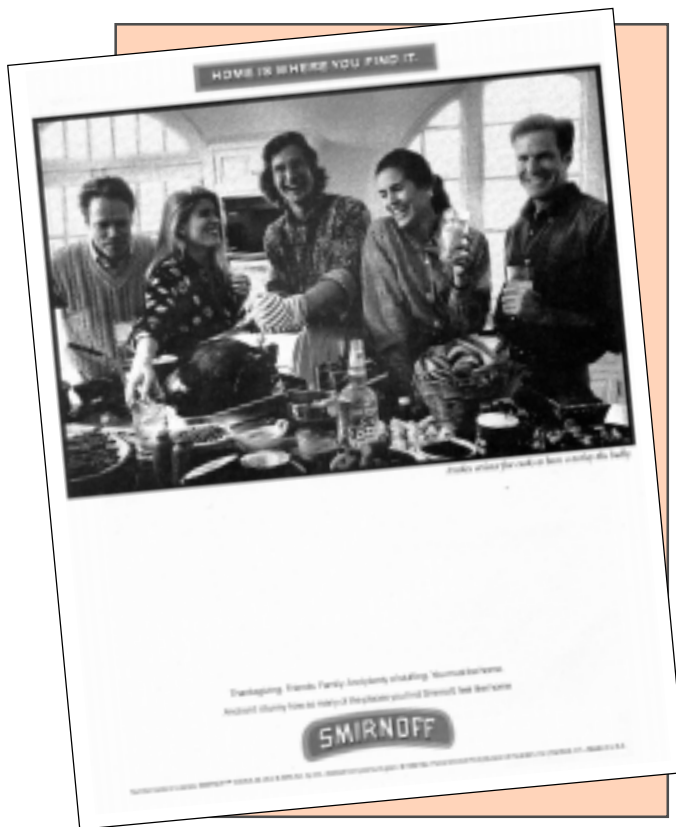


ALCOHOL PROPAGANDA

Analyzing and Countering Alcohol Industry Advertising

THEY APPEAR OVERNIGHT: new alcohol brands, new tantalizing flavors, new can or bottle labels and new dazzling promotions, all packaged and delivered with the same old hype. Whether it is Coors Beer or Hiram Walker Cinnamon Schnapps Lava, the

competition is fierce, and only a few can capture the coveted alcohol market share. With the stakes high, and millions of dollars hanging in the balance, alcohol companies simply must capitalize on their marketing campaigns. Towards this end, alcohol industry journals, like Market Watch and Beverage Dynamics, are filled each month with announcements of the latest, and in their minds greatest, promotional campaigns.



Promoting Family Values?

An analysis of the alcohol promotional campaigns of the 1990s reveals an interesting trend. Many of the ad themes emphasized a return to what the industry called “core” values, including family and home. Code words for this ad gimmick were “nesting,” “cocooning,” and “bonding.”

Smirnoff’s “Home is Where You Find It” campaign is a perfect example of this trend. A Smirnoff “Home” ad pictures five young people cooking Thanksgiving dinner and drinking Smirnoff (at left). The tag line directly underneath the photo reads, “It takes at least five cooks to burn a turkey this badly.” Perhaps the cooks would have had better luck with the big bird had they not been drinking. The tag line at the bottom of the advertisement reads “Thanksgiving. Friends. Family. And plenty of stuffing. You must be home. And isn’t it funny how so many of the places you find Smirnoff, feel like home.” This ad is so warm and cozy that, were it not for the Smirnoff logo, you might think you were reading a Hallmark card.

by Robin Wechsler

Robin Wechsler is a community organizer and trainer. For the past 15 years she has helped communities to design and implement campaigns to prevent alcohol-related problems using a grassroots, “bottom-up” approach.

prevention *Tactics* 5:2 (2001)

Tactics (tak'tiks) *n.* 1. a plan for promoting a desired end. 2. the art of the possible.

The Smirnoff “Home” ad is an example of the “glittering generalities” propaganda technique. This issue of *Prevention Tactics* will explore these techniques and present strategies for countering alcohol propaganda.

The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

THROUGHOUT THE 1990s the alcohol industry targeted children with abandon, belying its “family values” propaganda. The king of “Capturing Our Kids” is, of course, Budweiser. The ‘90s witnessed a Budweiser-sponsored parade of child-oriented cartoon characters beginning with Spuds Mackenzie, followed by Dalmatians and frogs, and culminating with the charming lizard team of Frank and Louie.

The family-friendly trend also did not interfere with the alcohol industry’s practice of wedding alcohol advertisements and pornography. St. Pauli Girl announced in the March 2000 issue of

Beverage Dynamics that Angela Little — who had “graced” the pages of Playboy magazine just a few years earlier — would be its poster girl in 2000. The announcement stated that a pin-up style poster of Angela would “also include a consumer promotion offering a trip to the Playboy mansion via the St. Pauli Girl web site.”

A review of the ads that debuted in 2000 and 2001, highlighted on the following pages, is telling of industry motives. Abandoning its family values, the industry returned to the alcohol propaganda themes we know so well.

Industry Efforts to Discourage Underage Drinking

The alcohol industry employs a self-regulatory code to minimize the extent to which underage consumers are exposed to and attracted by alcohol advertising. These voluntary advertising codes prohibit:

- 1) blatant appeals to young audiences, and
- 2) advertising in venues where more than 50% of the audience is under the legal drinking age.

In addition, many individual companies set higher internal standards to reduce the likelihood that their advertising and marketing will reach — and appeal to — underage consumers.

Internet Marketing Practices

A quick review of Internet sites reveals these practices...

- At minimum, most Web sites hosted by alcohol producers contain disclaimers that those entering the site must be of legal drinking age. Some sites require a birth date to be entered before allowing access to the main page. (Parents should be advised that installing Internet filtering software is a much more effective means of limiting access to alcohol Web sites.)
- The Absolut Company will not send *any* information regarding their product or company to an individual who is not of legal drinking age. Its policy requires that proof of identification be sent to its headquarters in Sweden before releasing product or company information.
- Miller Brewing Company has created an educational book entitled *Let’s Talk*, which is geared toward opening the lines of communication between parents and their children regarding alcohol and its consumption. Copies of *Let’s Talk* can be ordered or downloaded via the Internet.

Analyzing Alcohol Propaganda Techniques

KEY CONCEPTS

Alcohol advertisers target specific audiences using four major techniques:

1. Bandwagon (everyone is doing it)
2. Testimonial (celebrity endorsement)
3. Transfer (transforming the product into something else)
4. Glittering generalities (associating the product with a generalized value)

THE “BANDWAGON” TECHNIQUE

“Bandwagon” is the propaganda suggestion that everyone is doing something, so you should too. Even apart from the specific messages conveyed in alcohol ads, the sheer number that constantly bombards us would be enough to create the impression that 99% of us are drinking alcohol 99% of the time.

Phat Boy Malt Liquor advertises to the “NeXt Generation.” The ad, with a capital X in the word “neXt,” implies that an entire cohort of young people — already labeled generation X — will use this malt. The older malt liquor drinkers can stick with their Olde English and Schlitz. You can identify with your fellow “X-ers” by consuming Phat Boy.

Jim Beam utilizes bandwagon-type images as well. One of their recent ads shows a group of young men mugging for the camera in silly poses (at right). The tag line reads “You can count on them to never ask you to ‘Get in touch with your feminine side.’ Real friends. Real bourbon.” The bandwagon implication: your real male friends drink Jim Beam. Jim Beam is cast as a “guy” drink and if you join all your buddies who drink it, you won’t have to worry about those troubling “girlie” concerns such as relationships, communication, or sensitivity.

THE “TESTIMONIAL” TECHNIQUE

Testimonial is the propaganda technique in which a celebrity “loves” and lends their support to a particular brand of alcohol, so we should too. Examples of this technique abound. Ice Cube and Snoop Doggy Dog love St. Ides Malt Liquor. Dale Earnhardt Jr. loves Budweiser. John Elway and Magic Johnson love Coors. James Bond loves Smirnoff. The list is endless.



THE “TRANSFER” TECHNIQUE

Absolut Vodka is the undisputed champion of the transfer propaganda technique. Transfer involves using symbols, quotes or images not necessarily associated with alcohol to convey a purchase-this-brand message. The Absolut ad campaign features some *non*-alcohol item in an Absolut bottle shape with just two words underneath as the tag line. The first word is always “Absolut” with the second word acting as the “transfer” word. The vodka brand name is associated with a single image or message to persuade us, by the power of association, to drink this brand. As Richard Lewis, author of *Absolut Book: The Absolut Vodka Advertising Story*, put it, “Because the size and shape of the object [in the Absolut Ad] resemble the size and shape of the bottle, the object itself becomes an Absolut bottle. And that is the whole trick.” In the Absolut Fashion series, for example, a woman’s body becomes the bottle. In the

Absolut Cities series, an entire city, or a section of it, becomes the bottle. And so on.

Smirnoff also employs the transfer technique. As seen through the image of the Smirnoff bottle (the bottle magnifies the image and transforms it), what is ordinary becomes extraordinary. Plain gingerbread cookies spring to life, don colorful garb, and dance in the Smirnoff bottle. Through the lens of the Smirnoff bottle, traditional Christmas stockings hanging at the fireplace become shapely women’s nylons. The bottle itself literally *transfers* the image into something provocative, exciting, sexy or desirable. Like the Absolut campaign, Smirnoff completes the scene with a two-word tag line: Pure Mischief, Pure Party, Pure Surprise. This campaign is quite a departure from Smirnoff’s “Home is Where You Find It” series of the ‘90s. The “Home” campaign had a striking lack of glamour since traditional values were the buzzwords of the day.

THE “GLITTERING GENERALITIES” TECHNIQUE

Many advertisers employ the “glittering generalities” propaganda technique. These ads feature ambiguous words that generally conjure up positive emotions. For instance, if you drink Barcardi your life will be filled with “magic.” “Glittering” alcohol advertisements make implicit promises in their tag lines. They promise to deliver the good life, home, adventure, escape, excitement and sexual encounters. Budweiser promises “pride” in ads that target the gay and lesbian community, and “power” in ads that target people of color. Hennessy Cognac promises the feeling of “having been kissed” and being “swept away.” Kahlua promises “anything goes.”



Countering Alcohol Industry Propaganda

Prevention activists and organizations utilize media literacy techniques to counter industry propaganda, reframing alcohol ads to communicate the reality-based negative consequences associated with alcohol such as drunk driving, crime and violence, health problems, and abuse. For example, Adbusters, an organization devoted to exposing conspicuous consumption and out-of-control consumerism,

has delivered a powerful prevention message through counter ads that utilize many of the same advertising techniques that marketers use (see box below).

STRATEGIES

Other groups have protested the alcohol industry's co-optation of important cultural holidays. In its campaign, "Cinco de Mayo Con Orgullo," the California Latino Leadership United for Healthy Communities has brought attention to the way the alcohol industry has promoted Cinco de Mayo as a drinking holiday and trivialized or degraded the Latino culture for the purpose of selling alcohol and increasing profits.

AN ADBUSTER COUNTER AD EXAMPLE

Adbusters Media Foundation used the transfer technique in the Smirnoff "Bottle" campaign described on the previous page to reveal a truth about alcohol use. Its spoof (below) shows a line of happy young children except for one who is caught in the lens of the Smirnoff bottle. This girl has a black eye and a broken arm in a sling. The tag line

reads "Wipe That Smirkoff: 65% of child abuse cases are alcohol related."

The contrast of the smiling faces of the three children surrounding the girl caught in the bottle is jarring, a powerful reference to the connection between alcohol and family violence.

STRATEGY IN ACTION

IMAGE COURTESY www.adbusters.org



STRATEGIES

Funding a Comprehensive Counter-Ad Campaign

The tobacco control movement provides a model for both funding and implementing powerful counter-ad campaigns. No one who lives in California can miss the anti-tobacco messages that appear on freeway billboards, bus stops, and primetime TV. Even California airport billboards sport the tag line, "Welcome to California. America's non-smoking section."

Research shows that the tobacco counter-advertising campaigns have been effective in reducing tobacco use among young people and promoting public discussion regarding tobacco control policies and tobacco industry marketing tactics. How are such campaigns funded?

DEDICATED EXCISE TAXES

- California, Massachusetts and Arizona enacted tobacco tax initiatives that devoted a portion of the tax revenues to counter advertising.

LAWSUITS FOR DECEPTIVE MARKETING

- Minnesota and Florida campaigns are funded by settlements with the tobacco industry for deceptive marketing.
- The national tobacco settlement includes funds to take the counter-advertising campaign nationwide.

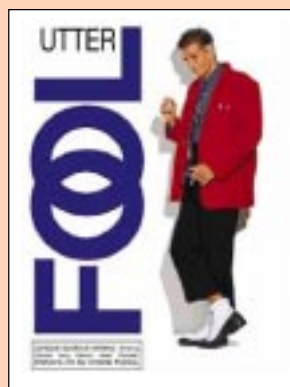
CREATE YOUR OWN COUNTER AD!

De-constructing and creating counter ads is a particularly effective prevention tactic, especially with teens.

ANALYZE AN AD...

Choose an ad and ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is the product?
2. What are the stated messages?
3. What are the implied, hidden messages?
4. What might a counter-message or Public Service Announcement look like?



A tobacco counter-ad
BROUGHT TO YOU BY
The BADvertising Institute
© 2000 Bonnie Vierthaler
www.BADvertising.com

CREATE A COUNTER AD...

Using some old magazines, scissors and glue (or a computer and mouse), create your own counter ad. Have fun!

NOW ADVERTISE!

Display your counter ad by hanging a poster, sending a postcard or e-mail greeting, including it in a presentation, putting it on your web page, or creating a screen-saver.

As Bonnie Vierthaler of The BADvertising Institute says, "Get your images out where they can do some good...!"

WHAT MESSAGES ARE AIMED AT ... YOU?

YOUTH

- Independence
- Social Acceptance
- Coolness

CULTURAL GROUPS

- Culture and Heritage
- Sophistication and Style
- Success
- Power/Empowerment
- Friendship and Social Acceptance
- Religion and Church

WOMEN

- Attractiveness, Being Thin
- Sophistication
- Pleasure
- Freedom and Independence
- Romance and Relationships
- Escape

MEN

- Sexual Conquest
- "All American"
- Success
- Sophistication

FTC RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY

In 1999, the Federal Trade Commission reviewed the alcohol industry's voluntary advertising codes for marketing to underage consumers. Here are the FTC's recommendations for strengthening its guidelines.

THIRD-PARTY REVIEW: The industry should create independent external review boards with responsibility and authority to address complaints from the public or other industry members.

HIGHER PLACEMENT STANDARD: The industry should raise the current standard that permits advertising placement in media where just over 50 percent of the audience is 21 or older.

BEST PRACTICES: All industry members should adopt the following "best practices" currently implemented by some industry members to reduce the appeal of advertising to underage consumers:

- **AD PLACEMENT:** Bar placement of alcohol ads on TV series, radio and other media with large underage audiences.
- **AD CONTENT:** Prohibit ads with substantial underage appeal, even if they also appeal to adults, or target ads to persons 25 and older.
- **PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN MOVIES AND TV:** Restrict alcohol product placement to "R" and "NC-17" rated films, and apply ad placement standards to product placement on TV programs.
- **ONLINE ADVERTISING:** Use available mechanisms to block underage access and avoid content that would attract underage consumers.
- **COLLEGE MARKETING:** Curb on-campus and spring break sponsorships and advertising.

What Can You Do?

Here are a few things that individuals, organizations and agencies can do to reduce the appeal of alcohol advertising propaganda.

❑ **Establish media literacy campaigns** in middle and high schools, and in after-school programs.

❑ **Create and display counter ads** using techniques described on the previous pages, or check out organizations such as Adbusters that can help you learn how to make and buy a TV ad on a low budget (see Resources on next page).

❑ **Monitor the alcohol marketing practices** and publicize harmful practices. Pay special attention to:

- Practices that violate FTC recommendations (see left). See back page for making a consumer complaint to the FTC.
- The use of promotional items that have strong youth appeal such as clothing, stuffed animals, candies, toys, blow-up toys, cars, and animals.
- The use of provocative images of women, particularly in settings that suggest violence or abuse against women.

❑ **Work toward limiting alcoholic beverage sponsorship** of cultural, music, sporting and other events. Many governmental and nonprofit organizations accept alcohol industry funding for community events in exchange for giving the industry opportunities to advertise at the events. Ending such sponsorship will not only reduce the amount of youth-oriented alcohol advertising but will also help build momentum for a counter-advertising campaign.

❑ **File shareholder resolutions** with alcohol producers that have the most offensive advertising. Shareholder resolutions provide another vehicle for highlighting the propaganda content of the industry's alcohol advertising.

❑ **Promote Internet filtering software** on home computers to limit access to alcohol web sites.



ALCOHOL PROPAGANDA

AVAILABLE FROM THE EMT GROUP, INC.

The following **AOD Prevention Extension workshops** address media literacy issues. They are offered free-of-charge in many areas of the state. Contact The EMT Group, Inc., at (916) 983-9506 for more information.

- "Prevention Strategies for Adolescent Girls and Young Women" by Benard, Burgoa, and Drabble.
- "Media Advocacy Basics" by Goldberg/IHA, O'Hara, and Tufenkian.

See also "Newsmaking and AOD: The Power of Media Advocacy to Advance Prevention Goals," *Prevention Tactics*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1999. Available online at www.emt.org

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

www.ftc.gov
 901 Market Street, Suite 570,
 San Francisco, CA, 94103

How to make a consumer complaint:

Contact the FTC Consumer Response Center toll-free at (877) FTC-HELP (877-382-4357), Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM EST.

WEB SITES

Adbusters Media Foundation
www.adbusters.org

The BADvertising Institute
www.badvertising.org
 Bonnie Viethaler

Institute for Health Advocacy
www.healthadvocacy.org

EDUCATIONAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- "Advertising Alcohol: Calling the Shots" (1/2 hour video). Available from Cambridge Documentary Films, P.O. Box 39038, Cambridge, MA 02139-0004. Tel: (617) 484-3993 · Fax: (617) 484-0754.
- Selling Addiction: A Workshop Kit on Tobacco and Alcohol Advertising. The Center for Media and Values, Los Angeles, CA.
- "Substance Abuse Prevention Activities" Toner, P.R. (1993). Substance abuse prevention activities. New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education.



LET'S HEAR FROM YOU!

We welcome readers' comments on topics presented. Call us at 916.983.9506, fax us at 916.983-5738, or send an email to cmkord@emt.org

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