

Engage with smokers to clean up their act ...

As many people predicted, the amount of smoking-related litter on England's streets has risen dramatically after the introduction of the smoking ban last year. Since 1 July 2007, the nation's 9 million smokers have been outdoors - puffing on average 14 cigarettes a day each - and both logic and observation suggest this is generating a substantial increase in the 120 tonnes of butts and related litter that hit our streets every day.

So the launch this month of a new anti-cigarette litter poster campaign by ENCAMS, the charity behind Keep Britain Tidy, is certainly timely. It's welcomed by CSR Solutions, a Bath based social responsibility consultancy with extensive experience on environmental litter.

We believe that an integrated approach - raising awareness of the problem and offering positive easy to use disposal alternatives - is vital. Thereafter enforcement of littering fines can legitimately follow and behavioural change achieved.

Education and raising awareness is the first step and the tone and content of the advertising campaign must be carefully tailored for the target audiences.

The eye-catching and arguably provocative creative treatment in the new - "Are you a dirty chucker" - poster campaign will certainly generate some shock value that will build awareness and recall. However, we think it may serve to vilify the smoker as opposed to engage. We are correspondingly dubious that it will have the desired effect of encouraging responsibility and changing behaviour.

It seems to resemble closely a recent "Don't be a tosser" campaign in Australia. That campaign reported very high levels of consumer recall but we aren't aware it had a big impact on levels of cigarette litter.

It's widely recognised that humour and positive messaging are integral tools in encouraging consumers to connect with advertising. They both increase the likelihood of new behaviours being adopted or trialled.



As Cadbury Schweppes commented in February this year in the context of chewing gum: "We are committed to educating the public about responsible disposal [and] we encourage behaviour change through humour, which people respond to better than negative advertising."

And in its own 'Preventing cigarette litter in England' pamphlet, the Department for Environment itself say: "the target audience is more likely to remember the message if they are given a positive message".

Regardless of this reservation, we hope the new campaign will kick-start greater awareness of what has become a huge problem. And, while stand-alone advertising campaigns, no matter how memorable and provocative, have been shown to have little discernible effect on behaviour, we look forward to a future where a truly integrated campaign involving all key stakeholders can engage smokers, bring about change and deliver what matters most ... cleaner streets and pavements.

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