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Cigarette Packet Warnings.

I'm pretty sure that almost everyone would have seen some of the cigarette labels on packets warning about the ills of smoking.

Ask any smoker if they have stopped smoking because of the labels and the majority would give you a flat out 'NO' answer. (You'll remember what we said about 'NO').

I'm sure that potential mothers would be aghast at the fetal deformation caused by smoking prior to and during pregnancy.

Most young men would dread not being able to kick a ball or go for a surf because their lungs had rotted away from cigarette caused lung cancer.

All of the labels have impact up to a point, but I doubt that they are overly successful at deterring or reducing the number of new or current smokers from the addiction.

The reality is that the anti smoking labels are attempting to highlight long term pain (inevitable serious health problems) to overcome short term gain (pharmacological addiction needs).

You can't beat an addiction using messages that are long term. Smokers know that it is a miserable habit and that their health will be affected, but the short term need is un-swayed by the pain some way off in the distance. For many a smoker it is simply a case of 'worrying about it when it happens'.

We need a different tack, one that addresses the more 'instant' gain with instant 'pain'.

This is also one that I am certain the cigarette companies would get REALLY upset about because they know that this would work.

The new approach would be to use the cigarette companies own weapon of choice in creating addicted people - Image and Affiliation.

To address the Affiliation issue, the labels would feature comments from well known, healthy-breathing celebrities. For instance one by Dr. John Tickell springs to mind - "It's impossible to smoke and look intelligent at the same time"

Maybe we could find the TV soapy star who'd say something like, "I used to think smoking was cool, then I grew up". I'm sure you get the idea.

Next we begin to tackle the affiliation factor by targeting the image factor.

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Try telling teenagers suffering under the weight of peer pressure that 'smoking ain't cool' and you get no where. Instead we need to coax them with a few 'reality' messages - 'Smoking makes your breath stink'. Imagine the impact that would have on a bunch of self conscious and hormone driven girls and boys.

'Smokers suck'. Language they understand.

'Brown teeth, bleeding gums? Have fun smoking'

Or what about a straight 'UGLY'.

'Think smoking is cool? - NOT!'

'Smoking makes your clothes reek'. Anyone waking up from a night in a smoke filled club knows that horrendous stench emanating from their clothing.

'Stained yellow fingers? Probably a smoker'.

Lets get the messages instant, lets get them 'now' and lets make them relate-able.

The messages ultimately transcend age groups by drawing on emotional recognition labels like embarrassment, immaturity and visual ugliness. Affiliation and Image are powerful weapons. Its time the Health authorities began using them effectively.