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# TOBACCO MARKETING UPDATE

Reducing Youth Exposure to Tobacco Advertising and Promotion

## FDA investigating JUUL e-cigarette for targeting youth



An example of JUUL's early marketing. The bright colors and young models make the ad appealing to youth.

By *BETSY BROCK*

JUUL, the company that makes the wildly popular e-cigarette with the same name, is under investigation by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Massachusetts Attorney General for targeting youth. JUUL launched in 2015, and the \$16 billion company now controls more than 70 percent of the e-cigarette market share. The brand is very popular with high school students. In recent months, the company has come under scrutiny for its marketing practices. In particular, many of the early JUUL ads were colorful and featured young models. In addition, marketing materials focused heavily on youth-friendly flavored products such as “cool cucumber” and “crème brulee.” There is also concern that the company didn’t sufficiently ensure those who purchased the products online were of legal age. The FDA ordered JUUL to turn over company marketing and scientific reports in order to help the FDA determine if JUUL specifically targeted youth. In mid-September, the FDA took it one step further. The FDA put JUUL and three other e-cigarette companies (Vuse made by R.J. Reynolds, blu made by Imperial Brands, and Logic brand) on notice that they have 60 days to prove they have the systems in place to ensure young people can’t access these products. Failure to do so could result in the removal of these products from the market.

In response to FDA criticism, JUUL has taken several measures. First, going forward they will only feature models 35 years and

older in marketing materials. They also don’t plan to highlight flavors in company ads. JUUL also launched a youth tobacco prevention “curriculum” for schools. The curriculum is based on teaching students mindfulness techniques. The company sent a letter to school administrators across the country offering the curriculum. To many, the offer seems a bit deceptive and is reminiscent of a tobacco industry tactic. Tobacco companies have a long history of developing tobacco curricula. Research indicates these curricula are ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst (i.e. they might actually encourage youth tobacco use). JUUL responded to this criticism by saying company executives were unaware that tobacco companies have a history of offering curricula. However, at least one member of JUUL’s Board of Directors also served on the Board of one of the largest smokeless tobacco companies.

The future of JUUL and the outcome of the investigation of company marketing practices is unknown. In the meantime, JUUL’s popularity continues to rise with adults and youth alike.

**Questions or to subscribe:  
Please contact Betsy Brock at  
651-646-3005 or  
betsy@ansrmn.org**



# TOBACCO MARKETING UPDATE

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## Seed to Cigarette? How Tobacco Companies Use “Cause Marketing” to Increase Sales

By *MADÉLINE BREMEL*

Tobacco companies, including Grizzly, Marlboro and American Spirit, frequently promote their efforts to support charitable initiatives. Recently, this has become common in marketing across all industries. Corporate charity is increasingly celebrated as a happy solution to multi-dimensional problems. Consumers purchase ordinary goods, but also can feel proud of themselves, knowing an amount of the price they paid will support causes like organic farming, sustainable agriculture, or fair wages. Corporations promote their efforts with “cause marketing,” and it looks like a win-win-win scenario for the consumer, the industry, and the greater good. But unfortunately, there is underlying criticism that this simplistic system allows companies to promote charity without engaging in much of it, discourages individuals from supporting other more productive charity efforts, and promotes irrational and excessive consumption of unnecessary products.

These problems are especially relevant to cause marketing by the tobacco industry: conglomerates of companies who, no matter their charitable contributions, are in the business of selling lethal products to consumers invariably against consumers’ greater self-interest. Evidence suggests cause marketing appeals disproportionately to young people, ages 18-24, an important and problematic audience for the tobacco industry.

The theory of moral licensing suggests that, in response to making a decision we see as morally 'good,' we will often overcompensate by subsequently allowing ourselves to engage in a destructive behavior. It seems the tobacco industry is especially aware of this idea. Tobacco companies have a long history of using cause marketing to promote their products. The practice continues today.

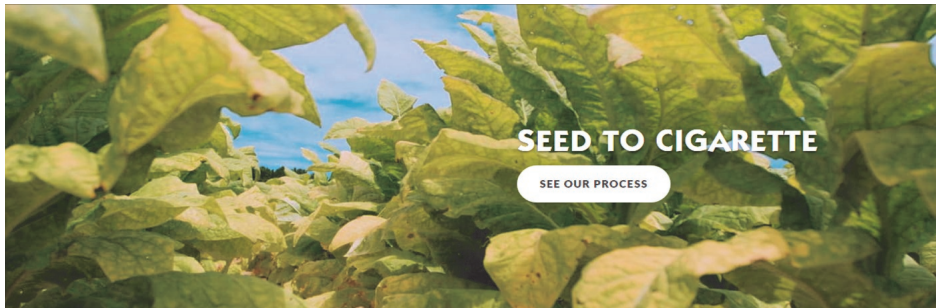
This month, the American Spirit cigarette brand sent out an email promoting their mobile coupons as an eco-friendly alternative to paper coupons, disregarding that cigarette butts resulting from every purchase would only contribute to global waste when they were discarded.

In fact, recent research sponsored by another cigarette company, Marlboro, in order to promote their own eco-friendly campaign, found cigarette butts account for 32 percent of all litter.

Grizzly smokeless tobacco spent the summer promoting "Grizzly Outdoor Corps" which supports habitat conservation and population management with the aim of preserving hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation areas, and Marlboro cigarettes recently wrapped up their "Stand for the Land" promotion aimed at better cigarette butt disposal. This campaign encouraged smokers to contact Marlboro about public locations in their area that did not allow easy disposal of cigarette butts. Marlboro would subsequently distribute disposal cans to those locations. This example, while helpful to some degree, ignores the reality that the surest way for smokers to decrease the burden of cigarette waste would be to stop purchasing cigarettes all together.

Perhaps the most ironic example of the tobacco industry's perverse marketing tactics is American Spirit's promotion of their organic tobacco products. Across their website, the company portrays leafy images and happy farmers tilling sunny fields. Their products, promoted as organic, natural, and simplistic, indirectly imply American Spirit cigarettes may offer the same types of health benefits that accompany other organic food products. It isn't until you come upon the cleverly disguised Surgeon General's warning hovering inconspicuously at the bottom of the page, that you understand "Organic tobacco does NOT make a safer cigarette" and "Natural American Spirit cigarettes are not safer than other cigarettes." They sure make it easy to miss the important point.

Sources: Marlboro, Grizzly, American Spirit, International Journal of Communication



American Spirit's promotion of their natural tobacco products: a spin-off on a common cliché.



Grizzly promotes their initiative as simplistic and masculine.