environment during events and provide a lasting presence. A 1989 marketing report for RJ Reynolds included a description of a “Bar/Nightclub Presence Kit” including Camel-branded items for patrons and staff:

Establishments participating in Camel promotional activities will be supplied with the following items for special Camel nights and permanent brand presence:

- Cork lined bar trays
- Bar towels
- Simulated neon-lit write-on boards
- Napkin/Coaster/Stirrer Holders
- Ash Trays
- Coasters
- Napkins
- Table tents with write-in area<sup>29</sup>

Brown & Williamson used these tactics to promote Kool cigarettes in nightclub events during 1992<sup>30</sup>; its training manual instructs employees to remove the promotional materials belonging to competing tobacco companies during Kool events.<sup>27</sup> Philip Morris’ 1990 bar promotions used Marlboro bar supplies, racing jackets, and pants for staff; in 1991 neon message boards and cocktail trays were added, to be “left behind as mementos from Marlboro.”<sup>31,32</sup>

Tobacco companies also attracted bar owners with financial incentives. In 1991, RJ Reynolds hired Compel Marketing to conduct a survey of bar owners on their views of tobacco bar promotion. Compel recommended the following:

- I. A “bar paraphernalia” program should be tested incorporating a variety of Camel logo items. Over 40 percent of respondents were very interested and 70% were somewhat to very interested in purchasing from this type of program. . . .
- II. A bar cigarette rack/sales program should be tested. . . . Discussions with attendants at the show strongly indicated that those bars who had established their own cigarette sales programs felt it represented a significant profit center. . . .
- III. A program of bar promotion kits should be tested. . . . Approximately 50 percent of respondents indicated a willingness to share the costs of these programs. It should be noted, however, that the level of cost sharing was

modest; perhaps due to the \$1500 estimated cost mentioned.<sup>33</sup>

A 1994 report to RJ Reynolds from KBA, an advertising firm that ran the RJ Reynolds Camel Club Program, addressed bar owners’ cost concerns: “Using our Camel Club crew, we will approach clubs with promotional opportunities that will not only be cool and exciting, but also cost saving. . . . Being a Camel Club will make the venue eligible for valuable goods and services, both tangible and intangible.”<sup>34</sup>

KBA recommended providing “premiums” worth \$12 000 to bar owners and managers,<sup>34</sup> as well as offering promotional incentives to bar owners to display advertisements:

In exchange for promotional support that we will provide for nightclubs, we will require the club to allow us to install in-club displays. These displays will be designed and coordinated keeping club aesthetics in mind. Nothing produced will be obtrusive, bright or out of the ordinary looking for a nightclub. Some of these items will be bar cigarette dispensers, cash register lights, and display marquees.<sup>34</sup>

A 1994 Philip Morris contract with a participating club guaranteed Parliament signage at the entrances, on the roof, and in at least 50% of available space during the events.<sup>35</sup> Memos from Brown & Williamson and Philip Morris indicate that these practices were expanded through 1995 to promote Lucky Strike and Parliament cigarettes.<sup>28,36,37</sup> In a 1996 operating plan, RJ Reynolds also stressed the importance of bartenders’ selling cigarettes to bar patrons.<sup>38</sup>

### Other Benefits to the Tobacco Companies

*Research.* Tobacco companies used promotions to build their name databases and collect information for marketing profiles, direct marketing, and potential political organizing.<sup>39</sup> A 1994 report to RJ Reynolds described how cigarette brand market research fit with promotional activities in bars and nightclubs:

In order to monitor our success and evaluate strategies, market research will be a valuable tool. To maintain consistency with underlying discreet feel of the Camel Club Program, it is essential that market research is completed in non obtrusive fashion. In nightclubs, it is very common for an individual hired by the club to mingle with patrons, while obtaining names and information for the

club's mailing list data base. As another perk for the nightclubs, we may hire and supervise this mailing list in person for them and use the information they collect for the purposes of Camel Club research. . . .<sup>34</sup>

A handwritten note on the document says, "This is also a service to the club—provide them with a general list—don't link back to the club—covert name-catching. . . . Can tailor a questionnaire for smoking with date of birth with signature."<sup>34</sup>

Brown & Williamson also designed smoker survey cards to profile smokers during nightclub promotions in 1988.<sup>40</sup> In a 1992 report, National Field Marketing Corporation advised the company to present the surveys as entries for a prize drawing.<sup>30</sup> Philip Morris documents list "name generation" for the company's consumer database as a primary objective of Parliament and Marlboro promotions.<sup>41–43</sup> Philip Morris used gifts, luxury car sweepstakes, and interactive video racing games to encourage patrons to fill out marketing surveys.<sup>31,44,45</sup> These 1993 promotions generated approximately 1.3 million new names for the Philip Morris database.<sup>46</sup> These databases were used to generate smoker profiles, direct mailing campaigns, and conduct telephone research studies after the bar events.<sup>47</sup>

*Minority targeting.* Bar promotions were also used to target specific communities, as was the case with RJ Reynolds' 1989 Camel Hispanic Program<sup>29</sup> and Philip Morris' Inner City Bar Night Program:

To achieve trial, awareness and conversion objectives among Black smokers, Brand recommends an expansion of the Marlboro Menthol Inner City Bar Night Program developed during the second half of 1988. Given that we have limited tools to reach Black smokers, this represents an attempt to penetrate the audience via an aggressive event program which will work in combination with targeted in-store and media efforts.<sup>48</sup>

Philip Morris planned a \$1.2 million expansion of this 1989 program.<sup>48</sup> A 1989 Brown & Williamson document also noted Philip Morris' pursuit of the "Black consumer" in bars.<sup>40</sup> Brown & Williamson's Kool Festival bar promotion events included a cocktail party for retailers to build awareness of Kool's "involvement in the community."<sup>49</sup>

*A shield from social and political pressures.* In the 1990s, bars provided a safe place to con-

tinue to promote cigarettes despite increasing social pressures against smoking. Reports from Brown & Williamson and Philip Morris note the "non hostile, festive lifestyle atmosphere"<sup>30</sup> and "smoker friendly environment" of bars.<sup>50</sup> Bar promotions also conferred protection against clean indoor air laws. In a 1994 report, Philip Morris consultant Romann and Tannenholz observed, "[f]acing increasing restrictions on smoking in public places, parties represent one of the last refuges—a place where smoking is not only permissible but part of the shared experience."<sup>23</sup>

Bar promotions also avoided the controversy around tobacco marketing to children. RJ Reynolds' 1996 operating plan mentions keeping marketing strategies "under the radar."<sup>38</sup> A Romann and Tannenholz 1994 market research report for Philip Morris recommends the company avoid political pressure by "develop[ing] a comprehensive below-the-line marketing program." The same report points out that bar promotions would "prevent potential public-relations issues [and] anticipate future restrictions on advertising."<sup>23</sup> Romann and Tannenholz correctly anticipated that marketing restrictions would likely be limited to youth and that bar and nightclub promotions would be immune, as they were in the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement.

### Bar Promotions and the Alternative Press

The alternative press was an essential element of new tobacco industry advertising strategies to promote bar programs.<sup>1,2,24</sup> RJ Reynolds appears to have been the first to launch such an advertising campaign in the alternative press.<sup>1,51</sup> Other tobacco companies followed throughout the 1990s. The Ruxton Group, which managed alternative-press advertising in several major cities, recommended placing a "Smooth Character Column" on young adult entertainment in alternative newspapers in 1991:

#### The Objective

- To increase Camel's visibility with urban young adult smokers.
- To identify Camel with young-adult entertainment in priority markets.
- To maximize reader involvement with Camel ads . . .
- To associate Camel with what's fun to do in town.

#### The Concept

Introducing The Smooth Character: a column of colorful banter about what's doing in town and who's been doing it with whom . . .

#### The Benefits

- Reaches young-adult smokers in priority markets.
- Provides unique creative for each market on a weekly basis at a low cost.
- Associates Camel with what's hot, what's fun, what's local.
- Provides opportunities for promotional, and merchandising tie-ins.
- Reaches research documented full- and part-time smokers.<sup>52</sup>

KBA advertising, in a 1994 marketing proposal, also recommended the alternative press as media support for bar promotions. The company noted how this technique was used by Girbaud jeans to reach young adults who frequent nightclubs:

Every major city in the nation has a number of alternative media outlets. These newspapers and magazines appeal to the urban, progressive trend setters and often have gossip columns that speak of trendy happenings, such as art openings, nightclub events, underground parties, and benefits. These free periodicals are distributed at most trendy nightclubs and are found in the stores and coffeehouses that the club crowd frequents.

Developing an alternative advertising campaign geared towards the club goers, would be ideal. In the past year, Girbaud jeans, a trendy high profile clothing company has sponsored a full-page calendar of hip events for the week in New York's Village Voice. The placement of this particular ad is directly adjacent to the nightclub gossip column. This has aligned Girbaud with every trend setting event in New York City for the past year. Girbaud clothing first became prominent seven years ago in the club scene and has sustained its hip image through its affiliation with the trend setting scene. Aligning Camel with certain publications by way of advertising lends immediate hip credibility to the brand.<sup>34</sup>

The 1996 operating plan for RJ Reynolds suggests placement of tobacco advertisements in the alternative press by the "use of club page local media to hype event."<sup>38</sup> An analysis of tobacco promotions in the alternative press shows that these strategies were implemented, with the highest concentration of tobacco advertisements in entertainment-focused sections.<sup>1</sup>

### Bar Promotions and Young Adult Peer Influence

Bar promotions also provided a tool with which to engineer peer influence among young adults. The tobacco industry studied

peer influence for years and considered it to be a major factor in promoting smoking initiation among both adolescents and young adults.<sup>22,53–55</sup> The industry worked to identify “social leaders” or “trendsetters,”<sup>53,55</sup> believing that changing the smoking behavior of social leaders would, in turn, influence a large number of potential smokers.<sup>54</sup>

In 1992, Philip Morris conducted extensive research in its “Social Networks Project”:

If data from brief questionnaires can distinguish between leaders and other group members, this capability could be applied to:

- Marketing efforts to communicate more extensively with leaders than other group members.
- Screening for subsequent research, given leaders' importance in the diffusion process.<sup>53</sup>

Philip Morris attempted to design questionnaires that could differentiate leaders from nonleaders in a short telephone survey.<sup>55</sup> In the mid-1980s an RJ Reynolds contractor, Entertainment Marketing & Communications International (EMCI), attempted to reach “trendsetters” through make-your-own music videos in bars.<sup>22</sup> Brown & Williamson sought to market Lucky Strike cigarettes to social leaders in 1995.<sup>36</sup>

The relationships between bar owners, club promoters, employees, and patrons provided an ideal social structure for the use of leaders to encourage smoking. In 1994, the KBA advertising firm reported to RJ Reynolds on “trend influence marketing,” a strategy that capitalized on clearly defined “leaders”: bar owners, bar workers, club promoters, and bar patrons. KBA’s “Camel Club Program” sought to influence 3 “tiers”: bar owners, workers, and patrons. KBA recommended providing premiums totaling \$12 000 to bar owners and managers (the first tier).<sup>34</sup> The tobacco-sponsored entertainment events also helped bar owners financially by encouraging patronage and defraying the cost of live entertainment. KBA observed that club promoters were another source of influence:

A very important entity in the nightclub scene is the nightclub promoter. Most nightclubs utilize these individuals or groups to promote special events. Promoters are generally the trend setters of the nightclub scene. They define what is hip. A promoter will generate an idea for an event, usually something thematic that involves some sort of entertainment. In many cases, promoters use their own funds to produce events. In these cases, where pro-

motors are self-financed, our financial support in the form of printing reimbursements and premium giveaway packages will win their loyalty with relative ease. . . .

We will use the same techniques for club owners and managers to make promoters part of Camel Trend Influence Marketing effort, i.e. Camel jackets, premiums, event sponsorship funds, etc.<sup>34</sup>

Bar employees constituted the second tier of KBA’s plan. The plan described how to influence bar employees to become allies in marketing cigarettes:

Tier Two: Utilize our “foot in the door” to influence bar employees and convert them to Camel brand smokers and promote the brand. . . .

The crux of Tier Two is to convert the bar staff to Camel. We will do so by offering top notch premiums such as leather motorcycle jackets, with the employees name embroidered on the front. Embroidering the employee’s name will make the jacket a more valuable tool to reinforce and enhance our relationship with this influential segment. . . . In addition, our “Camel Club Crew” will develop relationships with these employees, always tip well at the bar (very important!) And occasionally schmooze the employees with other Camel gifts as well as dinner packages at local restaurants. Of course, Camel Club employees will have an ample supply of Camel cigarettes for personal use and to present to patrons.<sup>34</sup>

Bar employees were also slated to receive \$12 000 in premiums, according to KBA’s start-up budget.<sup>34</sup> Camel’s 1996 operating plan also recommended cultivating a relationship with bar workers, stressing that it was “critical to convert bar staff to Camel [so they could] act as selling agents.”<sup>38</sup>

The third tier consisted of trend-setting patrons who would be influenced by the bar management and staff to smoke Camels:

Tier Three: Work with the bar employees to influence the trend setting patrons, which will then start to make smoking Camel a recognized trend. . . .

Once our relationship is solidified with club owners, management and bar staff, we will begin to subtly train the employees on how to influence smokers of competitive brands to sample Camel with the goal of eventually switching brands. Because we are making Camel “trendy” as well as formulating a positive and productive relationship with the staff. . . . the process of generating trial among patrons will appear quite natural and uncontrived.<sup>34</sup>

Ideally, hip young bar patrons would also recruit their non-club-going friends who viewed them as leaders.

## DISCUSSION

Bar and nightclub promotions started as part of an increase in promotional events that integrated tobacco marketing with young adult activities and reached beginning smokers. They were later expanded to increase consumer involvement and to create smoke-friendly promotional environments. These promotions are also used for marketing research, to target minorities, and as a haven from social pressures. They protect the industry from advertising regulations, clean indoor air laws, and accusations of marketing to adolescents. Bar promotions help the industry engineer peer influence to encourage tobacco use among young adults.

The volume of tobacco industry documents (more than 40 million pages) and the inefficiency with which many are indexed makes it difficult to know whether we located all relevant documents. Those we did analyze, however, provide a consistent picture of industry marketing activities that were still observable in bars and clubs in 2001. The fact that these practices have been duplicated over time and replicated by several tobacco companies increases our confidence in these findings. The relationship between tobacco and alcohol use in these venues is beyond the scope of this study, but it is a fertile topic for future inquiry.

Bar and nightclub promotions are an example of the tobacco industry’s shift from traditional advertising to promotional activities. Tobacco promotional allowances tripled between 1988 and 1998, while spending on advertising remained constant.<sup>20</sup> The industry has taken affirmative steps to protect bar promotional venues. The 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between the tobacco industry and many states’ attorneys general explicitly exempts marketing in “adult-only facilities” from its limitations on industry activities.<sup>56</sup> The industry opposes bar provisions of clean indoor air laws with particular vigor<sup>57,58</sup> and has fought hard (if unsuccessfully) to repeal the provisions in California’s smoke-free workplace law that apply to bars and clubs.<sup>59–61</sup>

The industry’s penetration into bars may have serious implications for smoking initiation among the young adults who frequent

bars. The industry's manipulation of peer influence through incentives to "social leaders" can encourage nonsmoking young adults to initiate smoking as well as move experimenters toward addiction.<sup>22,23,34</sup> The increase in smoking rates among young adults indicates that their smoking behavior is still amenable to outside influences and suggests the success of the tobacco industry's strategy.<sup>8,9</sup>

The fact that it is legal for young adults to smoke does not mitigate the public health burden of disease and suffering that will be incurred later in life by these young smokers and the nonsmokers who will be exposed to their secondhand smoke. Tobacco control advocates should include young adults in research and advocacy efforts and should design interventions to counter the tobacco industry's bar promotion strategy.

The industry's use of this strategy can also provide a guide for public health practitioners working with young adults. Bars' association with the tobacco industry should be portrayed as negative exploitation of social and cultural institutions. Rather than stressing resistance skills to counter peer pressure, public health educators should seek to identify social leaders and encourage them to promote and defend smoke-free lifestyles. Creation of smoke-free bars—with appropriate groundwork and public education—may be a key to undermining the tobacco industry's efforts to use bars to reestablish the social acceptability of smoking and secondhand smoke. ■

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This article was accepted October 14, 2001.

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All authors contributed to the design of the study and writing and editing of the paper. E. Sepe and P.M. Ling collected the data.

### Acknowledgments

This work was supported by National Cancer Institute grants CA-61021 and CA-87472 and by the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund.

This work was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association, Atlanta, Ga, October 21–25, 2001.

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