



# The Philip Morris Nordic journalist program: Strategies, implementation and outcomes

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** To describe media strategies for the Nordic countries outlined in internal Philip Morris documents and to evaluate their implementation and outcomes.

**Methods:** Systematic search of internal tobacco industry documents from the databases available on the Internet and retrieval of newspaper and magazine articles from Sweden and Finland.

**Results:** The Philip Morris Nordic journalist program contained a broad range of strategies to communicate company views and to counteract negative publicity, including trips for journalists, media briefings and special events. While several of these strategies were implemented, the efforts were largely unsuccessful in that the media in Sweden and Finland carried few tobacco industry friendly articles. Articles defending the tobacco industry appeared mainly in business papers. However, support of smokers' rights' groups and sponsoring of cultural events generated positive publicity for Philip Morris.

**Conclusions:** Despite minor transient victories The Philip Morris Nordic journalist program was largely unsuccessful in providing the anticipated media coverage to question the health hazards of environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) and in preventing ETS regulation in the Nordic countries. The study further supports the notion that the internal corporate documents may expose the intents of the industry, but do not include enough information to evaluate implementation of industry's strategies or their outcomes.

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## 1. Introduction

For many tobacco control advocates the release of internal tobacco industry documents following a legal settlement in 1998 provided a historical opportunity to

analyse tobacco industry strategies, including targeted lobbying efforts [1–4] and more specifically media strategies [5–9]. Earlier research reports have revealed that the tobacco industry systematically sought to prevent tobacco legislation also in the Nordic countries by deflecting discussions about the harmful effects of smoking, especially regarding health effects of environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) [10–13].

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In every media strategy it is possible to identify at least four consecutive phases: planning of the strategy, implementation, output (in this case media coverage) and outcome (the overarching objective of the strategy, e.g. to prevent ETS regulation) [14]. However, strategies do not always turn into action. Specific plans may have been produced to promote projects and to obtain internal company funding. This flaw may also apply to internal reports on outcomes. To fully understand the ways the tobacco industry has been able to influence tobacco legislation and public opinion, it is of interest to explore if proposed strategies actually were implemented and if they resulted in expected outputs and outcomes.

For this purpose, we describe media strategies for the Nordic countries outlined in internal Philip Morris (PM) documents and their implementation before assessing the actual outcomes. While the present article focuses on events in Sweden and Finland, some references are also made to Denmark and Norway. Our study focuses on events between 1988 and 1995, a period of heated debate on tobacco control in the Nordic countries, especially with regard to adverse health effects of ETS.

Earlier reports have established that PM feared that anti-tobacco initiatives in the Nordic countries could spread to bigger markets [10]. The greatest threat was considered to originate from markets where regulation on smoking had been in place for a long time such as Sweden and Finland, countries which acted as forerunners in ETS regulation. Sweden was the first country where workers' compensation was awarded on the grounds of ETS exposure. In Finland, the first European product liability suit was filed against the tobacco industry in 1988 [15].

## 2. Material and methods

Our investigation was based on documents retrieved from tobacco industry documents and media articles [2]. The search strategy was based on three hierarchical levels. The first level focused on PM media strategies outlined in tobacco industry documents. Different versions of a Nordic journalist program authored by PM's spokeswoman in Stockholm were used as key documents. Data collection with multiple search terms was continued until a point of saturation was reached.

Once relevant documents were found the search was extended to file names and ranges of unique identifying numbers (bates numbers) to improve accuracy. We summarized the contents of the program in six specific areas: trips for journalists, briefing journalists, events, spokespersons, "independent" public voices and influencing journalists.

We identified tobacco documents relating to the program at the PM Docs site, the Legacy site and the Tobacco Documents site. These archives were supplemented with a private archive of one person, Matti Otva, who worked as a public relation consultant to PM [16]. The search was conducted between December 2004 and September 2007.

On a second level, names of these strategies, PM employees and collaborators, journalists, publications, organizations and journalist's trip destinations were used as search words. The idea was to analyse the implementation of media strategies.

To assess the outputs of the journalist program, newspaper and magazine articles on tobacco issues from Sweden and Finland were identified. We focused on those articles that had direct links to strategies outlined in the tobacco documents. The links were established, e.g. through tobacco document information on media strategies, media briefings, journalist's trip destinations, publications, organizations (e.g. Smokepeace groups) and person names (PM employees and collaborators, journalists). In the absence of a comprehensive full-text media database covering all print media, tobacco related articles were searched for in different electronic archives (Artikelsök, Presstext, Aleks, Arto, Finp and Esmerk), print articles and microfilms, including material from morning newspapers, evening papers, current affairs magazines, financial newspapers and magazines with the highest circulation. The list of publications included Helsingin Sanomat (HS), Uusi Suomi (US), Aamulehti (AL), Turun Sanomat, Ilta-Sanomat (IS), Iltalehti (IL), Kauppalehti (KL), Talouselämä (TE), Suomen Kuvalehti (SK), Apu, Seura, Dagens Nyheter (DN), Svenska Dagbladet (SD), Dagens Industri (DI) and Veckans Affärer (VA).

Due to non-complete coverage in records over time, we were unable to retrieve all relevant articles. However, the number and scope of publications and articles covered indicates that our material accurately reflects

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