

Ted Bates advertising -- lessons from focus group research

This is a 1975 document for Ted Bates advertising agency which is the clearest statement yet of how the tobacco marketing industry regards its customers. The document describes research done Ted Bates which was the agency for British American Tobacco's US subsidiary, Brown and Williamson.

* Article in the the Independent on Sunday 25th April 1999
"Proof at last: tobacco admen think smokers are stupid"

View summary table (1 page)

Full title: What we have learned from people: a conceptual summarization of 18 focus group interviews on the subject of smoking.
26 May 1975.
Marketing and Research Counselors Inc.
New York

Some highlights

The following are extracts are from the document....

Smokers have to face the fact that they are illogical, irrational and stupid. People find it hard to go throughout life with such negative presentation and evaluation of self. The saviours are the rationalization and repression that end up and result in a defense mechanism that ... has its own 'logic,' its own rationale.

Start out from the basic assumption that cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health -- try to go around it in an elegant manner but don't try to fight it -- it's a losing war.

In the young smoker's mind, a cigarette falls into the same category with wine, beer, shaving, wearing a bra (or purposely not wearing one), declaration of independence and striving for self-identity.... Thus, an attempt to reach young smokers, starters, should be based, among others, on the following major parameters:

Present the cigarette as one of the few initiations into the adult world.

Present the cigarette as part of the illicit pleasure category of products and activities.

In your ads create a situation taken from the day-to-day life of the young smoker but in an elegant manner have this situation touch on the basic symbols of the growing-up, maturity process.

To the best of your ability, (considering some legal constraints), relate the cigarette to pot, wine, beer, sex, etc.

Brown and Williamson's response to this is that the material was generated by one of its advertising agencies and that Brown and Williamson does not necessarily agree with the conclusions.

Clive Bates, Director of ASH, commented:

"This is a peep into the way the tobacco marketing really works, and its shows them at their arrogant, predatory and manipulative worst. They reckon they can hook teenagers by playing on excitement about growing up and they assume teenagers are gullible enough to fall for this. I don't think many of their customers will be too impressed to find that they are regarded as stupid by the people selling to them."