



Getting the Pack to Speak for Itself: Cigarette Packaging in the Face of Restrictions on Advertising

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Canada

1986: ITL prepares for restrictions

You may or may not have heard that we currently have some very restrictive legislation staring us in the face and we are scrambling to do the work that we should have perhaps been done a while ago.

ITL Market Strategist, Bill Rose, to BAT, 1986



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When Health Canada introduced the Tobacco Products Control Act (Bill C-51) in 1986, and threatened to end all tobacco advertising, Imperial Tobacco began to plan a response to this new regulatory environment.

In 1986, Bill Rose of ITL's marketing strategy department wrote to Rob Ferris of BAT research to seek information.:

Bob tells me that he spoke to you at one time about doing a study on what communications channels opened when restrictions went into place. I'm wondering if you've ever done away work in this area and/or who else might be knowledgeable on such things." (RN 206, 40092617)

A description of Project Harpo, attached to his letter, stated:

"We are currently faced with a set of draconian restrictions that would virtually eliminate our traditional means of expressing lifestyle positioning...It is more than likely that we are looking at the loss of conventional image material in all media (retail included) - and new rotational warnings. We are faced with more prominent health warnings on our packs - and possibly, the closing of the door on trademark diversification." Nov 25, 1986. (Rn206, 400929618).

Project Harpo: Marketing when silenced

We should look closely at the legal status of our trademarks and ensure that they are less vulnerable to restrictions, legally, than may be the case today. We should certainly line up our options in terms of creative media/packaging alternatives and explore and prioritize them.

Project Harpo, 1986



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In-house, Imperial launched Project Harpo, which was to look at what the company should be doing now to prepare, and how activities should be conducted in the future (400929618), examining market dynamics, how to tap into new channels of communication, whether and how to exploit US overflows, and much more.

The starting point for HARPO was to find out what had been learnt elsewhere in BAT, from countries with ad bans in place such as Finland and Singapore.

**BAT helps out:
Research on Communicating under
Restrictions**

Well, Bob is correct in recalling that I have been obsessed with the issue of communication restriction over the last few years, to the extent of committing a third of my and/or my resources to the subject in that period.

ITL Market Strategist, Bill Rose, to BAT, 1986

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From 1979 onwards, stimulated by discussions at a BAT group conference on marketing futures held at Jestedberg that year, BAT prepared carefully for advertising restrictions Rob Ferris went on to say that:

“Our interpretation of some of the themes from Jestedberg took two directions:

1. Development of techniques to allow measurement of visual impact of communications at pack, gantry and external advertising levels.
2. Research of social communications networks in communications ban environments....” (RN206,400929609)

Rob Ferris’ letter to ITL attached copies of reports done by the Group Research and Development Centre, and gave some contact names for the key players working on these issues.

The Jestedberg conference appears to have stimulated a large field of work, including:

- analyses of what had happened in markets with bans, such as Singapore and Finland
- analysis of types of restrictions
- what happened in terms of prevalence, etc
- new channels of communication that opened up (‘project whisper’)
- tracking of penetration of new brands pre and post ban
- Work to maximize the effectiveness of packaging, point of sale and other remaining vehicles

ITL in Montreal was able to tap into this research, and indeed, proceeded to replicate a number of the studies to test their applicability to Canada, and apply them to the local market.

Visual and Brand Imagery

As far as pack design itself is concerned, there are two aspects which are important and they are brand imagery and visual impact. With the luxury of advertising most of our effort in pack design has been on the side of imagery. Thus, the imagery created using the advertising media is carried right through to the pack design itself.

Principles of Measurement of Visual Standout in Pack Design, RD2039



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Pack research focussed on two key dimensions: visual impact and brand imagery.

Visual impact was critical: if the cigarette package didn't get seen, it couldn't convey its message.

Brand imagery, though, was considered the most important: the pack does not simply convey information about the product, it conveys a whole set of associations, and attempts to tap into the motivations of smokers.

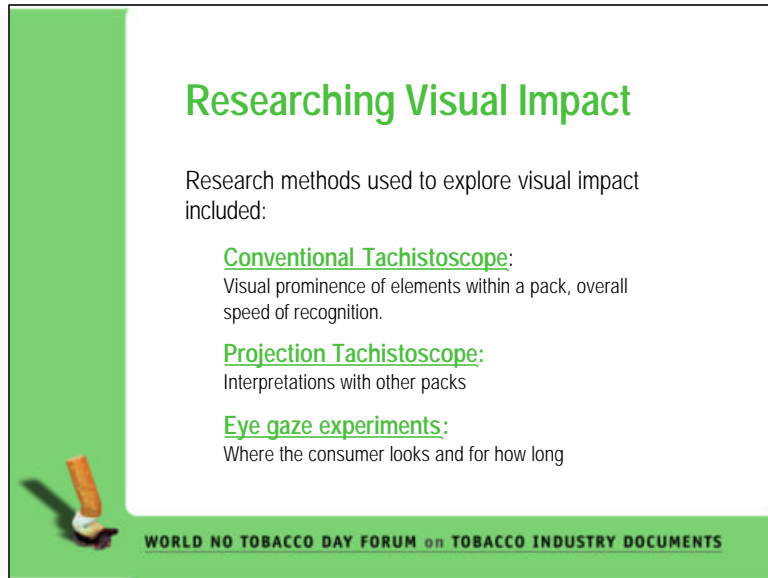
Good summaries prepared by the BAT of some of the techniques available are:

Product communication in the context of varying degrees of communication restriction: RN 380; and

Principles of visual standout in pack design Report no RD 2039: RN 82.

Application of Repertory Grid Technique I. An investigation of brand images, RN 76


The Influence of Brand Identification and imagery on Subjective Evaluation of Cigarettes, RN 311 cover these approaches.



Researching Visual Impact

Research methods used to explore visual impact included:

- Conventional Tachistoscope:**
Visual prominence of elements within a pack, overall speed of recognition.
- Projection Tachistoscope:**
Interpretations with other packs
- Eye gaze experiments:**
Where the consumer looks and for how long

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The report, Product communication research (RN380) explains the type of questions these techniques can be used to answer.

Conventional Tachistoscope - Can answer questions such as:

- how can we ensure that the brand name for a product is the most visible item on the pack, to ensure a new product is viewed in the context of the established brand family?
- if we change the colour of the pack for the new product, but retain the chevron, will it be as visible?

Projection tachistoscope: Size of stimulus material possible is bigger, so that subjects can be exposed to a photograph of a point of sale wall, and look at interactions with other packs. Answers questions such as:

- which design stands out best when placed next to other (brand) packs.
- what is the best positioning for a logo where there are legal restrictions on size.

Eye gaze experiments - shows where the consumer directs eyes and for how long.

- Used to find the best place to put packs on shop shelves.
- Learn how to 'trap' gaze on the packs through pack design
- The company is giving out free clocks for mounting on walls in shops. What is the best position for the clock, and how should company packs be placed relative to it?

Researching Brand Imagery

- **Repertory grid:**
 - Develops a 'map' of brands from consumer views on image associations, type of smoker expected to smoke the product, expectations of product characteristics
- **Patterns and colours**
 - that appeal to target personality types
- **Delta panels:**
 - Does the pack improve the perception of the product or work against it?
 - Does the pack image correctly position the product in terms of strength, target audience?



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In addition to the studies mentioned previously, two other BAT research papers cover brand imagery research:

Repertory grid – develops a 'map' of the brand in three dimensions: expectations of product characteristics (eg rough/smooth, satisfying/unsatisfying), type of smoker expected to smoke the product (eg male/female, affluent/cost conscious), and image associations (eg expensive/cheap, masculine /feminine, sporty/sedate).

Personality and patterns: for example, red for extraverts, blue for introverts. In addition, designers noted that particular pattern types fit personality types, eg the Marlboro chevron. These could be matched against market segmentation studies, as well as sales figures for particular brands.

DELTA - The DELTA panels were normally used to evaluate sensory characteristics of cigarettes, but experiments revealing brand name and packaging separately to assess their influence on perceptions were used to assess the impact of imagery on perceptions of the product.

Brand Imagery

From a consumer perspective, brand image appears to have three different aspects:

SLIDE 21

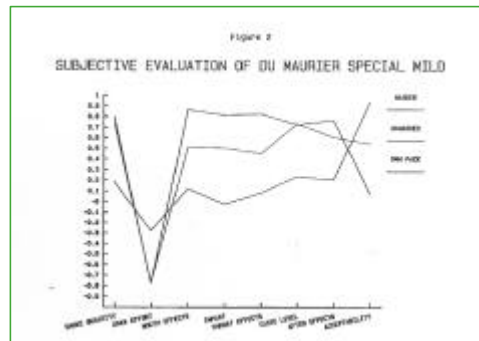
- General abstract image values (e.g. aspiration, formality, sophistication)
- Expected user associations (e.g. age, class, lifestyle)
- Expected smoking associations (e.g. strength, irritancy)



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The pack by itself was expected to play a key role in conveying the images and associations of the brand. As one of BAT's marketing training documents puts it: "The modern cigarette pack is not just a container, it has to have a personality!." (RN 678, 500171987)

Brand Imagery & Dimensions of Perception



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As the discussion of this chart in the report indicates (402374222), this chart illustrates the dimensions against which DELTA panels evaluate the product. Panels were skilled, and could reproduce results reasonably accurately. The three lines show, however, the impact of the packaging. Revealing the name of the product increased the overall acceptability of the product. Putting the cigarettes in their own packs increased acceptability even further. Putting them in their own pack simultaneously enhanced and diminished sensory perceptions. Perception of mouth effects, impact, and throat effects. Overall, the report finds that the pack imagery portrayed the product as milder.

The Importance of Colour

Lower delivery products tend to be featured in blue packs. Indeed, as one moves down the delivery sector then the closer to white a pack tends to become. This is because white is generally held to convey a clean, healthy association.

Principles of Measurement of Visual Standout in Pack Design, 1986



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COLOUR:

These brand affects were apparently achieved through a number of cues. Colour was recognized as important in a number of the reports. It could be used to:

- Indicate strength – eg. Red for full strength, green for menthol
- Appeal to particular personality types
- Effects on speed of recognition of a pack

It can also be tailored to appeal to personality types:

“It is well known that certain personality types prefer (and are physiologically receptive to) particular colours. This applies at the simplest level for extroverts and red, and introverts and the colour blue.” (RN715, 403634118)

Colour could also affect how quickly a brand is recognized. (Eg. RN 82, 102699362, 102699374-375, 390, 394)

The Role of Key Words

we have learnt that tar level isn't the only determinant of strength. Other main contributors would be the qualifier (strong, medium, light), packaging and other elements that contribute to the trademark image. A good illustration of this is Player's Medium versus Player's Light; the tar level of these two brands is practically identical (14 vs. 13) - yet in image terms, they are perceived to be significantly different on strength (6.4 versus 5.1).

ITL Memo to "Actual vs. Perceived Strength" 1993



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DESCRIPTORS

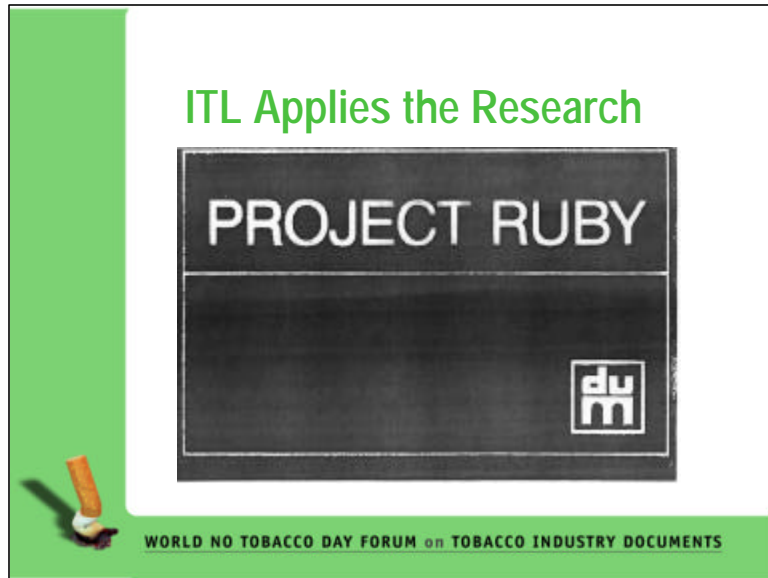
Just the use of the words 'special mild' appears to have influenced perceptions in the Du Maurier masked testing study: One finding of the study was that imagery influences seemed to be more important in the low tar sector:

"There is considerably more variation across presentations in the low tar portion of the cohort (deviations from stability, Table 10). This is an interesting point since the width of this tar band (3-4mg) is no different from that of the high tar portion."

Don Brown, now CEO of Imperial Tobacco, reported on the relationship of brand descriptors (like 'light' or 'mild') and perceptions of strength in a letter to BAT:

"Although 'tar', nicotine and C.O. numbers are printed on all packs and used by consumers for reference, perceived strength measured through image studies is a more important brand positioning measure for us.....

When we position our brands, we use all the tools to place our brands at the desired position in relation to the parent and the competition. Therefore, a light version of Player's will not necessarily be positioned at an identical strength level to compete with a DuMaurier. It will be true to the trademark positioning and in correct relation to the parent. Therefore, all the elements (tar level, packaging, product etc) must conform to the create the desired image." 202200798



ITL set about applying this research to ensure that its products were well positioned to cope with the coming restrictions.

Project Spur aimed at rejuvenating the Players family started in 1988. It focused on preparing for Bill C-51, including redesigning packaging to accommodate health warnings, using changes to the product and the packaging to counter rumours around fibreglass (prevalent in the West), and repositioning in terms of consumer perceptions. (PSC 119).

It had an interim target date, to meet the legislative requirements, but had started too late to be completely ready. The project continued under the auspices of Project Dreyfus (with the objective of dispelling the fibreglass rumour), and Project Spur II (PSC 115, 303542008-024, 1990 marketing plans).

PROJECT RUBY 's objectives were to:

1. Correct Du MAURIER Red's strength perception problem..
2. Ensure that all marketing elements communicate contemporary class..."
202235557

Its strategy based was on the idea that:

"Packaging is not as modern as it should be. Packaging modifications can also communicate a milder perception."

The advertising strategy to create awareness of the new design was to:

"Specifically, reassure the du MAURIER franchise that the product has not changed and imply to opposition smokers that du MAURIER has been improved to encourage trial." PSC 115, 303542048

The Research Helped!

IMPERIAL ANTICIPATED THIS LEGISLATION FOR SOME TIME NOW AND HAS BEEN QUIETLY GETTING ITS HOUSE IN ORDER. IT'S KEY TRADEMARKS ARE PROGRESSIVE AND WELL POSITIONED. MANY OF THE REMAINING AVENUES OF CONSUMER INFORMATION - PACKAGING, PRODUCT SENSORY CHARACTER, SYMBOLS, MERCHANDISING ARE ALREADY ACTIVE COMPONENTS OF THE COMPANY'S STRATEGIC PLAN.

Purdy Crawford, CEO Imasco, 1989



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In 1989, Purdy Crawford, CEO of IMASCO reported to the senior officers of BAT group companies during the regular Chairman's Advisory Conference about the role of packaging in Canada after the TPCA imposed a ban on advertising:

"At the core of this portfolio, consumer information on emerging perceptions has allowed imperial to make some fairly bold modifications to existing families in order to prepare them for the future...the consistency of overall design was structured in such a way that it would facilitate the least intrusive application of c-51 warnings and permit the greatest possible degree of trademark consistency within the coming marketing restrictions." 20179597.
HC