

## - ISSUE BRIEF -

# TOBACCO INDUSTRY MANIPULATION OF THE PRESS

*This issue brief is designed to support counter-marketing efforts by state tobacco control programs and tobacco control advocates. It sets forth a compelling topic and provides evidence from recently released tobacco industry documents to support its claims, concluding with statements that emphasize possible counter-marketing messages.*

### THE ISSUE

The tobacco companies tried various Corporate Social Responsibility tactics to influence the press's interpretation of their scientific positions, particularly on the subject of secondhand smoke.

### THE EVIDENCE

The tobacco industry tried to enlist journalists as its allies in the fight for the hearts and minds of the general public and regulators.

- \* A 1989 memo regarding the secondhand smoke activities of the Tobacco Institute, a tobacco industry trade group, recommended new strategies for approaching journalists that included trying to "make the media more skeptical" and to "hammer[] away at the inconclusiveness of the studies" through the dissemination of a briefing book to "targeted" journalists.<sup>1</sup>

The tobacco industry studied how the media covers it and created a strategy based on psychology to manipulate the media's biases in its favor.

- \* The Tobacco Institute recommended making non-American scientists more available for interviews on secondhand smoke because it noticed that they were more favorably received by American journalists.<sup>2</sup>
- \* R.J. Reynolds employees strategized in 1997 about how best to influence reporters and editorial boards on the topic of secondhand smoke. It was suggested that the company should proactively organize one-on-one meetings with reporters with only one scientist and a public relations person in the hopes that such an approach "might garner more credibility with the press."<sup>3</sup> The theory was that journalists would be less apt to feel like they were being given a sales pitch if they were approached individually. The company hoped to avoid creating a group dynamic in which the journalists would feel pressured to write a story adverse to the tobacco industry's interests because they got the impression that the "[t]obacco industry meets with journalists because industry is running scared."

### THE MESSAGE

- \* The tobacco industry tries to manipulate and game the press using psychology to try to turn them into allies.

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<sup>1</sup> ETS Coordinating Committee. September 15, 1989. Bates No. 515541697, 515541698. Available at: <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/pbc77a00>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at Bates No. 515541698.

<sup>3</sup> Moskowitz, Seth W. IARC Communications. January 16, 1997. Bates No. 700900322. Available at <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/oob77a0>.