

BUGA UP FOUR YEARS ON

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BUGA UP (Billboard Utilising Graffiti Against Unhealthy Promotions) set the tone of militancy among non-smoking groups at the 5th World Conference on smoking and health. It had a dramatic affect on the advertising and politics of tobacco in Australia and world-wide.

This paper will describe

1. BUGA UP's origins and methods
2. The spread of its philosophy and tactics
3. Examples of its social and political effects.

BUGA UP was started in 1979 by three activists who wanted an acronym so their actions in protesting against tobacco advertising could be seen as part of a movement to question the right of wealthy corporations to deliberately promote ill health through advertising. The acronym was a way of distinguishing their efforts from vandalism and linking diffuse subjects in a common campaign. They had no resources but a legitimate message. Though the big corporations and advertisers involved in legal drug pushing tried to portray them as vandals, the public were able to see they were fighting against the slick, dishonest manipulations of the advertisers.

The activists understood the principle that to sell a product with no intrinsic merit, the advertiser had to build up an image that is pleasurable, then link the product with the image. The images of health that cigarette ads portray have nothing to do with the product. This doesn't worry the advertiser but is very good for the satirist

BUGA UP satire was very public, and. the acronym linked activists who worked independently or in small groups.

As well as billboards, BUGA UP used demonstrations with amusing handouts which satirised the tobacco industry. Cigarette give aways and tobacco sponsored events were also targets for street theatre and protests.

BUGA UP activists were not keen to be arrested but if this occurred, they played for all the publicity possible and this led to more notoriety than the original billboards. Arrested activists pointed out that cigarette advertising should be illegal under the Trade Practices Act Section 52 prohibiting practices which "mislead and deceive or are likely to mislead or deceive." The misleading ad was a greater crime than the "altering" of the ad to a more true message. A more recent defence is that changing the ad is "abating a public mischief. "

Judges were often sympathetic, giving light fines. About two thirds of activists who went to trial were found guilty, but many graffitists have not been arrested and often charges were dropped. It is now believed that in New South Wales the Tobacco Industry if asked request that no charges be laid because of the publicity. They refuse to confirm or deny this rumour.

As more and more billboards were done it became less newsworthy, and a large demonstration was organised to publicly discuss billboard advertising of cigarettes and demonstrate BUGA UP's techniques. This was done outside Sydney's largest sports stadium at 11 am on a Saturday' and the Tobacco companies were invited to come and witness. About 150 supporters turned out and though 5 police cars drove past, no one was arrested.

Since this time, BUGA UP have been involved in lectures to schools, service clubs etc, but most importantly they influenced Health Education Government Media campaigns. By setting a nerd standard of radicalism, they changed the perception of advertising and the tobacco issue' Conservative health groups became more willing to speak out for stronger health Policies.

BUGA UP identified the Tobacco Industry as the enemy in the public mind by following Alinsky's dictum (1) "Polarise, -particularise and Personalise," so that smoking and its advertising was not just a " widespread social phenomenon " or some other vague notion - it was a deliberately cultivated and socially engineered behaviour masterminded by anti-social and unscrupulous tobacco executives'

BUGA UP also has been involved in promoting media studies and advertising , and produced a book, "Adexpo" which is a child's guide to advertising written from a consumerist perspective.(2) BUGA UP has also made it clear that -sponsorships , giveaways and new hidden endorsements in films are all just aspects of advertising. While this point is obvious to anyone who has thought about it, a legalistic view might acknowledge a difference and most legislators are lawyers. BUGA UP has made it clear that sponsorship is the same thing as advertising.

BUGA UP, because it has given a philosophical lead, has had a ripple effect. Many groups have adapted the ideas through using less radical methods. Some examples of this are

The North west Regional Health Authority in Manchester, England in 1985, developed a contest called "Scramble - An - Ad" which asked children to satirically alter ads to reverse their messages (3).

Consumer and Health groups in Canada, The United Kingdom and Australia documented tire farcical nature of the advertising "self-regulation" system in these countries'

The Australian Consumers Association challenged the re-accreditation of the self regulation of the Advertising Standards Council at the Trade Practices Tribunal and won a judgement that

the Media Council must come up with a regulation formula that allows input from health and consumer groups (4,5,6).

The West Australian health department developed a "Death Clock" which changes every half hour to update the number of deaths in Australia from tobacco related illnesses (7).

Australia's Drug offensive - \$100 million national campaign against drug use includes Tobacco and Alcohol as 'drugs' (although somewhat more mutedly than narcotics) (8).

The Drug Offensive also uses short satirical plays derived from street theatre in its schools campaign against alcohol and tobacco.

The British, American and Australian Medical Associations have called for a ban on tobacco promotion.

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (9) recently produced a 'Tobacco Company Alternative Annual Report 1987' which related market share of individual brands to the number of deaths. This marks a milestone in the militancy of a Medical college'.

The Western Australian state government attempted unsuccessfully to ban tobacco promotion in 1982 and the Victorian Government (10) has recently introduced a Bill to ban Sponsorship and outdoor advertising by tobacco and to create a 'Health Promotion Foundation' funded by an increase in tobacco excise. Advertisers cancelled their National Conference and donated 300 billboards to try to stop the legislation. A TV ad appeared in 2 days.

The Canadian Non-Smokers' Rights Association (11) have gone a different route against tobacco advertising in their "Equal Treatment Campaign" which calls for tobacco to be treated the same as any other toxic chemical in terms of packaging and advertising restrictions.

RODDS (Relatives and friends Of Dead and Dying Smokers) seek to turn the anguish of relatives into directed lobbying against the Industry - the source of the problems (12).

The Australian Non-Buyers Guide is produced by a collective that attempts to get Consumer to boycott socially irresponsible corporations. It has targeted tobacco companies for their damage to 3rd World environments (13, 14).

IOCU (International Organisation of Consumer Unions) has set up AGHAST (Action Group to Halt Advertising and Sponsorship by Tobacco) as part of their world strategy (15).

In summary BUGA UP's major contributions have been:-

1. To focus on the Tobacco Industry as the source of the tobacco problem.

2. To emphasise that Advertisers must display social responsibility in proportion to their power.
3. That advertising includes all other types of promotions.
4. That Publicity is a key to social change. Their publicity has been achieved by:-
 - a. Protests, demonstrations or street theatre
 - b. Civil disobedience and court cases
 - c. An overall media management strategy.
5. That Humour and Satire must be used.

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