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# Modern Addiction: Myths and Facts About How the Tobacco Industry Hooks Young Users

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## **Young people are the tobacco industry's ideal target.**

- If the industry doesn't hook a new generation of users on its products, it will eventually go out of business after its current customers quit or die.
- Younger is better for tobacco industry profits. Most lifetime tobacco users start before the age of 21.
- While the industry targets young people worldwide, it especially focuses on those [in low- and middle-income countries](#).

## **Despite the well-known health harms of smoking, the tobacco industry's main focus is still on selling cigarettes—including to young people.**

- Some major tobacco companies, like British American Tobacco (BAT) and Philip Morris International (PMI), claim they want to move away from cigarettes, but selling as many cigarettes as possible is still their main business.
- Targeting young people with cigarette packaging, ads and promotion still happens today.

## **New nicotine products are the latest threat to youth addiction.**

- The industry is creating a new epidemic: addiction to its electronic and novel nicotine products.
- Electronic products being marketed to young users include [e-cigarettes](#) and [heated tobacco products](#) (HTPs). [Nicotine pouches](#) are another novel product being targeted at young people.
- These products are addictive and their long-term health effects are still unknown.

## Common Myths

### MYTH:

The tobacco industry doesn't market cigarettes to young people.

### TRUTH:

The industry continues to make and advertise cigarettes and accessories like flavor capsules that appeal to young people. As cigarette sales decline in most parts of the world, the industry must recruit a new generation of smokers to sustain its highly profitable cigarette business.

- Tobacco companies sell flavored cigarettes (including menthol) and flavor capsules, which are designed to [appeal to new smokers](#) and are commonly used by [those experimenting with smoking](#).
- Tobacco companies design cigarette packaging that appeals to youth, such as [Marlboro's "Music Limited Edition" packs](#) which it advertised in Israel in 2019. The same year, Marlboro flavor capsules were sold in [brightly colored packaging](#) alongside fruit and snacks in Colombia, and cigarette advertisements have been found near schools in [Indonesia and India](#). Japan Tobacco International (JTI) was also recently found to be covertly [advertising Camel, Winston and American Spirit cigarettes](#) to young people on social media in Germany.

### MYTH:

The industry's novel products are for adult smokers who are "looking to switch."

### TRUTH:

The industry markets e-cigarettes and HTPs as aspirational lifestyle products that appeal to young people and non-smokers.

- Often positioned alongside tech gadgets and stylish accessories, or in the hands of young, attractive people in glamorous locales, tobacco companies use social media influencers to [appeal to the platforms' younger users](#) and non-smokers.
- The tobacco industry's own data suggests the pool of nicotine users has grown in recent years, [raising concerns](#) that those who have never smoked or used these addictive products before are taking them up.
- Studies from the U.S. suggest that minors who use e-cigarettes but have never smoked at least [double their chances of starting to smoke](#).

## Common Myths

### MYTH:

Young people are protected from tobacco advertising via advertising regulations and bans.

### TRUTH:

Tobacco companies fight or work around advertising bans, and there's evidence they have even violated their own policies against targeting younger users.

- Some tobacco companies use “[alibi marketing](#)”—or, using familiar brand fonts, colors and imagery without mentioning the product itself—on social media, which can help them get around in-country and social media platform advertising bans.
- Social media has allowed tobacco companies to market their products internationally. Regulation of this global promotion can be difficult because enforcing TAPS (tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship) bans on social media [may require cross-border legislation](#).
- PMI may have violated its own “marketing standards” when “IQOS brand ambassadors” under the age of 25 [promoted the product](#) on Instagram.

### MYTH:

The tobacco industry can be trusted as a partner to end the tobacco epidemic.

### TRUTH:

According to Article 5.3 of the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), there is an irreconcilable conflict between the commercial interests of the tobacco industry and the interests of public health policy.

- The tobacco industry was the main driver of the current tobacco epidemic that kills more than 8 million people every year. It is not in the industry's financial interests to end the tobacco epidemic.
- The industry continues to employ the [nine common tactics](#) it's been documented using to interfere in policies that would otherwise help curb smoking.

## The industry counts on new users

The industry banks on “new entrants.” At a 2019 presentation to investors, BAT reported that “[new entrants](#)” (those who did not previously smoke or use nicotine products) were the group driving its NGP (so-called next generation product) category.

## Ways the industry indirectly targets young people

- **Motorsport sponsorships:** The industry targets Formula 1’s young, global, affluent fan base. BAT advertises its novel products on McLaren livery and through off-track events and PMI uses the Ferrari team to advertise its Mission Winnow initiative. PMI also sponsors the Ducati motorcycle team in MotoGP, and Imperial Tobacco sponsors the Suzuki team.
- **Youth-oriented events:** PMI sold Marlboro Mega Blasts [at music festivals](#) throughout Argentina in 2019 and BAT organized [social media giveaways](#) for parties in Spain.
- **Free samples:** The Bureau of Investigative Journalism reported cases of BAT brand representatives [handing out free samples](#) of nicotine pouches to youth in Pakistan and free samples of the Vype e-cigarette to youth in the U.K.

The industry tries to present itself as a trusted partner to governments, but it fights policies that could reduce next generation addiction.

- The industry [fights increases on tobacco taxes](#): When taxes are lower, tobacco and nicotine products may be more affordable to price-conscious consumers, including young people.
- The industry [opposes flavor bans](#): Added flavors are designed to appeal to young people and those new to smoking, yet the industry tries to delay or prevent flavor bans around the world.
- The industry fights local smoke-free restrictions: One notable example was when PMI and other tobacco companies [took legal action](#) against the city of Balanga in the Philippines when it tried to instate a smoke-free ordinance for its University Town.
- Fully implementing the WHO FCTC can help protect young people from the industry’s insidious attempts to get them hooked on its addictive products.