I got a call the other day from a reporter at a public-relations newsletter, who was working on a regular feature about how to pitch stories to journalists. He asked me what kind of news releases I might want to receive from pharmaceutical companies. “Short ones,” I chuckled, adding that I get the drug study news I need from journals.

But then another thought popped into mind. “You know,” I told him, “what I would really love to see are the market research studies.” Goodness knows we are inundated with crowing news releases when companies get favorable results from research on drugs, but when was the last time you heard a pharmaceutical company tout results of the research they do on us?

His question sparked memories of stories I’ve written about tobacco company market research. Company secrets began spilling out after a trove of internal documents literally landed on the doorstep of anti-tobacco activist and University of California San Francisco cardiology professor Stan Glantz, PhD.

In an interview a few years ago, Dr. Glantz told me about walking into his office in May 1994. There was a large express shipment box on his desk. The sender’s name: “Mr. Butts.” Inside the box were 4,000 pages of internal documents from the files of the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation displaying 30 years of research, marketing, and legal maneuvering. The paper payload blew apart decades of tobacco industry secrecy.

“When I opened it and realized what they were, it was kind of like an archeologist discovering King Tut’s tomb or being let into Hitler’s bunker,” he told me. “I mean, it was this incredible view inside the tobacco industry. Just amazing.”

Since then, lawsuits and other sources have brought to light many more tobacco industry files. Most are available online at http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu


One of my favorites is titled “Successful Marketing to Younger Adult Smokers.” This R.J. Reynolds market research report from the 1980s sliced young people into segments including “Goody-Goodies,” “Preps,” “Rockers,” “Party-Parties,” and “Burnouts.” Each segment was linked to attributes along a spectrum from conformity to non-conformity.

While the “Goody-Goodies” and “Preps” were said to favor Mercedes cars and t-shirts with mild slogans, “Burnouts” just wanted to have wheels, any wheels, and might sport t-shirt slogans like “Time Flies When You Don’t Know What You’re Doing.”

The point, of course, was to help the company’s marketers aim effective messages at the people most likely to be drawn into smoking their brands.

What are Pharmaceutical Market Equivalents?

So, what are the pharmaceutical market equivalents of the “Goody-
While parents of childhood cancer survivors are typically watchful of neurocognitive problems that arise in their children, a recent study suggests that a 30-minute neurocognitive screening method is more accurate in identifying children at risk for future cognitive and academic difficulties and who need more comprehensive follow-up.

The researchers, from St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, said in an article published in the September 1 issue of the Journal of Clinical Oncology (2008;26:4138-4143) that their screening method is practical, cost effective, and clinically useful. Further, they said, it offers a more specific and sensitive evaluation than parents’ observations.

As many as 40% of childhood cancer survivors may experience neurocognitive impairment in areas such as processing speed, attention and memory, noted the researchers. The screening method, they noted, is rapid, cost effective, and clinically useful.

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