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Marketing

## Philip Morris puts best face forward

**P**HILIP MORRIS has a marketing message that is elegant in its simplicity:

We are not the devil.

After a decade of having its brains beat out in the court of public opinion, the world's most famous tobacco company has unleashed a massive corporate image campaign to sell its softer side.

"People were getting all their information about us from our critics," said Victor Han, vice president of corporate affairs at Philip Morris Cos. "They took over the floor of debate."

That debate took center stage in the '90s. Mississippi, Florida, Texas and Minnesota sued Big Tobacco and won multibillion-dollar settlements. Joe Camel was staked out and skinned. Tobacco billboards were banished across the land. And Hollywood made a movie that depicted a Big Tobacco informant as a tormented but hunky hero.

In short, the movement finally was able to seize the Marlboro Man by his lapels and gave him a good shaking. Philip Morris, by its own admission, initially responded to the storm by looking for a good place to hide.

"We went into a bunker. We didn't do a lot of talking, and we didn't do a lot of listening," Han said. "Now we want to show our face and talk about what we are. . . . Our corporate image is not good for our stock price, and it's not good for our ability to attract and retain the best and brightest people."

### Showing company's other side

One of the primary goals of the campaign is to show the public that Philip Morris is more than a tobacco company. It also owns Kraft Foods and Miller Brewing Co. It makes Shredded Wheat and Oscar Mayer bologna, Stove Top stuffing and Maxwell House coffee. How nasty could the maker of Kool-Aid and Jell-O really be?

A second goal is to show Philip Morris as a responsible company that gives generously to charities all over the country. A prime example is a new television commercial about domestic vio-

lence, encouraging battered women to seek help for their own sake and that of their impressionable children. The ad also posts a hot line number for those needing help.

"Whenever the ad runs, the switchboard for the hot line lights up like a Christmas tree. Philip Morris wrote a check to help the hot line keep up with demand," Han said.

Community sponsorships is not a new tactic for Philip Morris. It has been a leading sponsor of the fine arts since the 1950s. What is new is the company has redoubled its efforts to be recognized for those donations.

In the most recent edition of the New York Times Magazine, the company has a full-page ad showing a picture of an elderly woman and the heading, "Ardie has a hot lunch date."

"Ardie Collingsworth can receive a hot meal, and a visitor, almost every day. That's because Philip Morris provides grants to eliminate waiting lists for Meals on Wheels programs across the country," the ad reads. It goes on to say the company has spent \$350 million on food and donations to fight hunger during the past decade.

The final piece of the campaign puzzle is anti-smoking ads aimed at teen-agers.

"I don't need to smoke to prove myself," a girl says confidently in one television ad. "My coolness is not on trial here."

### Effort viewed as a 'smoke screen'

Not surprisingly, Philip Morris' efforts have been met with skepticism by those who remember how Big Tobacco formulated strategies to recruit "replacement smokers" to fill the void left by customers dying of cancer.

"It is a brilliant campaign, but this is a smoke screen. The industry really hasn't changed," said Dr. Alan Blum, founder of Doctors Ought to Care, a Houston-based anti-smoking initiative. "They are doing these ads for one reason only, to preserve and protect the well-being of Marlboro. This is a public company. They have a responsibility to their shareholders not to just give piles of money away. If they are giving money away, it's for a reason. And that reason is Marlboro, which generates as much profit for the company as all of its different food brands combined."

Faced with a choice between making noise and making money, Philip Morris decided to stop bashing its critics and get happy. And it looks like happy sells.

"One of my colleagues has an aunt who told him, 'Why are you beating up on this nice company?'" Blum said, amazement dripping from his voice. "To judge by these ads, they are the good guys now."

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