

'Illegal cigarette' awareness campaign may get more people smoking

 By [Felix Kessel](#)

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When South Africa took the step to ban cigarette advertising, it was with the hope that the adoption of smoking would end. So, our televisions and movie screens were stripped of beautiful, young, successful and sporty people lighting up a cigarette and enjoying a 'healthy' life.



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Slowly the images of the glorious smoking lifestyle faded away; the cigarette was no longer in the upper echelon of our awareness. Relegated to point of sale, pack innovation, permission-based marketing and other dark marketing practices they have, however, persevered. And now they're back.

Consider cigarettes again

Then, this year, cigarette communication has once again taken centre stage, forcing people to consider cigarettes again - perhaps not to the same degree as when B&H commercials promoting skiing and smoking filled the airwaves or when the Marlboro Man made us want to ride off into the sunset on our horse - but they have made it back onto the billboards and interrupted our daily journeys once again, even if its message is somewhat more sinister.

Instead of the lifestyle positioning, the message is all ominous: "Buying Illegal Cigarettes Funds Organised Crime!"

Pamphlets, print ads and billboards all raise the profile of the tobacco product once more, in what is probably a loophole in the legislation overseeing advertising-restricted products.

While there is no recognisable brand to be seen, the Tobacco Institute of South Africa has taken centre stage in

communicating that consumers who buy a pack of cigarettes for under R14.50 are probably buying illegal cigarettes, and so are more than likely supporting organised crime syndicates who use the profits of illegal cigarettes to fund their dastardly deeds.

Applying the lessons learnt

The campaign is extensive, probably applying the lessons learnt during the time when cigarette advertising marketing budgets kept the SABC profitable.

The result is that smokers and non-smokers are, for the first time in years, exposed to the concept of cigarettes and smoking again. Smokers may question the local café or garage shop as to the integrity of his or her cigarette supplier. Then again, being addicted and with the cost of cigarettes maxed out by sin tax, they probably just won't.

Of course, the tobacco industry won't care because a sale is a sale, whether through a middle man, a reputable supplier or illegal importer - at some point the manufacturer was paid for his product - how it gets to the smoker from there is more or less irrelevant, as long as it does. Nicotine is a drug, remember?

So what the Tobacco Institute of SA really achieved doing is to get people thinking and talking about cigarettes again, without promoting a single brand. And this technique is not new. A few of us might remember industry-body advertising campaigns that promoted the product category, rather than any single brand.

Product category campaigns

Do you recall the American ["Got Milk" campaign](#), which promoted the consumption of milk without saying what brand of milk? Similarly, the American beef industry also went on an advertising campaign when the sale of beef dropped. [Beef Daily](#) reported that, "Both the 'Beef, It's What's For Dinner' and 'Beefscape' campaigns have proven to reach the appropriate audiences in increasing demand for beef, and it's always exciting to hear these commercials on the radio or see them in the pages of a magazine."

The difference here is that neither beef nor milk are viewed as been deadly and are not restricted in terms of the manner in which they are promoted to the consumer. Cigarettes are.

So, I must take my hat off to the Tobacco Institute of SA for doing what its industry partners could not. Through this campaign, it has once again gotten us thinking and talking about cigarettes and offered you, the addicted smoker, a glimmer of hope in your downward spiral to emphysema: cheap cigarettes. It has successfully found a way to briefly put cigarettes front and centre in your world.

Come to think about it, this article probably does the same...

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ABOUT FELIX KESSEL

Born a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, where writing was the only way to survive the suburban ennui of his homeworld, Felix wrote his way into a strange land called advertising. Currently, he is the creative lead at WPP's agency for Distell, TeamLiquid.

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