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## Philip Morris Japan's Leaked Marketing Blueprint for IQOS

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**A leaked document details how Philip Morris Japan (PMJ), a subsidiary of Philip Morris International (PMI), planned to manufacture support for its controversial addictive product, IQOS, in Japan. If this marketing blueprint is successful and is replicated elsewhere, PMJ threatens to create a new type of tobacco epidemic.**

**A leaked Philip Morris Japan (PMJ) document outlines the company's multi-pronged marketing plan for its heated tobacco product, IQOS, in Japan.**

The 2019 document titled "PMJ 2019 Business Objectives" includes details of how PMJ planned to grow its "reduced-risk product" business (a misleading<sup>1, 2</sup> industry term for newer noncombustible tobacco and nicotine products) and build regulatory and societal support for its heated tobacco product, IQOS.

This extensive plan to promote IQOS as a "reduced-risk product" and "accelerate acquisition and conversion of new users" is concerning because IQOS remains a controversial product whose long-term health effects are unknown. IQOS is addictive and, unlike e-cigarettes, contains tobacco.

Philip Morris International (PMI) positions IQOS as "smoke-free," though this designation has been contested by independent research.<sup>3, 4, 5, 6</sup> While IQOS exposes users to lower levels of harmful substances than combustible cigarettes, it has not been proven to reduce the risk of tobacco-related disease and death compared to cigarette smoking.<sup>7</sup> At least 80 chemicals have been found exclusively or in higher amounts in IQOS emissions than cigarette smoke. Of these, nine were identified by PMI to be of toxicological concern, and four were identified as possible or probable carcinogens.<sup>8</sup> Further, IQOS has not been proven to help people quit smoking cigarettes and data shows that many users continue to smoke cigarettes while using IQOS.<sup>9</sup>

## **PMJ appeared to attempt to capture a wide audience for IQOS.**

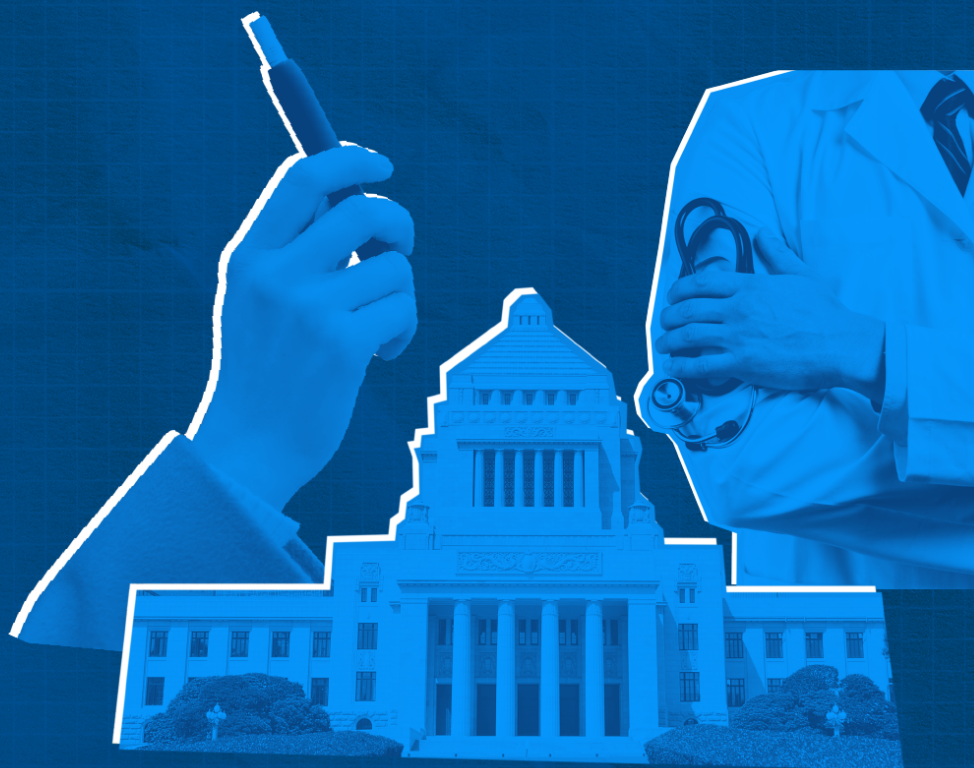
PMI claims that IQOS is only for adult smokers.<sup>10</sup> The leaked marketing document, however, suggests PMI was vying for a much broader audience for its new addictive product, and sought to increase IQOS addiction across the board. This adds to a body of evidence showing how PMI markets IQOS in ways that appeal to the general public, including youth, not just adult smokers.

The groups PMJ appeared to want to influence and gain support from ranged from politicians to medical providers to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Recent exposés have revealed that PMJ had also covertly funded research about smoking cessation.<sup>11</sup> Evidence shows corporate actors have funded science to skew evidence bases in their favor and promote industry-friendly scientific messaging, while obscuring their involvement in this science.

## **PMJ targeted decision-makers and influential organizations in an apparent attempt to gain broad acceptance for IQOS and create favorable conditions for its widespread use.**

It appears PMJ sought to influence politicians to associate IQOS with harm reduction, and create or relax existing regulations accordingly. This contravenes Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which aims to protect policy from tobacco industry interference.

The tobacco giant also planned to pursue endorsements from medical professionals, much like tobacco companies once sought doctor endorsements for cigarettes. Plans to target third-party entities from seemingly unrelated sectors, from hospitality to global trade to safety, suggest that PMJ wanted to manufacture support from all angles, giving the appearance of organic widespread backing for its product. The end result, if PMJ were to successfully influence each of these parties, would be increased IQOS availability, usage and, ultimately, addiction.



**Key findings from the "PMJ 2019 Business Objectives" leaked document:**

Sectors PMJ sought to influence	PMJ's intended targets (Section)	PMJ's business objectives	PMJ's apparent goals
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prefectural and local governments (2.1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with 30 prefectural governments</li> <li>Engage with 43 local governments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand regulatory differentiation between heated tobacco products,* like IQOS, and cigarettes</li> <li>Gain political endorsement for HTPs and expand exemptions for HTP use in smoking-restricted areas</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministries of Finance and Ministries of Health (2.2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present to Ministries of Finance and Health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand fiscal differentiation between HTPs and cigarettes</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Key" politicians (2.3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Map 100 "key" politicians</li> <li>Develop a political narrative</li> <li>Secure political support for the inclusion of "harm reduction" at parliamentary events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gain political endorsement for the industry's definition of "tobacco harm reduction"</li> </ul>
Medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dentists (2.4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create dentist referral program</li> <li>Run pilot with 15-50 dentists, with possible expansion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish third-party scientific endorsement for the industry's definition of "tobacco harm reduction"</li> </ul>
Sports and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Olympics (2.6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a PMJ presence at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expose HTPs to a global audience and associate them with health and sports</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House of Switzerland (2.6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Cooperate" with the House of Switzerland, a mobile visitors center that has appeared at past Olympics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand regulatory differentiation for HTPs</li> <li>Possibly imply the Swiss government's approval of HTPs, as the House of Switzerland is part of Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs</li> </ul>
Influential third-party entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hotels, restaurants and catering businesses (2.5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mobilize the hospitality industry ("HORECA" [hotels, restaurants and catering]) to call for differentiation on indoor use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achieve support from the hospitality industry creating favorable conditions for indoor HTP use</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Fire Agency (2.4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achieve acknowledgement of "noncombustion" of HTPs in National Fire Agency report</li> <li>Leverage and publicize report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand third-party scientific endorsement for the industry's definition of "tobacco harm reduction" and HTPs</li> <li>Add to the narrative that HTPs are safer than cigarettes</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World Customs Organization (2.2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with Japan Customs and continually monitor its position on HTPs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Secure" Japan's World Customs Organization position, supporting placement of HTPs in a new category and characterizing them as noncombustible</li> <li>Differentiate HTPs from cigarettes to influence favorable trade conditions</li> </ul>

\*"HNB" ("heat-not-burn") is used in the leaked document to refer to heated tobacco products (HTPs). IQOS is PMI's flagship HTP brand.



**Evidence suggests this document may be a blueprint for a global influence campaign. If successful, these actions could initiate a new kind of tobacco epidemic that would threaten public health.**

Media reports from around the world suggest that PMI may be attempting to enact this marketing plan internationally.

- In 2020, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism reported that PMI wrote to government ministers and local councils in the United Kingdom to create a favorable market for IQOS.<sup>12</sup>
- In 2022, researchers published a case study on how PMI lobbied politicians in Australia in order to overturn the country's ban on heated tobacco products and regulate them in a category separate

from other tobacco products. Informants interviewed by the researchers revealed that PMI was planning to sell IQOS in pubs, bars and clubs if its lobbying efforts were successful and legislation was achieved.<sup>13</sup>

- In 2020, the manager of scientific and medical affairs at PMI's German subsidiary, Philip Morris GmbH (PMG), touted the company's engagement with dentists, including presenting its research and meeting face-to-face to "inform them" about IQOS.<sup>14</sup>
- PMI has also targeted the tourism and hospitality industry around the world, including in Greece, the Czech Republic and the Canary Islands, among many others, as reported by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project in 2022.<sup>15</sup> A public relations campaign to designate tourist destinations, including entire islands, as "smoke-free," didn't focus on enacting new restrictions on cigarettes. Instead, the focus was on promoting IQOS.
- In 2022, the New York Times reported that PMI had hired a former official from the United States Food and Drug Administration who had "considerable power" over decisions around e-cigarette authorization. This was a notable "revolving door" hire as PMI prepares to launch IQOS in the U.S. in 2024.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

This leaked document shows that PMJ had plans to attempt to convince Japanese politicians, regulators and the general public that IQOS was significantly different from cigarettes. Its plans suggest PMJ sought to position IQOS as less of a threat to health and safety. These actions have the potential to create fertile ground for widespread IQOS addiction—and increased profits for PMI.

Learn more about PMJ's covert funding of research related to smoking cessation at [Nicotine & Tobacco Research](#).

## “Harm Reduction” or Profit Protection?

- The tobacco industry has a documented history of rolling out new “reduced-risk” products whenever its cigarette business comes under threat. As overall global smoking rates decline, IQOS may be PMI’s latest version of this in a world that is slowly turning away from its core product, cigarettes.
- “Mild,” “light,” “low-tar” and even filtered cigarettes were historically advertised by the industry as safer than “regular” cigarettes, despite industry data showing they weren’t safer and were, in some cases, more harmful.



A 1994 ad markets “low-tar” cigarettes. From the Stanford cigarette advertisement collection.

- The introduction of “safer” products was often a response to the public’s growing concerns about the health effects of smoking. These new products served as a way to protect industry profits, not protect the health of smokers.



## Japan: PMI’s Perfect Case Study?

PMI often cites data about IQOS use in Japan, positioning its rollout as a success in curbing the tobacco epidemic. But there are several reasons why Japan might not be a good indicator of IQOS use globally.

- E-cigarettes, which do not contain tobacco, are banned in Japan. This leaves less competition for IQOS in the so-called “reduced-risk” product market.
- Japan does not have strong tobacco control relative to other countries. In the 2023 Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index, Japan received the third-highest score for tobacco industry interference in policy.<sup>17</sup>
- Japan Tobacco International has historically dominated the Japanese market. By introducing IQOS into this market, PMI only stood to gain from a market-share perspective, providing seemingly dramatic and positive data to cite.



## PMI Markets IQOS to Broad and Young Audiences

Stanford University published an extensive report showing the many ways PMI markets IQOS to a wide audience, not just current adult smokers.<sup>18</sup>

**Social media influencers:** PMI has used social media influencers to present IQOS as a trendy lifestyle product.



An influencer posts as an “IQOS Ambassador” in 2019. From the Stanford IQOS Influencers/Celebrity collection.

**Trendy retail stores in popular locations:** IQOS retail stores often resemble the distinct modern, minimalist aesthetic of Apple stores, associating the product with consumer technology. Many stores offer ample seating to encourage customers to linger and “discover” the product. Pop-up stores are often located in shopping centers and areas of high foot traffic, exposing a broad and nonspecific audience to IQOS.

**Youth-oriented events:** Researchers identified 270 events held or planned by PMI between 2015 and 2019 across 27 countries. Some were hosted at IQOS stores, while IQOS sponsored or had booths at others. The events did not cater specifically to adult smokers but often targeted broad and young audiences. Events included parties, concerts, music festivals, art shows, film festivals, food and wine festivals, sports events and more.

**Formula 1:** PMI is the longest-standing tobacco company sponsor in F1 racing. In 2018, branding for Mission Winnow, a corporate campaign advertising PMI’s “transformation” narrative and a plausible proxy for IQOS, began appearing on the Ferrari team’s cars and livery.

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## About STOP (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products)

STOP is a global tobacco industry watchdog whose mission is to expose the tobacco industry tactics that undermine public health. Comprised of a network of academic and public health organizations, STOP researches and monitors the tobacco industry, shares intelligence to counter its tactics, and exposes its misdeeds to a global audience. STOP is funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies as part of the [Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use](#). For more information, visit [exposetobacco.org](https://exposetobacco.org).