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### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/05s8b040>

### Journal

Social Science & Medicine, 63(8)

### ISSN

0277-9536

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### Publication Date

2006-10-01

Peer reviewed

**Taking Ad-Vantage of Lax Advertising Regulation in the USA and Canada:  
Reassuring and Distracting Health-Concerned Smokers**

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## **Acknowledgments**

We thank the faculty and fellows of the Institute for Health Policy Studies at UCSF and three anonymous reviewers for their excellent comments on a previous draft of this work. We are grateful to Professor Virginia Ernster for allowing us access to her advertising collection.

This work was supported by National Cancer Institute Grant number CA-87472, California Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program Grant number 14FT-0013, the Flight Attendant Medical Research Institute, and the American Legacy Foundation.

## ABSTRACT

We explored the evolution from cigarette product attributes to psychosocial needs in advertising campaigns for low-tar cigarettes. Analysis of previously secret tobacco industry documents and print advertising images indicated that low-tar brands targeted smokers who were concerned about their health with advertising images intended to distract them from the health hazards of smoking. Advertising first emphasized product characteristics (filtration, low tar) that implied health benefits. Over time, advertising emphasis shifted to salient psychosocial needs of the target markets. A case study of Vantage in the USA and Canada showed that advertising presented images of intelligent, upward-striving people who had achieved personal success and intentionally excluded the act of smoking from the imagery, while minimal product information was provided.

This illustrates one strategy to appeal to concerned smokers by not describing the product itself (which may remind smokers of the problems associated with smoking) but instead using evocative imagery to distract smokers from these problems. Current advertising for potential reduced-exposure products (PREPs) emphasizes product characteristics, but these products have not delivered on the promise of a healthier alternative cigarette. Our results suggest that the tobacco control community should be on the alert for a shift in advertising focus for PREPs to the image of the user rather than the cigarette. Framework Convention on Tobacco Control-style advertising bans that prohibit all user imagery in tobacco advertising could preempt a psychosocial needs-based advertising strategy for PREPs and maintain public attention on the health hazards of smoking.

**Abstract word count:** 243

**Keywords:** cigarettes; low-tar; advertising; psychology; tobacco industry; corporate documents

**Full word count: 7962**

**Taking Ad-Vantage of Lax Advertising Regulation in the USA and Canada:  
Reassuring and Distracting Health-Concerned Smokers**

**INTRODUCTION**

In the 1950s the American tobacco industry greatly increased its offerings of filtered cigarettes, followed by low-tar cigarettes in the late 1960s and 1970s, in response to burgeoning scientific evidence and growing public knowledge of the health risks associated with smoking (Glantz, Slade, Bero, Hanauer, & Barnes, 1996). This initiated a dramatic shift in the cigarette market; by 2001, 97% of smokers in the USA used filtered cigarettes (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001), and 88.7% of all cigarettes sold in the USA were low-tar cigarettes (Federal Trade Commission, 2003). The adoption of low-tar cigarettes was followed by a de-escalation of quit ratios (ratio of former smokers to current plus former smokers) in the USA between 1965 and 1983 (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).

A substantial body of research demonstrates the fallacy of low-tar, low-yield, or light and ultra-light cigarettes (Bates, McNeill, Jarvis, & Gray, 1999; Djordjevic, Stellman, & Zang, 2000; Hoffman & Hoffman, 1997; Jarvis, Boreham, Primatesta, Feyerabend, & Bryant, 2001). The industry re-engineered cigarettes to skew machine measurements of tar and nicotine yields toward significant underestimation (King, Carter, Borland, Chapman, & Gray, 2003). Low-tar advertising has been intentionally misleading (Leavell, 1999), reassuring health-concerned smokers who are considering quitting that smoking low-tar cigarettes is a proactive health measure (Pollay & Dewhirst, 2002).

Smokers often switched to low-tar products as a step towards quitting (Kozlowski, Mehta, Sweeney, Schwartz, Vogler, Jarvis, & West, 1998), though switching does not make low-tar smokers more likely to quit (Gilpin, Emery, White, & Pierce, 2002; Hyland, Hughes, Farrelly, & Cummings, 2003) and may make them less likely to do so (Ling & Glantz, 2004). Epidemiological studies of lung cancer (Harris, Thun, Mondul, & Calle, 2004; Stellman, Muscat, Thompson, Hoffman, & Wynder, 1997; Thun & Burns, 2001) and peripheral arterial disease (Powell, Edwards, Worrell, Franks, Greenhalgh, & Poulter, 1997) show no health benefits of low-tar cigarettes.

Potential reduced-exposure products (PREPs) are the newest products developed to provide smokers with an alternative to quitting. Just as the introduction of filtered and then low-tar products followed the publication of tobacco-related health risks, PREPs are being test-marketed, largely in the USA, amidst growing public knowledge about the risks of secondhand smoke and the decreasing social acceptability of smoking. Some of these products have failed (Brown & Williamson's Advance, RJ Reynolds' Premier), and some are struggling (Vector's Quest, introduced as Lorillard's Omni; Philip Morris' Accord, called Oasis in Japan). RJ Reynolds' (RJR) Eclipse is available through toll-free number in the US and in selected stores. Advertisements introducing PREPs claim significant reductions in smoke and odor (Philip Morris, 1997; RJ Reynolds, 2005a), carcinogens (Vector Group (author inferred), 2001), or risk of cancer (RJ Reynolds, 2005a).

Tobacco companies identify psychosocial needs salient to different segments of the market and position brands of cigarettes as capable of satisfying those needs. Women (Anderson, Glantz, & Ling, 2005), African American adults (Balbach, Gasior, & Barbeau, 2003), the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community (Smith & Malone, 2003), Asian

Americans (Muggli, Pollay, Lew, & Joseph, 2002), youth (Pollay, 2000), and young adults of both sexes (Ling & Glantz, 2002) have all been targeted with psychosocial appeals in tobacco advertising. We distinguish between cigarette advertising campaigns that deliver a product-focused message from those that deliver a needs-focused message. The term “product-focus” indicates that the main emphasis in an advertisement is on a physical product characteristic, such as a filter type or cigarette length, or on some selling point seemingly due to the physical product characteristics, such as good breath or low throat irritation. The term “needs-focus” refers to the major emphasis in the advertisement being a specific psychosocial need and, particularly, the satisfaction of that need. For example, Philip Morris (PM) capitalized on “closet smokers” need to feel accepted and included rather than rejected and ostracized with the late 1980s-early 1990s Benson & Hedges “For People Who Like to Smoke” campaign (Anderson, Glantz, & Ling, 2005). Though this shift from product focus to needs focus is not unique to cigarettes, the addictive and harmful nature of tobacco relative to other consumer goods sets cigarette advertising apart and necessitates a rapid advertising evolution. Marketers of cigarettes have a particular challenge to cast a positive light on a consumer product that kills people when used as intended.

This paper is meant to serve several purposes. First, we describe a shift in advertising for low-tar brands away from a product-focused message to a psychosocial needs-focused message. Second, we report a case study of advertising for a major brand in the low-tar segment, RJR’s Vantage in the USA, and we corroborate our USA findings with concurrent advertising for Vantage in Canada. Our intent is to uncover the motivations for de-emphasizing product-based arguments for using Vantage in favor of eliciting positive affect unrelated to smoking and the

mechanisms by which RJR and their advertising agencies attempted to do so. We then explore implications for the advertising of PREPs, such as RJR's Eclipse.

RJR's Vantage brand presents an excellent opportunity to study the shift from product-focused to needs-focused advertising. First, RJR has historically shown an affinity for solving smoking problems with new products (Ling & Glantz, 2005; Pollay & Dewhirst, 2003). Second, Vantage was one of the early leaders in the low-tar segment (Author Unknown, 1980, 1990) and was a pioneer in the use of the psychographic segmentation techniques that became popular among advertisers in the 1970s (Demby, 1971; Plummer, 1971). Third, during the studied period, 1970-1988, Vantage launched seven different advertising campaigns. This provides a valuable opportunity to document the diversity of means that RJR, its ad agencies, and market research firms thought were potentially efficacious in addressing the health-concerned smoker. Vantage's advertising history also presents an opportunity to anticipate advertising strategies for PREPs, as RJR's cigarette-like PREP, Eclipse, was first introduced under the name "Eclipse by Vantage" to capitalize on Vantage's perceived "health heritage" (RJ Reynolds, 1996).

## **METHODS**

We searched the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library (<http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu>) and Tobacco Documents Online (<http://tobaccodocuments.org>) using established methods (Malone & Balbach, 2000). Initial search terms included low-tar, health, concerned, marketing, creative, focus group, qualitative, exploration, segmentation, psychographic, promotion, advertising, brand names, and industry acronyms (e.g., "FFLT" for full-flavor low-tar). These searches yielded tens of thousands of documents.



We conducted additional snowball searches on names of individuals and agencies, places, dates, Bates numbers, and campaign slogans. Documents related to the research, planning, and evaluation of advertising to the low-tar segment were selected. This analysis is based upon a final collection of 1180 documents. An annotated bibliography of these documents is available from the corresponding author. Themes and strategies identified in these documents were triangulated with documents produced in Canadian litigation (Pollay, 2000). Vantage in Canada, like the USA, was a prominent pioneer in this market niche and was sold with nearly identical advertisements.

We matched advertising images with the campaigns described in industry documents using print advertising from University of California, San Francisco Professor Virginia Ernster's tobacco advertising collection and the Pollay online collection (<http://www.tobaccoads.org>). We collected 107 advertisements for this analysis. Our examination of the advertisements also suggested strategies for searching the documents (e.g., publication dates of specific ads, campaign slogans appearing at different times). We organized both documents and advertisements chronologically and assessed the shifts in focus over time. Our analysis focused on low-tar advertising from the late-1970s to the mid-1980s, when quit ratios rose and then plateaued as low-tar products began to dominate the USA market (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).

## **RESULTS**

### **An overview of the evolutionary cycle in low-tar advertising**

High-filtration products, such as Kent with its patented Micronite filter in 1952, led the way in the purportedly healthier cigarette market, prompting many filtered and low-tar product

introductions for this and the following two decades. An historical analysis of competition between low tar and high-filtration brands in the 1950s and 1960s from the American Tobacco document archives captured the clamorous nature of the product-focused campaigns of the time: “Lorillard was first to emphasize high-filtration (‘hi-fi’), and Kent’s Micronite Filter set the pace, bringing a spate of ads on ‘laboratory testing’ and ‘scientific proof’. Claims, counter-claims and exaggerations got out of hand” (American Tobacco, 1964). Ultimately, successive claims about the superiority of one low-tar or one high-filtration brand over the other had little meaning.

Though low-tar products quickly became popular, tobacco companies worried that many smokers concerned with their health would still reject low-tar products and quit smoking instead (Alar, Heger, McCafferty, & Wallace, 1980; Fishlock, 1972; Russell, 1976). One of RJR’s “short term major areas of concentration” in 1976 was to address the special needs of the health-concerned segment by offering “products targeted to social symbolism and enhancing the social acceptability of cigarette smokers” (RJ Reynolds, 1976). The problem for tobacco companies became convincing smokers that socially desirable people smoked low-tar products.

One of the strategies RJR explored was to develop advertising focused on psychosocial benefits. In 1982, Dick Nordine of the RJR Marketing Research Department described the difference between product characteristics and consumer “benefits:”

A benefit relates to the consumer’s life not to the cigarette product. For example, a benefit obtained from low tar might be to project a rational image to others. A smoker whose most important benefit is to project a rational image would not necessarily be concerned about the alleged hazards of smoking. This person wants to appear to be doing the practical or sensible thing to people around him – to his friends, family, co-workers and so on. In this case, low tar is the means but projecting a rational image to others is the benefit (Nordine, 1982) (emphasis in original).

Product attribute-based identities fail to differentiate products from their competition, a limitation that can be remedied in part by infusing brands with “personality... [which] can help create a self-expressive benefit that becomes a vehicle for the customer to express his or her own personality” (Aaker, 1996). As psychographic market segmentation research yielded detailed profiles of different target markets (Brown and Williamson, 1975; RJ Reynolds, 1979; RJ Reynolds (author inferred), 1979; Vogel, 1983), advertisers moved from relatively simple to more complex user imagery that addressed target-relevant psychosocial needs. Because low-tar cigarettes had established their place in the market as the healthy alternative, tobacco advertisers could capitalize on this while overtly addressing other psychosocial needs.

### **Vantage and the problems of smoking: 1970-1979**

When RJR nationally launched their low tar Vantage brand in 1970, it was positioned to answer concerns about high levels of tar and nicotine. Its selling point, like its competitors, was that it delivered less tar while still offering full flavor to smokers who did not enjoy “hot air” brands (i.e., low tar brands that have so little flavor that the experience of smoking one is little more than inhaling hot air) (Karnbach, 1970a). The Vantage project manager wrote: “The mass of normal flavor smokers are not receptive to current hi-fi products; they would rather quit than settle for less taste” (Karnbach, 1970b).

(Table 1 around here)

### “Cop-out”: 1970-1971

Leber Katz Partners, RJR’s advertising agency for the Vantage campaigns, first developed the introductory “Cop-out” campaign for television (Leber Katz, 1981a). This

campaign stated that “Vantage doesn’t cop out on flavor” and that it was the “breakthrough cigarette because it delivers full flavor and very low ‘TAR’ and nicotine numbers” (Karnbach, 1970c; RJ Reynolds, 1970) (emphasis in original). “Cop-out” was popular jargon at the time, and was conveyed with images of rugged sailors (shown) and die-hard fans watching a football game in a downpour. Rather than lose customers to quitting, RJR offered Vantage as a “‘better’ [cigarette] in terms of health... that can stem the decline in cigarette smoking” (Karnbach, 1970b).

The brand gained a 1.0% share of the market within three months after introduction, then plateaued at 0.9% after six months (Leber Katz, 1981a). After cigarette advertising was banned from television in 1971, plans for a new print campaign appearing in magazines and on billboards were enacted.

#### “Candid”: 1971-1976

The first print-only Vantage advertisements, the “Candid” campaign, framed the problem as a “controversy” about smoking and assured consumers that they were “adults” who made the “choice” to continue with the “pleasure” of smoking while taking the necessary steps to alleviate their health concerns (RJ Reynolds, date unknown; Shackelford, 1972). These text-heavy ads used a no-nonsense writing style to discuss “critics of smoking” and the “controversy”. The advertisements knowingly portrayed smokers as feeling “guilty” and “concerned”.

Vantage enjoyed a 10.8% increase in US market share in the first five years of Candid’s run (Leber Katz, 1981a). When asked about their attitudes toward tar and nicotine after exposure to the Candid campaign in 1971, however, consumers often felt more negatively than they did before exposure to the campaign (Monahan, 1971; Monahan, Simms, & Karnbach, 1971). When

similar text-based ads with an apparently candid tone were used in Canada, the text had to be carefully written to avoid phrases that might alarm readers. “The fact that a Vantage ad dares to raise the issue of ‘what you may not want’ generates defensiveness toward smoking in general, and a feeling of discomfort. The reference to the taste of Vantage is lost; overpowered by the implications of tar, nicotine and cancer” (Pollay, 1989). Other ads were more successful at communicating health without making explicit health claims; a Canadian advertisement using the phrase “Smoke Smart” was perceived to mean better for you and safe (Pollay, 2000). It is likely that the damage had been done, however, as RJR may have inadvertently associated Vantage with smokers’ anxiety rather than with the resolution of that anxiety.

#### “Confrontation”: 1976-1979

In 1977 John Winebrenner, Vantage Brand Manager, suggested a new campaign in which “the problem/solution message will be delivered in a first-person testimonial format” (Winebrenner, 1977). Initially, the problem was emphasized, with headlines such as “Are you still smoking?”, “Why do you smoke?” and “How many times have you decided to quit smoking?” Later executions were “more empathetic and testimonials more personal” (RJ Reynolds, 1978a), with models that conveyed “conviction and a sense of satisfaction (i.e. VANTAGE has solved their smoking dilemma). ... [Their facial expressions were] positive, pleasant, and [avoided] any suggestion of concern or foreboding” (RJ Reynolds, 1978b). This was intended to give an overall impression of “post-problem effects (i.e., a solution; a state of satisfaction deriving from VANTAGE’s good taste/low tar combination) rather than the pre-problem symptoms (i.e., concern/anxiety/dilemma/uncertainty)” (RJ Reynolds, 1978b).

Though Vantage's market share was up 8% from 1977 to 1978 (Leber Katz, 1981a), Winebrenner described several key deficiencies in the "Confrontation" campaign, including failure to communicate the desired product and psychosocial "benefits" (Winebrenner & Carey, 1979).

### **From the smoking decision to the stylish, decisive smoker: 1979-1984**

#### "Vantage Point": 1979-1981

Entering the psychographics decade, the description of the desired Vantage target market was refined as "sophisticated individuals who are emulated because they are contemporary, exciting, confident, and appealing to the opposite sex... modern stylish, white collar smokers" (Leber Katz, 1981a). A new campaign, "Vantage Point", was created to include images of such people. "A super-imposed outline of the Vantage bullseye", read RJR's guidelines for the new campaign, "will focus on the actual moment of satisfaction... the cigarette being lit by a member of the opposite sex" (RJ Reynolds, 1978c) (ellipses in original). In a clear departure from previous campaigns, the "Vantage Point" campaign eschewed text and featured romantic couples pursuing leisure activities such as golfing, yachting, hiking in fall foliage, riding horses on the beach, and fetching a Christmas tree in the snow.

Some focus group respondents, however, found the visuals "plastic... posed and unnatural" (RJ Reynolds, 1981a). The overall user image for the Vantage brand was also not sufficiently unified across the line extensions (Leber Katz, 1981a), leaving consumers without a distinct perception of who uses Vantage and why, and only a diffuse impression of the brand as something for "tar conscious smokers who do not really enjoy smoking" (RJ Reynolds, 1981b).

Perhaps the “smoker’s guilt” associated with previous campaigns was reflected in the perceived lack of pleasure communicated by the advertisements.

### “Vantage Pleasures”: 1981-1983

A new campaign, “Vantage Pleasures,” was developed to add the warmth, naturalness, and simple pleasure that was lacking in the “Vantage Point” campaign, and to provide a unified user image across brand styles (Leber Katz, 1981a). In a 1981 positioning statement, Leber Katz made explicit the importance of downplaying negatives:

Merit’s [Philip Morris’ competing brand] advertising stressed the Brand’s taste advantage and communicated a feeling of importance as well as mass acceptability (for a low tar brand). In net, Merit effectively addressed the positive taste aspects of low tar smoking whereas Vantage historically emphasized the negative, concerned smoker aspects (Leber Katz, 1981b).

Indeed, Merit’s avoidance of smoking negatives in its introductory campaign in 1976 was accompanied by a rise in market share that was three times steeper than Vantage’s in the same year (Leber Katz, 1981a; Philip Morris, 1990).

Deployed executions for “Vantage Pleasures” included people enjoying the leisure activities of skiing, hiking, golfing, canoeing, yachting (shown) and horseback riding. Alan Cox, RJR Marketing Research Manager, noted in a preliminary report of these results that “Vantage Pleasures communicated enjoyment, in terms of situation/environment” (Cox, 1981), rather than specifically in terms of smoking (emphasis in original). He speculated that “it is probably asking too much to expect superior communication of enjoyable cigarette on a one time exposure. Ideally, over time the enjoyable situation/environment would become associated with smoking Vantage cigarettes” (Cox, 1981).

This represented a critical shift in Vantage advertising: the emergence of an explicit expectation that the viewing audience would first experience a generalized pleasurable mood and would only through repeated exposure to the campaign come to pair the pleasure with smoking or with a brand of cigarettes. This is known to consumer psychologists as paired-association conditioning and, in practice, it requires substantial budgets and much repetition through campaign consistency over time. The important element to convey became taking pleasure in one's environment, not using RJR's low tar brand of cigarettes. Leber Katz's plans for a series of 1981-1982 winter season "Vantage Pleasure" executions specified that "[d]uring the photography sessions the act of smoking will be covered in almost all situations, but during editing selections may be made that do not include smoking" (Leber Katz, 1981c) (emphasis in original). The campaign essay guiding this set of plans stated:

Knowing that the people in the 1980's will be more concerned about the quality of their personal lives than they have been in recent years, it becomes clear that a campaign based on life's pleasures... it's simple pleasures... is of great relevance...

Always Vantage will be a part of the moment of pleasure... but never the pleasure itself. Because Vantage is an accompaniment to the moment... a symbolic endorsement of all the moments that will be depicted in this campaign (Leber Katz, 1981c).

The clear purpose of this campaign was to integrate the smoking of Vantage with simple and authentic pleasures, i.e., to subconsciously pair the cigarette with a "lifestyle of depth and quality and meaning" (Leber Katz, 1981c). Up through this campaign, RJR had attempted with increasing explicitness to convey pleasure, first with smoking pleasure in spite of the pressures of an increasingly nonsmoking world, and here with a simply pleasurable environment. It was during this campaign that Vantage reached its peak share of market at almost 4% (American Tobacco, 1992).



### “The Taste of Success”: 1983-1984

The continuing dominance of PM’s Merit over Vantage (American Tobacco, 1992) was accompanied by major changes in advertising messages for Vantage in the 1980s. RJR conducted target image studies throughout 1981 and concluded that Vantage smokers appeared to be “in the prime of their lives... self-confident because they have earned it... ‘doers’—thriving on activity” (Nassar, 1981). The positioning statement for the “Taste of Success” effort sought to portray Vantage as a brand “for people who have achieved an adult perspective, are succeeding in life and who wish to be seen as being intelligent, independent, decisive and achievement oriented” (RJ Reynolds, 1982). The decision was made to “shift emphasis from the smoking decision itself to the decisive characteristics of the Vantage smoker” (Holland, 1982a).

Individuals in focus group testing emphasized a non-monetary, non-competitive form of achievement and success. Participants often defined success as “the feeling I get from being in control of my life, of reaching the goals I set for myself and having the drive to set new ones. It’s an inner communication I have with myself that let’s me pat myself on the back for a job well done. The real key to success is knowing how to enjoy life” (Holland, 1982b). Themes of success as “a result of effort,” “an inner sense of self-satisfaction,” and “working [one’s] way up the ladder” commonly ran through Vantage focus group testing in late 1982 and early 1983 (Idea Generation Inc. (author inferred), 1982; Snyder, 1983).

The “Taste of Success” campaign, running through 1984, presented images of people who seemed to have achieved inner, personal success and satisfaction with self. Advertisements portrayed Vantage smokers as architects, artists, ballet dancers, fashion designers, film directors, newspaper editors, and pro golfers. The campaign represented an important step in the

evolutionary process away from product-based health messages in Vantage campaigns and toward messages of psychosocial needs satisfaction.

In Canada, Vantage used an almost identical ad campaign:

Vantage will be shown as intrinsic to the contemporary lifestyle led by intelligent individuals pursuing rewarding creative activities ... Research indicates that a positioning against “intelligence” is extremely aspirational to the Vantage source smoker. Likewise, that “intelligent people” are best symbolized as individuals pursuing “creative occupations...In the initial campaign stage the product will be positioned as “hero” to transfer imagery and enjoyment values... Once the campaign and the associative transfer between “intelligent people” and the brand has been established, subsequent ads can reduce the emphasis on the “product as hero” and serve more simply as a reminder and reinforcer of the learned image (RJ Reynolds-MacDonald, 1982).

#### “High Performance” risk-taking: 1984-1988

Intended to attract the lucrative young adult market, the “High Performance” campaign projected an “adventurous, active, exciting, self-confident and achievement oriented image” of the Vantage smoker; portrayed as “sportsminded, active, outdoors people” (Albert & Marketing Development, 1984). Ads featured oblique angle images of high speed risk taking sports: racing cars, motorcycles, boats, and snowmobiles, wind surfing, flying planes, snow skiing and water skiing, white water kayaking, and gymnastic tumbling. By 1988, however, Vantage brand management was becoming aware that repositioning Vantage as a young, exciting product resulted in confusion in the younger market and alienation among the traditional Vantage users (older women) (RJ Reynolds, 1988). Research showed that the advertisements conveyed a user image of “risk takers, masculine, rich and sporty people”, whereas the traditional market had a “somewhat conservative mindset ... [and] risk taking situations are not appealing to these more conservative FFLT smokers” (Hawkins, 1988).

Struggling to establish effective user imagery while continually shifting the desired target market eventually drove RJR to abandon costly psychosocial needs-based advertising and return to product-based advertising. By mid-year 1988, a decision had been made “to develop a new long-term positioning and advertising campaign ... an exciting, impactful, and distinctive look for Vantage that is product based” (Parks, 1988). RJR also dramatically limited Vantage’s advertising budget. By 1989, RJR had decreased media expenditures for Vantage nearly \$6 million from the previous year; 1989 advertising presented a product-based comparison of Vantage with Marlboro Lights on tar and nicotine numbers. By 1990, Vantage had become an “unsupported brand” (i.e., manufactured but not advertised). Without advertising to support for Vantage, its share of market dropped more than 300% from 3.0 in 1990 to 0.88 in 1999 (RJ Reynolds, 1991, 2000).

The decision to stop advertising Vantage after 1990 likely had to do with three general reasons: 1) Vantage had a core of smokers that appeared to be motivated by the idea of low tar and the habit of buying the brand and thus did not attend to specific advertising; 2) RJR shifted their attention to the workhorse brands of the company: Camel, Winston, and Salem, the starter brands that offered greater net present value by gaining new customers from the youth market; and 3) other business decisions required the firm to show short term revenue improvements, even at the expense of longer term net profits.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Accentuating positives, eliminating negatives**

RJR held that Vantage smokers were interested in cultivating positive feelings about smoking, or at least mitigating negative feelings. As smoking continues to lose social

acceptability, it is increasingly difficult for cigarette advertisers to invoke positive feelings about smoking without invoking the sum total of feelings about smoking. It is in the interest of the tobacco industry to advertise the feelings unrelated to smoking that are desired by different market segments.

Health-concerned smokers wanted fewer, not more, negative associations with their habit, and the early Vantage advertisements inadvertently served as a reminder of just how bad smoking is both for one's health and for one's social life. Part of the appeal of the "Taste of Success" campaign resided in its ability to offer positive user imagery that was not related to smoking. Shifting attention away from health concerns was vital to this effort.

Once the low-tar aspect of a brand is established it continues to occupy the conceptual space in the market belonging to "healthier alternatives". Discussing filtered cigarettes as the early "health alternative", Pollay noted in his 1999 testimony in *Henly v. Philip Morris*,

Once that idea had been established by themselves and other marketers of other filtered products, then the advertising style moved toward more oblique ways of communicating health, that is imagery that suggested health because of pure and pristine designs and people engaged in aerobic activities in the healthy outdoors. Smoke itself had disappeared from cigarette ads (Pollay, 1999).

Our study of the Vantage history demonstrates that changes in advertising messages did not stop with covert messages of health; rather, concerns about smokers' health were eliminated altogether from communications. Smoking may or may not be included in the editorial process of advertisement creation, as smoking is not the central message of the advertisement. The intention is that the cigarette be a peripheral element that viewers will eventually, and subconsciously, come to associate with the larger desirable affective states embodied in the advertising imagery.

It is clear that cigarette firms learned to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative and be careful when messing with the in-between. They also learned that a picture was often worth a thousands words and was far less likely to trigger defensive reactions. Pictures, along with judicious choices in fonts, coloration, and photographic styles could convey the stylish sophistication, sportiness, intelligence, or risk-taking that give a brand an identity. As noted twenty-five years ago, visuals are an expressway around most regulation of advertising content (Richards & Zakia, 1981).

Like any other new product, early Vantage advertisements attempted to create awareness of the functional attributes of the brand. However, unlike other products, Vantage offered health-concerned smokers certain “benefits”, but failed to “deliver the goods” in reality. We might say that the “delivered goods” were not important reductions in health risks but rather the peace of mind that advertisements were intended to instill. Even today many smokers continue to believe low tar is better for them (Etter, Kozlowski, & Perneger, 2003; Shiffman, Pillitteri, Burton, Rohay, & Gitchell, 2001), in spite of the scientific evidence demonstrating the low tar fallacy. We contend that low tar products and PREPs are not different approaches by the tobacco industry but rather are two versions of the same approach to stave off quitting and keep profits flowing.

### **Policy Implications**

This work helps explain how psychosocial needs-based tobacco advertising that targets health-concerned smokers can be constructed to deflect attention from the problems of smoking itself and to circumvent current advertising restrictions in the USA.

Advertising and promotional activities that encourage continued cigarette consumption might be banned as in other jurisdictions such as Italy, New Zealand, and Singapore. These are nevertheless only partial bans; point-of-sale and other mechanisms are still available to the tobacco industry in these countries. Minimally, life-style portrayals that make smoking seem enviable or healthy need regulation. For example, prohibiting the use of imagery in advertisements, limiting advertisements to black-and-white text-only messages with standardized typeface, prohibiting health claims in advertisements, and requiring advertisements to focus solely on cigarettes may help reduce the negative public health impact of cigarette advertising. Additionally, public health campaigns should refocus attention back on the inherent and inevitable dangers of smoking—for the smoker and the nonsmoker alike—regardless of the type of cigarette smoked.

This incremental approach to restricting advertising has limitations. First, advertising is a part of the larger practice of marketing, which also includes but is not limited to product and package design, placement of the product within the market, pricing, and other promotional activities such as sponsorships, direct mailings, and branded merchandising. Second, the tobacco industry possesses immense resources that extend far beyond advertising. Large budgets are allocated to market research and communications testing, and several studies demonstrate the formidable financial and intellectual resources that the tobacco industry marshals to manage consumer behavior (Federal Trade Commission, 2004; Lovato, Linn, Stead, & Best, 2003; Anderson & Dunn, in press). Third, the tobacco industry is adept at exploiting legislative loopholes and avoiding responsibility (Carter, 2003; Hirschhorn, 2004). Increased scrutiny over the industry's operations and enforcement of accountability is needed.

Although our case study addresses mainly the USA, with corroboration from Canada, these considerations have important implications for global Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) protocols. The tobacco industry employs similar promotional strategies worldwide (Hafez & Ling, 2005; Bitton, Neuman, & Glantz, 2002). With respect to PREPs and other emerging technologies, FCTC stipulations against all promotion of a tobacco product that is likely to create an erroneous impression about the product's health effects, hazards, or emissions should be endorsed internationally.

PREPs are currently promoted on a health platform, as were low-tar products at their introduction to market. We argue that the industry will repeat the pattern of shifting from health messages in advertising for PREPs to psychosocial needs-based messages. Philip Morris has already attempted to evade litigation by announcing about its test market product, Marlboro Ultra Smooth, that the company “will not make reduced exposure claims... because we do not have evidence that the application of these new carbon filters warrants a reduced exposure claim” (O’Connell, 2005), all the while appealing to the needs of smokers who traditionally gravitate toward “lights” or “milds”.

## **Conclusion**

This research can inform tobacco control policy related to the marketing of PREPs that will help avoid the roadblocks to public health protections introduced by the manufacture and marketing of low-tar cigarettes. The industry will use its experience with the development and marketing of low-tar products to refine its strategies for weakening tobacco control with PREPs. By reminding the tobacco control community of the public health disaster that was low-tar and

alerting them about the similarities between low-tar and the current generation of harm-reduced tobacco products, we hope to encourage preemptive policies relating to PREPs promotion.

It is time that legislators, the public health community, and the public fully recognize the significance of the industry's public relations statements that "there is no safe cigarette,"(Philip Morris USA, 2005) and that "the best way to reduce the risks of smoking is to quit."(RJ Reynolds, 2005b) Will we be seduced by promotional messages for these new products, knowing what we do from the low-tar experience? Low-tar cigarettes gained in popularity due in part to the support of public health authorities who advocated switching to low tar for smokers who were unable or unwilling to quit. Advocating for the use of PREPs among similar smokers may well mean another four decades of uninterrupted profits for the tobacco industry through needless disease, disfigurement, and premature death for the public.



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Table 1: Vantage campaigns 1970-1988				
Campaign	Date	Message	Execution characteristics	Thumbnail image
Cop-Out	1970-1971	Low-tar Vantage doesn't "cop out" on flavor	Translation of TV images to print after TV/radio advertising ban	
Candid	1971-1976	Forthright statements from RJR about smoking problems and solution	Headline format; conversational ad copy; challenge the smoking "controversy"	
Confrontation	1977-1979	Sympathetic smoker testimonials: Vantage as solution to smoking problems in personal life	Not company persuasion, but rather smoker-to-smoker testimonials	
Vantage Point	1978-1980	For white-collar, sexually attractive people. 85s for men; 100s for women	4-color spread; attractive, white-collar models; sexual energy; bulls-eye logo	
Vantage Pleasures	1981-1983	Warm, simple pleasures of a quality life	Serene, dawn or twilight scenes; smoking does not have to be included in images	

Taste of Success	1983-1984	Personal achievement; decisive character of successful people; “can-do” attitude	Props/images suggesting success through hard work; non-threatening situations	
High Performance	1984-1988	Sports-minded risk takers; younger males	Images suggesting speed, vigor, power; color palette differentiates Regular from Ultralight	