

AD WATCH

Cigar advertising: targeting “baby-boomers” and older adults

In recent years, tobacco control advocates have focused increasing attention on the tobacco industry's targeting of cigarette advertisements to children and teenagers. Cigarette advertising and marketing have featured glamorous young movie and television stars, the Joe Camel cartoon character, Virginia Slims promotional items, and Marlboro “gear”.

This increasingly targeted cigarette advertising has resulted in one group being largely overlooked by both tobacco control advocates and the tobacco industry: the older population. However, one increasingly popular tobacco product, the cigar, seems to have found its core market in the baby-boomer and older adult population. This older population constitutes a large and growing share of the consumer market. In 1990, 31.3 million Americans were aged 65 or older; in 1995, 33.5 million Americans (12.8% of the total population) were aged 65 and older, an increase of 7% in only five years.^{1,2} Furthermore, the baby-boom generation (now between the ages of 32 and 51) constitutes approximately 30% of the population of the United States.³ By the year 2010, when

the baby-boom generation (born between 1946 and 1964) reaches age 65, 40 million Americans will be aged 65 and older, an almost 20% increase in a 15-year period. When all of the baby-boomers have reached age 65, in 2030, more than 20% of the United States population will be 65 and older.¹

As young people, these baby-boomers and older adults were primary targets of the cigarette industry's marketing agenda, but they are no longer. Because almost 90% of smokers begin smoking cigarettes by the age of 18,⁴ and as nicotine addiction is so difficult to overcome, the cigarette companies apparently do not believe there is a need to spend advertising dollars on the older population.


Unlike cigarette advertising with its youth-focused advertisements using cartoon characters and cowboy vistas, cigar advertising is largely found in publications geared towards older and more affluent adults: the *New York Times Book Review*, the daily and Sunday *New York Times*, the *New Yorker Magazine* and the cigar industry's own magazines, *Cigar Aficionado* and *Smoke*. *Cigar Aficionado*—which reached a circulation exceeding 225 000 by the end of 1995⁵—often features older, mature movie stars such as Jack Nicholson, Bill Cosby, Danny DeVito, and Arnold Schwarzenegger as examples of those people who have achieved success and earned the right to smoke a cigar (figure 1).

Furthermore, cigars and their accompanying products (humidors, cigar holders, lighters, etc.) are advertised in catalogues geared towards upscale older adults—for example, Brooks Brothers and For Counsel. These products, including the “Be a man—smoke cigars” cufflinks offered by Brooks Brothers, promote cigars as symbols of prestige and success.⁶

Cigars are also expanding their presence in Hollywood. No longer banished to “mob movies,” cigars surfaced in an advertisement for *The First Wives Club*, showing the three female stars (all of baby-boomer age) holding cigars (figure 2). Furthermore, cigars continue to be a popular prop in many major motion pictures including such recent films as *Independence Day*, *The Associate*, *Jerry Maguire*, and *Wyatt Earp*.⁷

In the first nine months of 1996, the cigar industry increased their advertising expenditures by 438%.⁸ This recent growth in cigar advertising has been led by General Cigar's premium cigar brand, Macanudo. From 1994 to 1995, Macanudo increased its advertising budget 193% to \$1.45 million.⁹ Its newest campaign highlights two men—one older and one younger—sharing cigars as a common

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Figure 1 Covers of Cigar Aficionado often feature older movie stars.

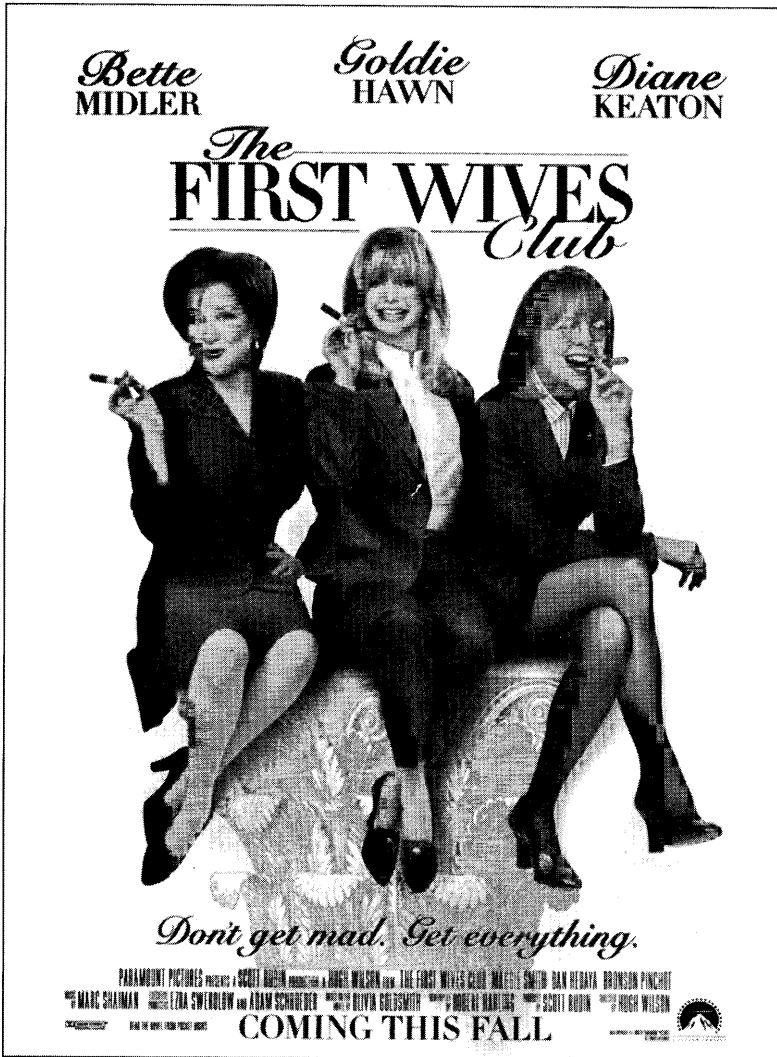


Figure 2 Three movie stars, all of baby-boomer age, holding cigars in an advertisement for The First Wives Club.

interest and a symbol of maturity and success (figure 3).

Although cigars and their growing popularity among 20, 30, and 40 year olds has now attracted attention,^{10 11} their advertising and promotion have only recently begun to be challenged. This delayed response to the cigar



Figure 3 Two men—one older and one younger—sharing cigars in an advertisement for Macanudo, a premium brand.

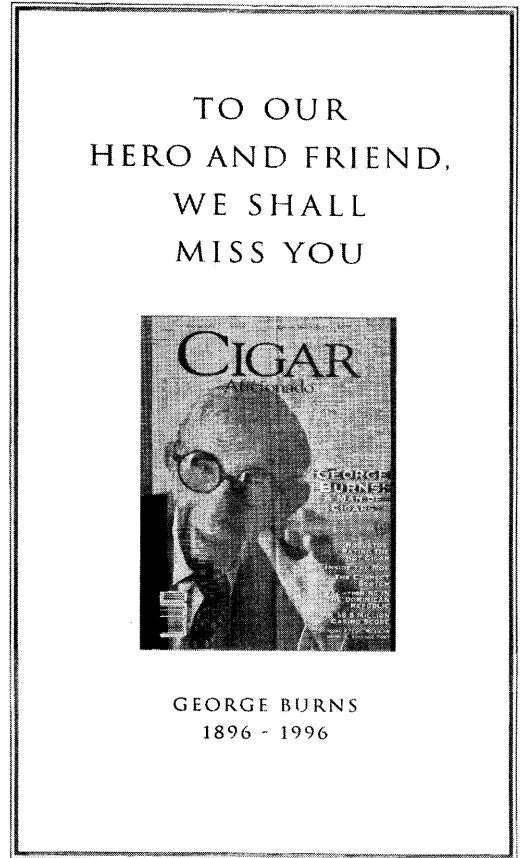


Figure 4 A tribute to the late George Burns—the cigar's most popular "poster-child"—in Cigar Aficionado, which featured Burns on an earlier cover of the magazine.

industry's advertising surge appears to be the result of two factors: first, the cigar companies are not yet blatantly or explicitly targeting children; and second, cigars are not commonly believed to have the same health effects as cigarettes.

Although the health effects of cigar smoking have not been researched nearly as much as those of cigarette smoking, cigar smoking is known to cause cancer of the larynx, mouth, oesophagus, and lungs.¹² Also linked to cigars is an increased likelihood (as compared with non-smokers) of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart disease, and vascular disease. However, with George Burns as the cigar's most popular "poster-child" (figure 4), the health dangers of cigar smoking are subtly undercut.

After the US Surgeon General's first report on smoking and health in 1964, cigar consumption in the United States peaked at 9.1 billion.¹³ Whether or not there was a causal relationship between these two events is uncertain. However, there is much speculation that the increased awareness of the health consequences of cigarette smoking caused many adult cigarette smokers to switch to cigars, perceived as less risky to one's health.¹³ Given the current environment regarding cigarette smoking and its health consequences, it is likely that the recent growth in cigar consumption in the United States is similar to the phenomenon in the mid-1960s. In 1993 cigar consumption in the United States hit an all-time low of 2.1 billion cigars.¹⁰ Since then, annual

sales for premium cigars have increased 50% or more.¹³ According to the Cigar Association of America, more than 10 million people currently smoke cigars, up from six to eight million five years ago.¹¹

Data from the 1992 National Health Interview Survey show that 24.7% of those 55–64 years old and 21.1% of those over 65 years of age have smoked a cigar during their lifetime. Furthermore, among those who have ever smoked cigars, 58.2% of those aged 55–64 years and 57% of those 65 years of age and older have smoked 50 or more cigars in their lifetime.¹⁴

In addition to the perceived low health risks of cigar smoking, cigars promote an aura of glamour, prestige, and success. Dinner parties for cigar smokers only, private cigar clubs, and cigar bars all add to the perception that cigar smoking is for the elite.^{13 15} These marketing practices demonstrate that cigar advertising is targeted to an older population who can afford the price of a “good cigar”.

The combination of targeted cigar advertising to middle-aged baby boomers and older adults, the aura of glamour and prestige surrounding cigar smoking, and the perceived “safe substitution” of cigars for cigarettes pose a new tobacco danger. It is important that this growing cigar fad, and its inherent health dangers, not be overshadowed by the cigarette battles currently being fought in the tobacco war.

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