



free-range THINKING™

free-range thinking™ is a monthly journal of best practices, resources and generally useful stuff for public interest communicators who want to reach more people with more impact



Ads So Bad They Can Actually Do Some Good

Within the past few weeks, America's largest tobacco companies have started running television and print advertisements explicitly detailing the dangers of smoking. The ads were produced in response to a federal court order, but it took eleven years of wrangling before all sides could agree on the exact wording of these "corrective statements." The full-page print ads and [TV commercials](#) that were finally delivered may meet the specifications of the court order, but they are terrible advertising by any standard.

As Yankee legend Yogi Berra once said, "It's déjà vu all over again." In the late 1990s, Philip Morris produced a "Youth Smoking Prevention" campaign that included a series of print ads targeting parents of teenagers. The ads are a master class in what not to do if you want to engage readers and change behavior. So this month we've invited an advertising expert to revisit those ads and red-pencil all the wrong choices that went into them. It's our hope that identifying these errors - some obvious, some less so - can help you avoid similar missteps as you design marketing materials of your own. [Full story](#). Please note: Apple Mail users may need to scroll down manually.

Will We See You in Florida?

If you are a regular reader of this newsletter, you're probably going to want to block out February 6th to February 9th on your calendar. Once again, our tribe is gathering at the University of Florida at Gainesville for one of the most thought-provoking, entertaining, and downright informative events of the year. The *frank* conference, now in its fifth year, gathers movement-builders, change-makers, scientists and journalists together to discuss and debate all things good, bad, and surprising happening in the social-impact communications world. And this gathering may be even more chock full of fun than usual - the theme this year is "Play"! To see if *frank2018* is right for you, click [here](#).



frank2018

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Libby Morse

Libby Morse is Senior VP and Creative Director for [Lipman Hearne](#), a branding and communications strategy firm that works with nonprofits, foundations, colleges and universities. For more than two decades, Morse has overseen brand development and hundreds of campaigns at Lipman Hearne, and prior to that she helped develop TV, radio and print campaigns at DDB Needham Worldwide.

Before evaluating the Philip Morris ads, Morse insisted on one caveat: the ads are more than 20 years old - social media and smart phones have revolutionized how audiences look at print advertising. "We used to think that we could instruct people step-by-step how to read an ad," Morse said. "Look at the picture and headline, then read the words set in white block

below it, then have the 'a-ha moment' in the tagline. You don't see much of that anymore. Our eyes are trained to scroll, so full-bleed, bold visuals with a simple headline and minimal, if any, copy is the only way to attract eyeballs." That said, Morse identified the following problems which ad designers must still avoid today:

Failing the "at-a-glance" test

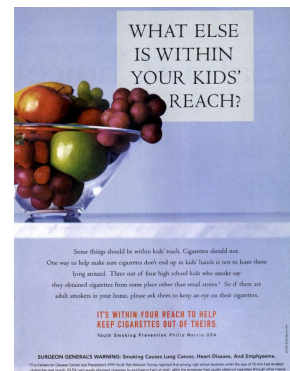
Readers page through newspapers and magazines fairly quickly, so an ad only has a second or two to grab your attention. Consequently, it has to give you some idea of what it's about in just a glance. All four of these ads fail that test miserably - there is absolutely nothing in any of the imagery or headlines that signals these are about smoking.

"The conventional wisdom in advertising used to be 'never see and say.' It wasn't considered creative," Morse said. "But audiences today want directness, transparency, and authenticity. Why isn't there a pack of cigarettes on that counter instead of a bowl of fruit?" Whether you're designing print ads, brochures or even web pages, Morse added this advice: "Think about the advertising that catches your eye when you walk through an airport. They know you're not going to stop and read because you have to get to your gate. So these days, you're not making print ads anymore. You're making *posters*."

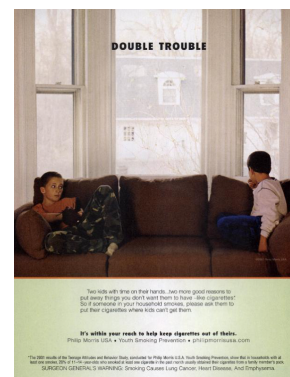
Ambiguous or confusing headlines

If a headline should make you want to read more, all of these ads fail at that level, too. The headline, "What else is within your kids' reach?" could have worked, Morse said, "but only if the ad had showed something that immediately conjures up danger." As it stands, who could fault a parent for reading the headline and thinking, "So my kid can reach fruit - that's a problem?"

Morse was similarly nonplussed by the ad with the headline "Double Trouble.""Does this mean the two kids are demon seeds?" she wondered. "That's what I see. I think they want to convey that they are bored, but it's the image itself that's boring. Think of how much more effective it would have been if we had been eye-to-eye with those kids, instead of clear across the room from them."



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Trapped space

This design flaw is present in all four ads, but it's most problematic in the one featuring the image of a basketball court. The pole supporting the backboard and hoop creates one visual boundary on the left side of the ad, and the two yellow blocks of text create another boundary on the right. The area in between is *trapped space*: empty and devoid of visual interest. And while this might seem counterintuitive, it's probably the first thing you looked at. "Your eye goes straight to where there is nothing," Morse said, and the next step is often to turn the page - the rest of the ad goes unread.

Terrible tagline

Morse, who is a voracious reader and appreciates a well-turned phrase, was particularly annoyed by the campaign's tagline, *It's within your reach to keep cigarettes out of theirs*. "It feels utterly manufactured - you can almost hear the ad team coming up with it. Successful taglines today feel intuitive, conversational - they capture the voice inside the audience's head."

Other problems: "It's shaming, which is another way of saying it's a one-way conversation. That kind of command-and-control marketing doesn't work anymore. And it's not straightforward. It has a weird circularity to it. It's within your reach to keep cigarettes out of their reach so they won't reach for them, etc., etc. And doesn't ending a sentence with the words 'theirs' look like it's a mistake? By the time you get there, your brain thinks, 'What's theirs?'"

Buried ask

Ultimately, these ads are asking adults to avoid leaving cigarettes around where teenagers can find them. The ask is not in any of the headlines, and if you read the tagline closely, it is only informing adults that they *have the power* to make cigarettes less available, but there is no explicit call to action. For that, you have to go deeper into the body copy to find the words, "put...cigarettes where kids can't get them."

"Don't leave your call to action to the tagline," says Morse. "Make it clear in the headline. And don't make it an order. Make sure your audiences feels that you know what they're up against. Be shoulder to shoulder with them. Tell them, 'Let's do this together, because we're in this together.'"



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If print advertising is a part of your communications portfolio, go to our Resources page and download a free copy of our book, *Why Bad Ads Happen to Good Causes*.

Based on unprecedented research into nonprofit magazine and newspaper advertising, this book can help you avoid common mistakes in ad design and copywriting.

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Upcoming online classes at The Goodman Center

TELL BETTER STORIES

**Storytelling:
Tapping the Power
of Narrative**

**January 10, 17, 24 & 31
9am - 10am PT**

PRESENT BETTER

**Why Bad
Presentations
Happen to Good
Causes**

**January 18 & 19
11am - 12pm PT**

CAMPAIGN BETTER

**Strategic
Communications:
Cutting Through
the Clutter**

**February 1 & 2
11am - 12pm PT**

Click on the class title to read more!

About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

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WHAT ELSE IS WITHIN YOUR KIDS' REACH?

Some things should be within kids' reach. Cigarettes should not. One way to help make sure cigarettes don't end up in kids' hands is not to leave them lying around. Three out of four high school kids who smoke say they obtained cigarettes from some place other than retail stores.* So if there are adult smokers in your home, please ask them to keep an eye on their cigarettes.

**IT'S WITHIN YOUR REACH TO HELP
KEEP CIGARETTES OUT OF THEIRS.**

Youth Smoking Prevention Philip Morris USA

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, And Emphysema.

*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported that among high school students under the age of 18 who had smoked during the past month, 23.5% had usually obtained cigarettes by purchasing them at retail, while the remainder had usually obtained cigarettes through other means.

©2000 Philip Morris USA

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DOUBLE TROUBLE



Two kids with time on their hands...two more good reasons to put away things you don't want them to have—like cigarettes*. So if someone in your household smokes, please ask them to put their cigarettes where kids can't get them.

It's within your reach to help keep cigarettes out of theirs.

Philip Morris USA • Youth Smoking Prevention • philipmorrisusa.com

*The 2001 results of the Teenage Attitudes and Behavior Study, conducted for Philip Morris U.S.A. Youth Smoking Prevention, show that in households with at least one smoker, 20% of 11–14-year-olds who smoked at least one cigarette in the past month usually obtained their cigarettes from a family member's pack.

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, And Emphysema.

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SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, And Emphysema.
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TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT NOT SMOKING. THEY'LL LISTEN.

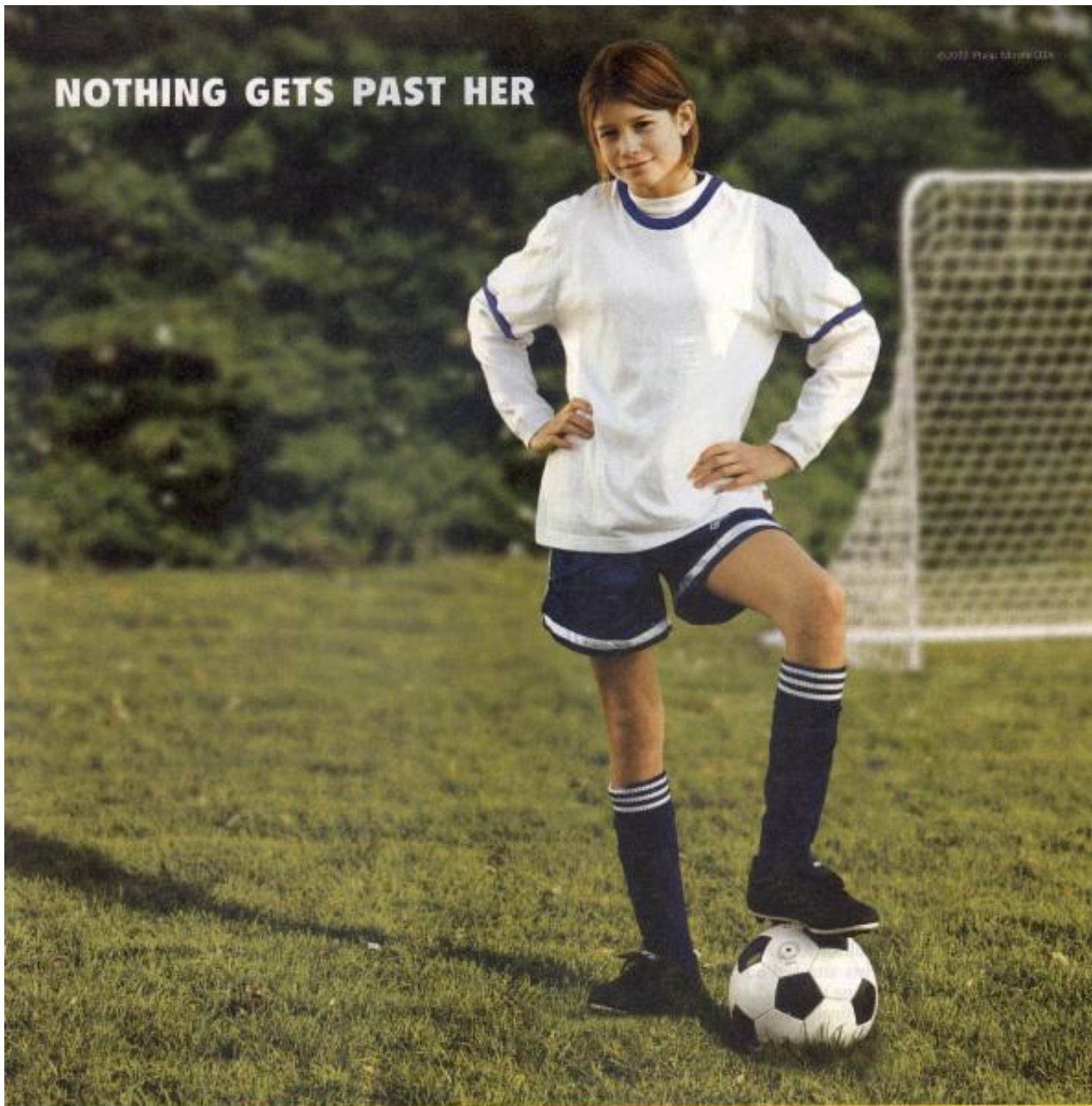
For a free brochure to help you talk to your kids about not smoking, please visit our website at www.PhillipMorrisUSA.com or call 800-662-3177.

Youth Smoking Prevention Philip Morris USA

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NOTHING GETS PAST HER

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Kids notice everything. That's just the way they are. Which is a very good reason to put away things you don't want them to have — like cigarettes*. So if someone in your household smokes, please ask

them to put their cigarettes where kids can't get them.

For a free brochure to help you talk to your kids about not smoking, please visit our website at www.PhillipMorrisUSA.com or call 800-662-3177.

It's within your reach to help keep cigarettes out of theirs.
Youth Smoking Prevention • Philip Morris USA

*The 2001 results of the Teenage Attitudes and Behavior Study, conducted for Philip Morris U.S.A. Youth Smoking Prevention, show that in households with at least one smoker, 1 in 5 of 11–14-year-olds who smoked at least one cigarette in the past month usually obtained their cigarettes from a family member's pack.

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, And Emphysema.

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