

Tobacco bought its way into movies. It's time to get it out again.

First, cross-promotion

During Hollywood's "Golden Age," more than two-thirds of America's top adult box office stars advertised tobacco brands.

What did film studios get in return for brokering these deals? Valuable national ad campaigns plugging their contract stars and latest films, paid for by the tobacco industry.

What did the tobacco companies get out of it? Stars smoking on screen reinforced every cent the companies spent on their brand advertising.

Then product placement

In the early 1950s, tobacco promotion shifted to TV. By the time tobacco ads were barred from radio and TV in 1970, Hollywood no longer kept brands off screen. So, through at least the early 1990s, tobacco companies again bought their way into movies through product placement deals involving hundreds of films.

Exposure led to a 1998 legal agreement with state Attorney Generals that barred paid brand placement by domestic tobacco companies. Yet smoking in mainstream movies continued to climb, peaking as late as 2005.



What's changed for audiences? In 2011, they saw Brad Pitt, Johnny Depp, Daniel Craig, Bryan Cranston and Phillip Seymour Hoffman using Marlboro, Kool, Camel and Copenhagen brands in five different PG-13 and R-rated films from one major studio.

Movies still sell smoking

In 2011, kid-rated films delivered twice as many tobacco exposures as in 2010. Whoever decides it, top stars continue to be associated with tobacco brands on screen (above).

"TOBACCO COMPANY ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES CAUSE ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT SMOKING INITIATION AND ARE COMPOUNDED BY DEPICTIONS OF SMOKING IN THE MOVIES."

U.S. Surgeon General, March 2012

Bottom line? Movies continue to recruit large numbers of new young smokers who replace the adult smokers killed by tobacco.

The R-rating solution

In March 2012, the U.S. Surgeon General reviewed the scientific evidence and history of commercial links between the tobacco and film industries. She then joined other leading health authorities in concluding that the adoption of the R-rating for all future films with tobacco imagery, excepting films that depict tobacco's real health consequences or portray actual historical people who smoked, would contribute to a reduction in youth smoking.

The tobacco industry has exploited movies for at least seven out of the last nine decades. The R-rating will ensure that the movies young people see most often are, in the future, tobacco-free.

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